Employee Resource Groups and Affinity Groups in Canadian Higher Education: A Framework for Memorial University
Best Practices, Challenges, and Implementation Pathways

Shazia Shaheen

Policy Analyst, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dr. Delores V. Mullings

Vice-Provost, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism
School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dorcas A. Akrong

Graduate Assistant, Memorial University of Newfoundland

MEMORIAL
UNIVERSITY
EDI-AR

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2   INTRODUCTION

Canadian post-secondary institutions increasingly rely on two community-driven structures—Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Affinity Groups (AGs)—to advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDI-AR). ERGs are voluntary, employee-led collectives typically organized around shared identities or interests such as race, gender, 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, disability, Indigeneity, or professional affiliation, according to the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI, 2021). Their primary purpose is to provide equity groups with a formalized structure to address their unique needs and foster support. They create structured spaces for mentorship, peer support, and institutional dialogue and are recognized for their capacity to shape campus climate, contribute to recruitment and retention, and inform policy and practice within higher education (Burke et al., 2021; Green, 2022).

AGs, while sharing these community-building aims, are defined as identity- or experience-based collectives formed to provide environments that are as safe as possible and supportive for dialogue, advocacy, and ([racial) and cultural resilience. They primarily serve systematically marginalized populations—including Black, Indigenous, and racialized professionals; 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; and people with disabilities—and are instrumental in fostering psychological safety, peer mentorship, and collective advocacy (Crefton & Miller, 2023; Havergal College, n.d.). Although ERGs and AGs often operate with formal institutional recognition and governance structures, they promote belonging, cultural resilience, and peer mentorship while enabling collective voices and leadership in institutional change efforts (Crefton & Miller, 2023).

3   AIM AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This report examines how ERGs and AGs operate across Canadian universities and colleges, what they enable, and what they require to be effective and sustainable. It provides evidence for how these groups are formed, governed, and supported within institutions. ERG and AG functions range from mutual support to policy influence. The outcomes include fostering an inclusive culture, enhancing staff and faculty well-being, supporting professional development, and advancing institutional learning. This report also maps funding models and accountability mechanisms used across institutions, highlighting opportunities and gaps that matter for long-term viability and impact (Hussain, 2019; Schultz, 2014).

4   SUCCESS MODELS AND COMPARATIVE REVIEW

The analysis draws on two complementary sources of evidence. First, ERGs are explored through case studies of four Canadian universities—the University of Toronto (U of T), McGill University, York University, and the University of British Columbia (UBC)—selected for their established ERG structures and documented practices (Burke et al., 2021). These cases provide depth, showing how ERGs function when formally recognized and resourced within academic institutions.

Second, the report provides a comparative review of AGs across sixteen Canadian universities and colleges and maps the variations in scope, funding, and institutional support. This broader analysis highlights patterns, gaps, and lessons that can inform the development of sustainable AG structures (Queen's University, n.d.; UBC n.d.; University of Guelph, n.d.).

Together, the case studies and comparative findings demonstrate how ERGs and AGs operate in different contexts and what lessons they offer Memorial. Further, the report highlights the ways ERGs and AGs contribute to mentoring and leadership pipelines, curriculum and policy reviews, data-informed equity initiatives, and community-engaged programming that builds allyship and strengthens institutional accountability (Burke et al., 2021; Crefton & Miller, 2023; Green, 2022). It also documents a spectrum of resourcing approaches ranging from large, strategically aligned internal funds to smaller, event-based grants. Finally, the report explores the use of external opportunities to help clarify the scale, purpose, and access to supports available to ERGs and AGs across universities (University of Manitoba, n.d.; University of Waterloo, n.d.).

5   OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY

The report has four aims. First, it defines ERGs and AGs within the Canadian higher education context and clarifies their shared and distinct roles. Second, it examines how these groups contribute to creating inclusive campus environments, advancing professional development opportunities, and informing institutional equity initiatives, drawing on evidence documented across multiple Canadian universities. Third, it analyzes common challenges, such as resource constraints, low and uneven institutional uptake and buy-in, emotional labour, and the complexities of intersectional[1] membership, and also identifies enabling conditions that contribute to sustainability and impact (Crefton & Miller, 2023; Kumar Painoli & Mishra, 2023). Finally, the report proposes an implementation and

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[1] The concept of *intersectionality* originates from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who used it to describe how systems of oppression—particularly racism and sexism—intersect to shape the experiences of Black women. In this report, intersectionality is understood not merely as the coexistence of multiple identity markers, but as an analytic framework that exposes how race and racialized power relations structure inclusion, exclusion, and access to institutional resources within and among groups (Crenshaw, 1989).

accountability framework tailored to Memorial, including guidance on recognition, governance, resourcing, integration with EDI-AR priorities, and ongoing evaluation.

6   APPLICATION TO MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

For Memorial University, the report proposes an implementation pathway that begins with visible leadership endorsement and dedicated resources. It calls for clear policies that guide how ERGs and AGs are created, governed, and supported, along with transparent reporting processes. The approach also prioritizes identity-based groups that reflect local needs and ensures their consultation is embedded in key institutional decisions such as recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, curriculum development, and policy design. Oversight is recommended through the Office of the Vice-Provost (EDI-AR), complemented by regular public reporting to track progress and institutional responsiveness. The document proceeds in six sections: first, the benefits of ERGs in Canadian higher education; second, the common challenges they encounter; third, case studies of ERGs at four universities; fourth, a comparative review of AGs across sixteen institutions; fifth, a proposed implementation framework for Memorial University; and sixth, a conclusion outlining recommendations for sustainability and accountability. Taken together, these sections provide both comparative evidence and practical guidance for adopting and sustaining ERGs and AGs as integral components of Memorial's equity infrastructure.

7   METHODOLOGY

This report is based on secondary research, drawing from publicly available sources such as post-secondary institutions' websites, equity office publications, policy documents, and funding program descriptions. The analysis integrates two approaches. ERGs were examined through case studies of four Canadian universities: U of T, McGill University, York University, and UBC. Institutions were selected based on their extensively and clearly documented ERG structures and practices, and because they offer insight into governance, leadership, funding, and institutional alignment

AGs were reviewed across the following sixteen Canadian universities and colleges (refer to Appendix A for details):

- Algonquin College
- Concordia University
- Dalhousie University
- Havergal College
- McGill University
- McMaster University
- Queen's University
- Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)
- UBC

- University of Calgary
- University of Guelph
- University of Manitoba
- U of T
- University of Waterloo
- University of Winnipeg
- York University

These institutions were chosen to capture a broad representation of regional, institutional, and structural diversity, offering comparative perspectives on how AGs are formed, supported, and sustained across Canada. This broader review allowed for a comparison of how AGs differ in their structures, funding models, and levels of institutional support.

8   LIMITATIONS

The report's reliance on secondary sources means the report does not capture first-hand experiences or testimonies of ERG or AG members. Instead, its significance lies in synthesizing institutional practices and published information to identify patterns, enabling conditions, and gaps. To address this limitation, all sources were cross-referenced and verified against official university and college documentation where possible. Some institutions were contacted directly by phone and electronic mail. Another important limitation is the invisibility of multiple and intersecting identities. Each ERG or AG recognizes a single identity, leaving individuals to choose which group(s) to align with based on their identities.

The findings presented in subsequent sections highlight common benefits, recurring challenges, innovative practices, and funding models that collectively inform a proposed framework for Memorial University.

9   OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to achieve the following:

1. Investigate the role of ERGs and AGs in mitigating inequities within Canadian higher education institutions.

2. Analyze institutional funding and external funding sources that sustain ERGs and AGs.

3. Examine the policy impact of ERGs and AGs, particularly in shaping institutional culture and decision-making.

4. Provide a comparative analysis of practices across Canadian universities, highlighting lessons for Memorial University.

10 EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS AND AFFINITY GROUPS: SCOPE AND FOCUS

ERGs and AGs represent two distinct models through which Canadian universities engage with equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. ERGs are employee-led groups that operate with formal institutional recognition and focus on mentorship, professional development, and policy advocacy. AGs, by contrast, are identity- or experience-based communities that emphasize belonging, solidarity, and psychological safety, often functioning independently from formal governance structures.

This report centres on ERGs as the model most relevant for Memorial University, drawing on four university case studies to illustrate how ERGs enhance institutional culture, inform policy, and support equity-driven change. AGs are discussed later through a comparative review of sixteen institutions to provide contextual insight into alternative, community-driven approaches and the lessons they offer for supporting inclusion.

11 BEST PRACTICES AND BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Employee-Led and Institutionally Supported

ERGs in Canadian universities demonstrate that sustainability depends on balancing grassroots leadership with institutional commitment. At the University of Toronto, ERGs are typically initiated and governed by employees through elections or volunteer leadership, ensuring initiatives remain relevant and member-driven (Schultz, 2014). By contrast, institutions such as McGill University formally recognize ERGs within their broader equity strategies, providing funding, meeting spaces, and communication platforms. This partnership between employee leadership and institutional support strengthens the ERGs' legitimacy and longevity.

Mentorship, Advocacy, and Policy Influence

Across institutions, ERGs provide mentoring networks and career-development opportunities that enhance retention and advancement for equity-deserving employees. At York University, the Indigenous Faculty and Staff Network and LGBTQ+ ERGs emphasize mentorship, community outreach, and policy advocacy. Similarly, Queen's University supports groups, such as the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus, advises on hiring, recruitment, and institutional statements related to equity and belonging. These examples illustrate how ERGs function not only as spaces of support but also as drivers of systemic change through mentorship and policy engagement (Burke et al., 2021).

Professional and Community Development

ERG programs at McGill University and York University integrate leadership and training opportunities for women, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ+ employees, helping members build professional capacity and confidence. Meanwhile, ERG-like networks, such as

Indigenous Resource Centres in Atlantic Canada, have reduced isolation among Indigenous staff and students by fostering peer connection and visibility (Cameron, 2009). Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how ERGs promote both professional growth and community well-being.

Structured Learning and Institutional Change

At UBC, the Indigenous Employee Resource Group organizes cultural events, such as Orange Shirt Day and Indigenous History Month, and collaborates with the Equity & Inclusion Office and Human Resources to develop cultural-safety and reconciliation training. Similarly, at the University of Toronto, the Black Faculty and Staff Network and the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office host Race-Related Dialogue Series and Black Inclusion Programs that encourage critical reflection on bias, privilege, and systemic barriers. These structured initiatives demonstrate how ERGs can become learning communities that generate institutional change by influencing curriculum design, professional-development practices, and policy reform (Burke et al., 2021; Fovet, 2017).

Inclusive Membership and Allyship

Many ERGs, such as those at York and UBC, welcome allies who share a commitment to equity while maintaining space centred on the voices of core identity-based members. Training for allies helps ensure that participation amplifies rather than overshadows marginalized perspectives, strengthening collective accountability.

Continuous Feedback and Evaluation

Canadian post-secondary ERGs use surveys, forums, and consultations to adapt programming and advocacy to member needs and institutional goals. For instance, after major equity consultations at York and U of T, ERGs revised their programming to align with campus priorities (Schultz, 2014). Feedback loops like these reinforce trust, demonstrate responsiveness, and contribute to organizational learning.

Overall Impact

Taken together, these practices highlight the institutional and human benefits of well-resourced ERGs: greater belonging, stronger leadership pipelines, informed policy, and measurable progress toward equity and inclusion. They also underscore that without transparent recognition, predictable funding, and institutional accountability, this work risks relying on volunteer labour and reinforcing inequities rather than reducing them.

Table 1 summarizes the findings of the four university case studies.

Table 1

Institutional Employee Resource Groups and Funding Models Across Canadian Post-Secondary Universities

No.	University	ERG Examples and Impact	Key Success Factors	Funding
1.	University of Toronto	• Multiple ERGs, including race, gender, LGBTQ+, and Indigenous networks • Supported with dedicated funding and leadership involvement • Activities include mentorship, advocacy, and policy input	• Strong institutional commitment, formal recognition, and strategic EDI integration	Black Opportunities Fund: $500–$3,000 yearly
2.	University of British Columbia	• Indigenous ERG advising on curriculum and policy, cultural programming, and peer support • ERGs engage deeply in institutional decision-making	• ERGs positioned as partners in policy • Indigenous leadership prioritized • Diverse programming	• Strategic Equity & Anti-Racism (StEAR) Enhancement Fund • Partnership Recognition and Explorations (PRE) Fund • Community–University Engagement Support (CUES) • Together amounting to $300,000 yearly
3.	York University	• Indigenous Faculty and Staff Network, LGBTQ+, and Women's Leadership ERGs	• Reflective of campus demographics, centring member	• Anti-Black Racism Initiatives Fund: $100,000 yearly

		• Emphasis on intersectional membership and ally engagement • Active in mentorship and organizing cultural events	voices, and welcoming allies respectfully	
4.	McGill University	• Wide range of identity-focused ERGs with institutional backing • Focus on leadership development, peer networking, and improving recruitment and retention	• Institutional funding and supportive leadership, focus on career development and community building	• Black Equity Fund: up to $1,500 yearly

12 CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Although ERGs clearly demonstrate significant benefits for members and institutions, their effectiveness is not without limitations. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing sustainable and impactful ERG infrastructures. The following section examines common ERG constraints across Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Resource Constraints: Limited funding, limited staff, and lack of administrative support can hamper ERG activities (Brennan et al., 2021; Kumar Painoli & Mishra, 2023).

Emotional Labour: Core ERG group members often carry the burden of representation (speaking on behalf of their groups) and advocacy, leading to burnout (Crefton & Miller, 2023).

Allyship Dynamics: Balancing core ERG member needs with ally participation often creates tension over how to be inclusive and what leadership roles look like (Crefton et al., 2023; Green, 2018).

Institutional Buy-In: Without a clear and ongoing commitment from senior leadership, ERGs risk systemic marginalization, including lack of funding and/or underfunding, being treated as token initiatives, and being used in performative ways. Formal institutional endorsement and integration within broader equity strategies are necessary to avoid such systemic marginalization and help empower ERGs (Hussain, 2019; Schultz, 2014).

Nuanced Diversity: The complexity of intersectional identities within ERG membership can make it difficult to meet every member's needs and may at times lead to experiences of internal exclusion, marginalization, or tension. These dynamics reflect how power operates not only between groups but also within them. Applying an intersectional lens therefore requires more than acknowledging multiple identities—it demands a critical awareness of how race and racialized power relations shape belonging, voice, and leadership within ERGs. Centring race as a foundational element of equity work allows ERGs to address overlapping systems of privilege and oppression without fragmenting or diluting their mission (Green, 2022).

Measuring Impact: Evaluating ERG effectiveness remains challenging, which may affect sustained support (Schultz, 2014).

The challenges identified previously underscore the importance of examining how ERGs are implemented and practiced. The four Canadian universities studied as part of this report— U of T, UBC, York University, and McGill University—have each established ERGs with varying structures, resources, and institutional commitments. These four examples highlight best practices in governance, leadership, funding, and integration with broader equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategies. Refer again to Table 1.

13 AFFINITY GROUPS

AGs are identity- or experience-based collectives that provide spaces where equity-deserving members can find support, build community, and engage in collective advocacy. They prioritize psychological safety, peer mentorship, and cultural resilience, creating environments that are as safe as possible, and they affirm members' identities and foster belonging. In the Canadian post-secondary landscape, AGs have become increasingly visible as stand-alone, community-driven mechanisms for supporting systematically marginalized populations—including Black, Indigenous, and racialized professionals; queer individuals; and people with disabilities. While their structure and scope vary across institutions, AGs contribute to individual well-being and can also inform broader institutional equity efforts when appropriately resourced and recognized.

An AG's sustainability and impact depend heavily on the resources and recognition it receives. Institutional commitment is sometimes demonstrated through small funding programs that enable AGs to host events, develop initiatives, and engage in advocacy. Canadian universities have adopted varied approaches to resourcing AGs, ranging from substantial, multi-tiered investments to small, event-based grants. Table 2 provides examples of funding models across five institutions, illustrating the different scales and strategies used to sustain these groups.

14 BENEFITS OF AFFINITY GROUPS

AGs provide critical benefits within Canadian post-secondary institutions by fostering belonging, resilience, and advocacy among equity-deserving communities. Their key contributions include the following:

- **Psychological safety and belonging**
  AGs provide experience-based spaces and a sense of belonging where members can share experiences in a supportive environment. This sense of safety and belonging is particularly significant for Black, Indigenous, and racialized professionals, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; persons with disabilities; and those whose voices are underrepresented in institutional structures.

- **Peer mentorship and solidarity**
  These groups facilitate mentoring relationships and strengthen solidarity across communities. They allow members to learn from one another, build support networks, and resist isolation in academic and professional settings.

- **Collective advocacy and policy influence**
  When formally recognized and resourced, AGs become vehicles for institutional accountability. At universities such as Queen's and McGill, AGs have contributed to policy discussions and influenced governance, demonstrating their potential to shape EDI priorities.

- **Intersectional inclusivity**
  Many AGs adopt intersectional approaches that recognize how systems of power and privilege—particularly those rooted in race—shape people's experiences within institutions. Rather than treating identity markers, such as gender, sexuality, or neurodivergence, as separate or additive, an intersectional lens examines how these dimensions intersect with racialized power relations to create distinct barriers and opportunities. Applying this lens within ERGs requires a demonstrated awareness of power dynamics both within and among groups, ensuring that race remains a central framework through which equity and inclusion are understood and advanced.

- **Strengthening institutional culture**
  AGs foster cultural resilience and affirm identity within campus communities, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive institutional culture. Although AGs in other institutions often operate as grassroots or community-driven collectives, this report positions ERGs as the most appropriate model for Memorial University—one that can integrate similar community-building strengths within a formal, well-supported institutional structure.

15 CHALLENGES OF AFFINITY GROUPS

While AGs play an important role in fostering inclusion and advocacy, several challenges limit their effectiveness:

- **Uneven institutional recognition**
  Some universities, such as UBC and TMU, have comprehensive networks with programmatic support, whereas others maintain informal or decentralized AGs. This variation affects visibility, influence, and sustainability.

- **Inconsistent and limited funding**
  Funding support for AGs varies widely, from substantial, multi-tiered allocations (UBC) to symbolic or minimal event-based grants (Manitoba).

- **Transparency gaps in resource allocation**
  Several universities do not publish clear information about AG funding, making it difficult to assess equitable access across groups.

- **Structural variation and fragmentation**
  Overly informal or fragmented structures weaken their institutional influence and reduce access to resources.

- **Emotional labour and risk of tokenism**
  Members of systemically marginalized communities often shoulder the burden of advocacy within AGs.

Table 2

Institutional Affinity Groups and Funding Models Across Canadian Post-Secondary Universities

Institution	AG examples	Success factors	Funding
University of British Columbia	Projects on racial equity, disability, gender, 2SLGBTQIA+	• Formal recognition by the institution • Dedicated and transparent funding • Inclusion (faculty, staff, students)	• $300,000 annually; grants $500–$10,000 • StEAR Fund
	Community–university partnerships	• Autonomy in structure and self-organization	• $750,000 annually (5-year commitment); grants up to $25,000 • CUES Fund

Institution	AG examples	Success factors	Funding
	Small-scale collaborations, relationship-building		• $50,000 annually; grants up to $1,500 • PRE Fund
Queen's University	Administered by VP (Culture, Equity & Inclusion) for AGs	• Sustainable leadership support and capacity building	• $50,000 annually • Inclusive Community Fund
Waterloo University	Mental health and wellness services for Black, Indigenous, racialized communities	• Strong administrative collaboration (EDI offices, HR, etc.) • Intersectional and inclusive approaches	• Up to $200,000 • Bell Let's Talk Fund (external)
	Public education on racism and hate	• Visible policy influence and advocacy channels	• Variable • Anti-Racism Anti-Hate Grant (government)
	National anti-racism initiatives	• Visible policy influence and advocacy channels	• $5,000–$20,000 • Canadian Race Relations Foundation Community Mobilization Fund
Guelph	Equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, Indigenization initiatives (students, faculty, staff)	• Strong administrative collaboration (EDI offices, HR, etc.) • Intersectional and inclusive approaches	• $200,000 total • EDI Enhancement Fund
Manitoba	Equity-focused events led by students, staff, faculty, or instructors	• Autonomy in structure and self-organization	Up to $500 per initiative Equity Transformation Office Fund

As Table 2 indicates, a significant variation in AGs exists among Canadian universities. UBC demonstrates a multi-tiered funding model with commitments exceeding $1 million annually, whereas institutions such as Queen's and Guelph provide mid-level dedicated funds. In contrast, the University of Manitoba's support is limited to small event grants of $500, illustrating disparities in scale and sustainability. Waterloo stands out for its reliance on external and government sources, suggesting that not all universities commit internal resources at comparable levels.

16 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS AND AFFINITY GROUPS AT MEMORIAL

The successful implementation of ERGs and AGs at Memorial requires a coordinated approach that combines visible leadership commitment, transparent funding, clear governance, and mechanisms for accountability. Drawing on practices across Canadian post-secondary institutions, the following framework outlines the elements necessary for embedding ERGs.

Institutional Commitment and Recognition
Visible endorsement from senior leadership and the Office of the Vice-Provost (EDI-AR) is essential to signal that ERGs and AGs are integral to Memorial's equity and inclusion strategy. ERGs should receive formal institutional recognition with policies that outline their purpose and scope.

Funding and Resourcing
Adequate and transparent funding is the foundation for sustainable groups. ERGs require allocated budgets, staff support time, and, where feasible, stipends or workload adjustments for group leaders. AGs benefit from flexible operational funding that allows for event-based initiatives, while also requiring transparency in how funds are distributed to ensure equity across identity groups. To avoid inequities, Memorial should publish funding criteria and provide annual public reporting on resource allocation. Both models should have access to long-term funding streams rather than short-term or ad hoc grants so they can move beyond symbolic programming toward sustained institutional impact.

Policies and Structures
Memorial should establish clear policies governing the formation, governance, and reporting of ERGs, including membership criteria, leadership roles, and evaluation processes. ERGs should welcome ally participation while ensuring that leadership remains grounded in the voices of the equity-deserving groups they represent. For AGs, structures should remain flexible to reflect diverse community needs: some groups may prefer formal networks with programmatic support, whereas others may operate more informally as decentralized collectives. Recognizing this structural variation is critical to preserving the accessibility and psychological safety that AGs provide.

Leadership and Capacity Building
ERGs and AGs both depend on strong leadership, but support needs differ. ERG leaders benefit from training in facilitation, advocacy, and event planning, alongside formal connections to human resources and EDI-AR offices. AG leaders may prioritize autonomy but should have access to equity office support, leadership workshops, and collaborative opportunities with other groups. In both cases, intentional investment in leadership capacity will strengthen sustainability and reduce the risk of burnout.

Integration into Decision-Making
ERGs should be embedded into institutional decision-making processes, with clear channels for consultation on hiring practices, curriculum review, and policy development. AGs, where strongly supported as seen at Queen's and McGill, can also play an important role in shaping governance and institutional priorities. In both models, ensuring that group voices inform decisions rather than remain symbolic is critical to institutional accountability.

Technology and Communication Supports
Digital platforms can play a supporting role in ensuring accessibility and engagement. Both ERGs and AGs should have access to communication platforms, such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, to facilitate networking and collaboration. Survey tools can be used to gather feedback, track participation, and assess group impact. Investing in simple, user-friendly technologies enhances visibility and sustainability.

Evaluation and Accountability
Regular evaluation mechanisms will ensure that ERGs and AGs remain effective and responsive. ERGs should conduct member surveys, host open forums, and publish annual reports on activities and outcomes. AGs should also establish reporting mechanisms tied to EDI-AR goals, with transparency in both funding and achievements. Institution-wide annual reporting should consolidate this information, providing public accountability for Memorial's commitments.

Intersectional and Inclusive Approaches
Both ERGs and AGs should be encouraged to take intersectional approaches that recognize overlapping identities and barriers; for example, the unique experiences of racialized women, neurodivergent individuals, and 2SLGBTQIA+ members. Supporting groups across multiple identity dimensions ensures that Memorial's equity infrastructure does not reproduce silos but instead reflects the complexity of lived experiences.

Phased Implementation
A phased approach will allow Memorial to pilot, evaluate, and refine its strategy. Initial priorities might include establishing groups for Indigenous Peoples, Black faculty and staff, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, women in leadership, and persons with disabilities, reflecting the university's community demographics and equity priorities. Lessons learned from pilot groups can inform the expansion of ERGs and AGs over time, ensuring that growth is sustainable and evidence informed.

17 OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ERG AND AG IMPLEMENTATION

The successful implementation and management of ERGs and AGs is strengthened by the availability of appropriate infrastructure and technological support. Both models benefit from tools that sustain communication, mentorship, and evaluation activities while ensuring accessibility and visibility across the institution.

Digital platforms will be a critical enabler for Memorial University. Structured systems, such as the Together Mentorship Platform, could be explored to coordinate ERG or AG mentoring programs, ensuring consistency and scalability across campuses. Common workplace tools already in use at Memorial, such as Microsoft Teams, can be leveraged to provide space for networking, collaborating, and organizing group activities. In addition, widely available survey tools, such as Google Forms, can be integrated into Memorial's institutional processes to collect member feedback, track participation, and measure impact over time.

The choice of specific platforms and support will necessarily depend on Memorial's existing infrastructure, IT policies, and resource allocation. However, having operational supports in ERG and AG design from the outset will enhance participation, visibility, and sustainability. By ensuring that both formal structures and identity-based spaces are adequately resourced and technologically supported, Memorial can create groups that are effective, responsive, and seamlessly integrated into the university's broader equity framework.

18 CONCLUSION

This report has examined ERGs and AGs as frameworks for advancing EDI-AR in Canadian higher education. ERGs, analyzed through case studies of four major universities—the U of T, McGill University, York University, and UBC—demonstrate the effectiveness of structured, employee-led groups in shaping institutional culture, influencing policy, and supporting professional growth.

The AGs reviewed provide valuable examples of identity- and experience-based collectives that build solidarity and psychological safety, but they often operate independently of institutional governance and rely on voluntary participation rather than formal accountability.

The findings indicate that ERGs and AGs serve distinct purposes and should not be viewed as complementary models. ERGs provide institutional legitimacy, governance mechanisms, and resourcing structures that enable sustained engagement and systemic impact. In contrast, AGs play a more informal, community-building role that can inform but not replace institutional responsibility.

The findings also demonstrate that when ERGs are employee led, institutionally supported, strategically focused, inclusive, and feedback oriented, they can have transformative

impacts on both their membership and the broader academic environment in Canadian post-secondary institution settings (Schultz, 2014).

For Memorial University, establishing ERGs represents the most appropriate and sustainable path forward. ERGs offer an opportunity to embed equity and accountability within the university's operational and cultural infrastructure. A phased approach is recommended, beginning with strategically prioritized groups such as Indigenous faculty and staff, Black faculty and staff, 2SLGBTQIA+ employees, women in leadership, and persons with disabilities, while developing governance, funding, and evaluation mechanisms for long-term sustainability. By starting with focused pilot initiatives and scaling gradually, Memorial can learn from national best practices while tailoring implementation to local needs.

Sustained recognition, transparency, and predictable funding are critical for ensuring that ERGs at Memorial can thrive without overburdening members or replicating existing inequities.

Ultimately, this report provides a framework for how Memorial can adopt and sustain ERGs as a cornerstone of its equity infrastructure. Investing in ERGs will strengthen belonging, accountability, and institutional excellence, aligning Memorial with leading practices across Canadian higher education while responding to the specific needs of its own community.

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    events

APPENDIX A: Institutional Affinity Groups and Funding Models

No.	Institution	Affinity Groups	Funding
1	University of British Columbia	IBPOC Connections, Black Caucus, ACCE, Queer Collective, Disability AG	StEAR Fund, CUES, PRE Fund
2	University of Waterloo	Black Faculty Collective, BIPOC Communities	Internal (SLEF, Innovation Fund), External (CIHR, Gov Grants), Not-for-Profit grants
3	Algonquin College	AC Women's Collective, Rainbow Connection, A.C.T.I.O.N, Disability AG	Not publicly disclosed
4	Queen's University	Black Faculty and Staff Caucus, QCRED	Inclusive Community Fund
5	Havergal College	Black, BIPOC, Muslim, Asian, Jewish AGs; Alliances	Not publicly disclosed
6	McGill University	Black Faculty & Staff Caucus	Black Equity Fund
7	Dalhousie University	Black, Queer, and (Dis)Ability Faculty and Staff	Not publicly disclosed
8	University of Toronto	Queer U of T, Black Leadership Table, Disability Networks	Black Opportunities Fund (UTM)
9	University of Manitoba	Racialized Women, 2SLGBTQIA+, Neurodivergent groups, Black Staff & Faculty	Office of Equity Transformation Fund, Promoting Black Flourishing Fund
10	McMaster University	Pride AtMac, Muslim Staff Network, BIRS, ACFAM	Not publicly disclosed
11	York University	Black Staff Network	Anti-Black Racism Initiatives Fund
12	Toronto Metropolitan University	Asian, Black, Latinx, Jewish, Sikh, Muslim, Disability Networks	Equity and Inclusion Project Fund, Black-Focused Pedagogy Grant. Black Scholarship Institute

No.	Institution	Affinity Groups	Funding
13	Concordia University	Black Perspectives Office	Black Perspectives Office Fund
14	University of Guelph	BIPOC, Black Faculty & Staff	EDI Enhancement Fund
15	University of Winnipeg	BIPOC, Critical Race Network	BIPOC Initiatives & Events Fund
16	University of Calgary	LGBTQ2+, Persons with Disabilities, Women	Not publicly disclosed