

# 2024 NASPEs AWARD

## *Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award Nomination Innovative State Human Resource Management Program*

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### **PROGRAM INFORMATION**

Program Title: Statewide Business Resource Groups Program

State: WA

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Contact's Title: Workforce Strategies Director

Agency: Office of Financial Management

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### **NOMINATOR INFORMATION**

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### **SUMMARY**

The Statewide Business Resource Groups (BRG) Program is a state-led initiative that brings together employees from across state agencies to address a diverse workforce's unique needs and issues. This program promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion by creating a path for cross-agency, employee-led workgroups. The groups operate at the state level and serve as functional strategic tools for advancing organizational culture, recruiting and retaining diverse talent, and improving statewide business outcomes. For instance, BRGs have initiated mentorship programs, diversity training sessions, and policy reviews.

Statewide BRGs are inclusive spaces that allow all employees to network, address workforce issues and concerns, and receive support from those with similar backgrounds, experiences, or interests. Participation in BRG-related activities is open to current employees of state agencies who identify as members of the BRG's focus community or as allies. Employee participation in BRG-related activities is considered work-related and a leadership priority, emphasizing the value of every employee's unique perspective and contribution.

BRGs play a crucial role in shedding light on workplace culture and identifying specific issues or barriers that may negatively affect certain groups of employees. This active involvement in addressing workforce issues empowers employees and demonstrates their integral role in shaping our organizational culture. Executive leadership participation also provides an opportunity to connect with the workforce and link the groups' missions to specific business goals, fostering a sense of motivation and engagement among all participants.

HR and leadership can use BRGs to focus on groups of employees at risk of leaving state agencies. BRGs can become part of the solution to solve turnover. The groups also offer a place for the development of emerging leaders and have become valuable tools in the state's efforts to support its diverse workforce's unique needs. By addressing these needs, we strive to create an environment where every employee feels understood and catered to, enhancing their overall job satisfaction and retention.

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Currently, there are seven BRGs in Washington State:



[Blacks United in Leadership and Diversity \(BUILD\)](#) aims to improve the experiences of current and future Black state employees by increasing their representation in leadership positions and giving them a voice in policy discussions.



[Disability Inclusion Network \(DIN\)](#) promotes universal access and an environment where people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of the workplace. Washington State [Executive Order 13-02](#) drove the creation of this group.



[Hawaiians, Asians, and Pacific Islanders Promoting an Empowerment Network \(HAPPEN\)](#) aims to improve Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (ANHPI) representation in state employment while advocating for anti-racism, equity, inclusion, diversity, and belonging policies in the workplace and gives voice to the ANHPI experience.



[Latino Leadership Network \(LLN\)](#) connects and inspires the Latino state service workforce and leaders, improving the experience of current Latino state employees by increasing professional development opportunities and encouraging the community to become future members of the state service workforce.



[Rainbow Alliance & Inclusion Network \(RAIN\)](#) exists to help the state to create safe and inclusive workplaces for employees and customers who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. The creation of the group supports the requirements outlined in [Washington State Directive of the Governor 16-11](#).



[Veterans Employee Resource Group \(VERG\)](#) exists to help integrate the experience, skills, and knowledge that veterans and military spouses bring to the state workforce. Washington State [Executive Order 19-01](#) directed the Office of Financial Management to work with agencies to establish this group.



[Washington Immigrant Network \(WIN\)](#) exists to expand opportunities for immigrants who are current or future state employees while educating the workforce and state agencies on the skills, expertise and cultural value of a diverse workforce. [Executive Order 17-01](#) drove the creation of this group.

Below there is a list of example resources or products created by the BRGs:

- [RAIN Transitioning in the Workplace Toolkit \[PDF\]](#)
- [RAIN Adding Pronouns to Your Signature Line FAQ \[PDF\]](#)
- [RAIN Recommendation for Use of Non-Gendered Language \[PDF\]](#)
- [RAIN Recommendation Including Gender X options on Forms \[PDF\]](#)
- [RAIN Recommendation Inclusive Bathroom Signage \[PDF\]](#)
- [RAIN 2021 Agency Awards video \[youtube.com\]](#)
- [WIN You Belong Here video \[youtube.com\]](#)
- [WIN Mentoring Program](#)
- [DIN Guide to Inclusive Virtual Meetings](#)
- [BUILD Summer 2023 Newsletter](#)
- [RAIN Winter 2024 Newsletter](#)
- [BUILD 2024 Black History Month Celebration video \[youtube.com\]](#)
- [LLN Decolonizing Self Care for the Hispanic/Latinx Community video \[youtube.com\]](#)
- [LLN Latina Pay Equity and Health Disparities Lunch and Learn video \[youtube.com\]](#)

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### DETAILS

#### **1. Please provide a brief description of this program.**

The BRG program brings together state employees from different agencies to address workforce-related issues in an innovative way. The groups aim to establish a high-performing public workforce that reflects the diverse population of Washington. They offer outreach activities, professional development opportunities, policy guidance, and expert insights. BRGs provide an alternative pathway to address business issues, and participation is considered an official duty. The program oversees the creation and structure of these groups.

#### **2. How long has this program been operational (month and year)?**

In February of 2021, Governor Jay Inslee signed [Executive Order 21-01](#), which not only acknowledges the presence of existing BRGs but also affirms their importance. The order goes further to encourage the formation of new BRGs, emphasizing their role in closing workforce representation gaps. These groups are designed to incorporate employee experiences and perspectives from diverse communities across all levels of state government in Washington, fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging. The ultimate goal is to develop solutions that will improve business outcomes and result in the best possible services for all Washingtonians.

Although most of the BRGs were already in existence, many employees shared challenges with getting supervisor approval to attend meetings or needing to take leave to attend. The release of the executive order and the creation of the BRG program managed by the Office of Financial Management legitimized the existence of the groups and gave them access to state resources to accomplish their missions.

#### **3. Why was this program created? (What problem[s] or issues does it address?)**

Washington State has continuously strived to be an employer of choice with a culturally relevant workforce that mirrors the demographics of the people it serves. However, quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the state had room to improve in that goal, prompting Governor Inslee to issue Executive Orders and OFM State HR to develop various policies permitting employees to participate in BRGs. These efforts were aimed at increasing the recruitment and retention of a diverse and culturally relevant workforce.

Additionally, BRGs help create spaces of belonging in the workplace. Although BRG meetings and events are open for any state employee to attend, each BRG is structured with a charter and community guidelines that outline its purpose to be a supportive space for a specific demographic and their allies. Feedback from members of all BRGs has shared that these spaces have been a key reason they continue to remain employed with the state of Washington. Overall, the BRGs play a vital role in ensuring that the state's workforce is diverse, inclusive, and equipped with the skills and expertise needed to tackle complex problems.

#### **4. Why is this program a new and creative method?**

The BRG program is a new and innovative way to foster grassroots initiatives and elevate employee voices and suggestions for a diverse and culturally relevant workforce. The program ensures that communities are adequately represented and involved in developing practical and effective solutions. This approach creates sustainable and inclusive change by involving those most affected by the problem, building trust, fostering collaboration, tailoring solutions to specific needs, and fostering a sense of belonging and community among our diverse workforce. The program was designed to structure BRG creations so that they are employee-led and have a clear line of communication with the Governor's Office, executive leadership, and the HR community. BRGs also serve as navigators and mentors for state agencies and employees, providing a professional network for career growth. They offer an alternative pathway for agencies to effectively address business issues, acting as a collective voice around shared interests or concerns. The BRGs are also a formal advisory body in the feedback process loop. This innovative design allows for a more direct and dynamic way of collecting employee engagement data while allowing employee participation without having to take leave or flex their schedule to participate.

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### Innovative State Human Resource Management Program

**5. What was the program’s startup costs? (Provide detailed information about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology, and staff already in place.)**

The Washington State executive order that formalized the existing BRGs also mandates that agencies provide appropriate resources to these groups, including authorizing employees to attend meetings and events during work hours, providing necessary office supplies, meeting spaces, facilities, teleconferencing technologies, and funding for ASL and CART interpreting services to accommodate employees with disabilities.

It can be challenging to quantify the exact cost of the program since existing resources are utilized. To support the continuous growth in numbers and complexity of the issues that the groups were assisting with, the Office of Financial Management, State Human Resources division, repurposed an existing strategy analyst position to create the BRG coordinator role. The coordinator's role provides administrative and strategic support to all seven existing resource groups and manages various platforms, licenses, and subscriptions used by the groups.

**6. What are the program’s operational costs?**

The program incurs operational costs that can be categorized into different areas. These include the salary of a full-time staff member who provides direct support to the groups, the cost of American Sign Language and closed captioning services to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, expenses related to group training opportunities for BRG members to help them grow and advance in their careers, and costs associated with events that build a sense of community and provide opportunities for engagement and education, which are a crucial part of the program.

	Range	
	Low	High
FTE	\$141,000	\$148,000
ASL & Closed Captioning	\$60,000	\$70,000
Training for BRG Leaders	\$10,000	\$14,000
Events	\$56,000	\$70,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$267,000</b>	<b>\$302,000</b>

**7. How is this program funded?**

The program has been primarily funded through existing resources. The State Human Resources division (State HR) within OFM is currently exploring more sustainable ways to fund the program, but at present, there is no formal allocation of funds for BRGs. The program is currently funded through sponsorships from both state agencies and private entities, as well as through an existing position allocated by State HR to support the groups.

In 2023, as a creative way to provide temporary financial several agencies contributed to a one-time funding contribution, which provided sufficient funds to cover the program expenses for the upcoming biennium, except for the assigned FTE from State HR. OFM is still advocating for and requesting more sustainable resource funding to support the program on an ongoing basis.

**8. Did this program originate in your state?**

Our team utilized the affinity group and employee resource group (ERG) guidelines of the Boeing Company and Alaska Airlines based in Washington to create the Statewide BRG Program. While Washington State agencies have ERGs that concentrate on their employees, the BRGs are interagency groups that permit current, future, and former state employees to connect, network, and provide guidance across all state agencies.

**9. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? No**

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### *Innovative State Human Resource Management Program*

#### **10. How do you measure the success of this program?**

BRGs have been successful in improving workplace diversity and inclusion in the Washington State Government. Success measures include event attendance, number of events organized annually, membership numbers, and proposed initiatives. BRGs have contributed to the creation of various initiatives and projects, which have led to a more equitable and inclusive workplace environment.

Examples of success include:

- In 2018, only 279 employees subscribed to receive updates about BRG events. After the implementation of EO 21-01, subscribers increased to 5,175 and as of April 1, 2024, there are 22,192 unique subscribers!
- BUILD's executive sponsor testified before the state senate for the creation of the Juneteenth bill, and the BRG organized the first Juneteenth celebration on the capital campus.
- In 2023, the VERG hosted an event at Joint Base Lewis-McChord for transitioning service members, their spouses, and National Guard members. The event connected attendees with recruiters and hiring managers from Washington state agencies. Over 30 state agencies participated.
- During the pandemic, many state employees started working from home. As a result, DIN created a guide to help agencies create accessible meetings, which is now used across state agencies.
- RAIN designed best practices documents to help agencies work with LGBTQ+ populations, including state employees and the public. These documents have now evolved into 1–4-hour training sessions available to state employees during work hours as part of their DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) training plan.
- BRGs played a vital role in championing the importance of disaggregating data, leading to a more precise picture of the state workforce. In FY 2017, 73.2% of state employees were labeled as white/non-Hispanic, with this category being the default for those who did not report their race and ethnicity. However, by FY 2024, the picture was more precise, with 61.8% identifying as white/non-Hispanic, 7.9% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 7.1% as Hispanic, 6.0% as black/non-Hispanic, and 15.2% as unassigned, demonstrating the positive impact of BRGs on data collection.
- Over the years, BRGs have helped encourage communities to disclose their demographics. In FY 2017, only 3.4% of state employees identified as having a disability, but by FY 2024, this number had risen to 4.9%, thanks in part to the efforts of DIN. Similarly, the self-reported number of LGBTQ+ employees increased from 0.2% in FY 2020 to 4.1% in FY 2024, reflecting the positive impact of BRGs in creating safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community.
- BRG participation has also been shown to improve employee retention and career advancement. Several executive leaders attribute their career success in state employment to their involvement in BRGs.

#### **11. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?**

With the establishment of the BRG program, employee-led groups are no longer left to navigate complex governmental structures without a clear path. This program empowers these groups, providing a direct route for them to deliver their recommendations to the highest levels of government. The result is a more equitable distribution of access and impact.

Since the inception of the BRG program, we have made it a priority to keep all employees, new and current, informed about the groups and their missions. This information is shared during onboarding for new employees and throughout the employment lifecycle for current employees. The leadership of each BRG is recognized at the highest levels of government, giving them the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their communities. This recognition ensures that the groups' voices and recommendations are not just heard but given the importance they deserve in decision-making processes across state government.

The Governor's Executive Order has created the clear expectation that state agencies should support their employees' participation in the groups. Employee participation is now a leadership priority, and members use state-paid time to participate in the groups.

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