

This guide is part of the Global Inclusion Week 2023 Toolkit

Global Staff Networks



**Global
Inclusion Week**
2023 12 - 16 June

Sponsored by:



**WARNER BROS.
DISCOVERY**

Contents

1. Definitions
2. Why ‘go global’?
The business case and opportunities
3. Approaches for ‘going global’
4. Challenges
5. Where do you start?
6. Global Staff Network engagement
7. Case studies

1. Definitions

Before we start, being clear about what we mean by global, and how that relates to global staff networks and Global Inclusion is important. Here are some definitions to help:

Understanding ‘global’

While many organisations have been operating globally for centuries, terms are often used interchangeably without too much thought. For this document, we are following the following application of words:¹

- “International” has a smaller scope encompassing only two or more countries.
- “Global” is a word that is used to refer to issues and concerns of the entire world.

Throughout this guide, we will use the term ‘global’ instead of ‘international’. This is because, even though an organisation may be ‘international’ as opposed to ‘global’, we see inclusion as a global issue that impacts everyone around the globe.

Global Inclusion is about how organisations provide inclusive environments where their workforce can flourish, regardless of where they are from. It is also about acknowledging the interconnected nature of the world we live in, where events such as pandemics and conflicts have an impact on people and organisations worldwide, and where an organisation’s commitment to inclusion and diversity will have an impact on their brand not only at a regional or local level, but also at a global level.

¹ Difference Between Global and International | Difference Between <http://www.differencebetween.net/language/words-language/difference-between-global-and-international/#ixzz7PZpeqm3T>

Definition of staff networks

A staff network is a group of colleagues, often with a shared heritage, experience or characteristic that come together to support each other and support the organisation where they work.

Staff networks exist in many different formats across organisations in the public, the private, the third sectors and the forces. They are known by many different names and acronyms. By their very nature, staff networks are essentially employee-led groups, although they may be supported by others (for example HR, executive sponsors etc).

Staff networks are called by a wide range of different names in different organisations – you may know them as Workplace Equality Networks (WENs), Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), Business Employee Resource Groups (BERGs) and Staff Network Groups (SNGs). Some organisations will refer to them as affinity groups or affinity networks and there are many other collective terms too.

The most popular networks in most UK organisations are affinity groups that are linked to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010. These include, but are not limited to, gender networks, faith networks, ethnicity networks, sexual orientation networks and disability networks.

As we look at this through a global lens, it is important to note that different regions will have more relevant networks to their part of the world. For example, a North American organisation may have a Latino/Latinx network to celebrate and address the needs of the organisation's Latin American employees. Other networks may also be focused on elements of organisational culture that are not necessarily linked to any one protected characteristic, but takes a holistic view on the employee experience – for example, a network focused on flexible working.

Networks can be extremely effective vehicles to support colleagues, raise awareness of the challenges of specific affinity groups and build allyship in an organisation. Staff networks can also help impact-assess decisions and enable innovative approaches to strengthen your organisation.

To understand more about staff networks, refer to our [Sustainable Staff Networks](#) guide available on the Member's Area of our website.

² Latinx (pronounced 'luh-TEE-neks') is a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina).

Definition of global staff networks

For the purpose of this guide, when we talk about global staff networks we are talking about:

- Staff networks that operate and have members in more than one country or geographic region.
- Staff networks whose headquarters may be in one country, but that have network hubs in other countries. For example, a network based in the UK that has UK-based network leads, working with the network leads based in Germany and Hong Kong. Each local network may work independently or collaborate with each other. Sometimes this is described in organisations as a ‘hub and spoke’ model.
- Staff networks that, while only having membership in one country, may provide support to other regions or countries. For example, a network that is based in the UK may also provide support to the organisation and employee resources based in Brazil.

Please note that the above definitions are different from an international staff network, which is a network comprised of international employees (generally employees not born in the country where the organisation operates), but that does not necessarily operate in different countries.

2. Why ‘go global’? The business case and opportunities

Running a local employee network in one location can be challenging enough. Motivating employees to support and join a network, engaging leaders and understanding the needs of the organisation, it is something that requires time and passion. So why make the effort to expand it globally?

Any expansion of a staff network beyond your geographical borders must make business sense to the organisation, and there are many factors to consider. Here are a few that you may want to consider for your business case:

- If your organisation has a global inclusion and diversity strategy, a staff network that exists in various markets could form a core part of the strategy and can influence business decisions and policies.
- Expanding globally will provide an opportunity for different (and sometimes unexpected) countries to be heralded as best-in-class and provide inspiration for others.
- The concept of a staff network, whilst having risen in popularity in the West, has gained more exposure in other parts of the world. It is likely that newer generations will be looking for this within any organisations they join – thereby widening your talent pool and the likelihood of retention elsewhere.
- Expanding a staff network beyond one market or allowing access beyond one market provides benefits for colleagues in other markets such as providing a safe space and mobility opportunities.

- A global staff network can break down business silos that may exist across markets. They can create a sense of belonging or allyship, which may well spread across an organisation.
- It is an opportunity to generate new ideas, gain a better understanding of global challenges impacting the communities and workspaces, generate better understanding and empathy for different nationalities, and create networking opportunities for network members and their allies.
- A global staff network can help address operational challenges in large and complex structures by providing a forum and space where colleagues across a multitude of functions share similar and inclusive values.
- A global staff network can benefit greatly from global world events that support various communities that may take place in any part of the world, for example: Gay Games (being held for the first time in Hong Kong and Mexico in 2023), or Paralympics (Paris 2024), or the Invictus Games (yearly).

3. Approaches for ‘going global’

The right approach to take for your global expansion will depend on a series of factors, from how mature your network is, to how big your market is, to what the needs of your network and market are.

First and foremost, be aware of what already exists by doing your research. This could be an informal piece of research or a detailed audit depending on the scale of your ambition. As staff networks are employee-led and work best when employees are already invested, make sure what is already there is leveraged and supported.

How you expand also depends on who you are. If you are an employee leading a staff network your level or type of engagement will be different from a Human Resources or a inclusion and diversity specialist. Whatever role you have, be aware of the differences in the make-up of the organisation in other countries and the cultural perceptions of various departments or skill-sets.

There are three main models:

Global expansion

This option would mean replicating the network around the world. This option assumes that there is already a network that is recognised for the difference it is making locally, and there may be a need to expand reach to other countries and regions.

Typically, expanding a network would require:

- Ensuring the strategies and plans are the same (with flex for local culture, nuances and laws).
- Ensuring branding and positioning are similar.
- A formal and specific approach to appointing local network leads.
- Creating a global ‘communication’ document that can be presented at a relevant organisational event such as a global townhall or a company conference.

- Co-leading an expansion drive with other countries that are already established with their own staff network or who have displayed a strong interest and have the resources to support it (whilst ensuring that branding, positioning etc. are aligned across every market).
- A strictly regular process for meeting, decision making and reviewing progress.

Global consultancy

This option would mean providing a softer form of support centrally for a characteristic, group or dimension.

You could consider this option if an existing network is already recognised for the work it does locally and are seen as a model to follow in the organisation. But a network does not need to exist locally already for this approach to work. The existing network can provide perspective, resources and tools (e.g. policies, events, customer outreach) that may be helpful but not 'mandated' for local teams.

In this advisory role, the network can also help other countries (or regions) in other ways:

- Providing frameworks or structural examples.
- Hosting events to generate excitement, share learning and inspire.
- By giving regions a seat at a 'global table' on inclusion matters that have a major impact on employees, so that global (i.e. headquarter) leaders understand their concerns and challenges
- If you are a commercial organisation, by helping provide insight on affinity groups that could affect clients, products or services.

Global governance

This option is a combination of international expansion and international consultancy. This works well when there is a benefit to keep certain elements of the staff network consistent such as: marketing, process or a code of conduct, but where there still needs to be flexibility for other countries to adapt.

A governance model usually provides countries with a framework, tools or resources that are 'ready-to-go'. A governance model normally has a clear set of standards, norms or a code of conduct, which should guide how everyone collaborates. It is also important to give countries access to a central team whenever advice is needed.

Typically this model includes:

- Having executive sponsors centrally or locally to ensure compliance to agreed codes.
- Having a central catalogue of resources and branding that everyone can access to drive consistency (i.e. SharePoint, Google Cloud).
- Semi-regular meetings that are used for updates, and compliance checks and also used as venues for collaboration.

4. Challenges

These are considerations all networks should discuss before expanding to other markets. It is recommended that you work through these with HR, any executive sponsors and other relevant stakeholders in the organisation.

The business case

Before taking a global leap, consider the business case. Is this the right step for the network? What will the network and organisation gain? Find out if a global inclusion strategy is in place or being developed and work with whoever is leading it to check whether your business case aligns with that strategy.

Time and resource

Do you have the time and resources to expand internationally, especially if you are not from an inclusion and diversity or HR department? And if you are not, would you need to let your manager know that time spent on a global staff network is a part of your job specification so you are adequately supported and potentially remunerated?

For support staff (i.e. I&D or HR), it is important to remember that many staff networks are created by employees at a 'grass-roots' level and take energy to create and manage over and above 'day-jobs'. Help employees gain support from senior executives and decision-makers to invest in any additional resources needed to get certain projects or initiatives off the ground. It is also important that leadership invests their own time in supporting the groups as members of the relevant communities or as allies.

Be aware that in a global context it is also even more important to bear in mind the energy required to work on staff networks, as many cultures often have longer working hours than Western cultures.

Make your purpose clear

As networks have increased in popularity some organisations have been guilty of assuming that a staff network is an inclusion and diversity strategy. A staff network may well influence many parts of an I&D strategy, but it is not the strategy.

People who are involved in staff networks should also not be held responsible for being the only people leading on inclusion and diversity in an organisation. Leaders and other stakeholders in HR or I&D must continue to be accountable for a broader I&D strategy that might leverage a global staff network.

Different approaches to inclusion and diversity

Each country will be at different stages in their relationship with inclusion and diversity as a practice. Do consider that what works in one place, might not always work somewhere else.

Truly listen to what your global people are saying – they will understand local barriers, opportunities and risks. Guide and support them to do what's right, but avoid 'enforcing' approaches or ideas. You will also need to take cultural and historical considerations into account when assessing what the best approach for certain markets is. For example, if a country or markets has historical resistance to materials and resources being shared in English, you could risk alienating people.

Refer to the Inclusive Employers guide on [global inclusion strategies](#) for more information on cross-cultural considerations.

Employee safety

You may find regions or countries where employees are less inclined to engage in employee networks or general conversations about inclusion. Besides the reasons already explored, others could include lack of psychological safety (i.e. lack of inclusive leadership), local cultural views (i.e., prejudice against some faiths and religions), or laws and legislation (i.e. anti-LGBTQ+ legislation) that could make people feel unsafe or afraid of being exposed. It is essential that employee safety is considered above everything else.

Before reaching out to a wide employee base, always work with local allies or HR to understand the risks and nuances of the regions in which you are operating.

However, do not let local laws stop you from having the right conversations as they can be seen as an excuse for organisations to avoid making any changes that are legally possible.

Read the Inclusive Employers guide on [Global Inclusion strategies](#) for more information on how to navigate this area.

Language barriers

While English is considered the ‘official’ corporate language in much of the Western world, please don’t assume that everyone speaks it.

According to the World Economic Forum, of the approximately 1.5 billion people who speak English, less than 400 million use it as a first language, meaning over 1 billion speak it as a secondary language. While it may seem a lot, it is also important to note that better English levels in a country correlate with higher income and a better quality of life.

So expecting everyone to speak the language may create additional inclusion barriers. To address that, you could look for allies or staff members in your internal network who have language skills and could support you. Or you may also engage with English-speaking allies in the country you are trying to reach to support you with translations and nuances.

Time zones

One of the main challenges for global organisations is the different time zones and the difficulty of having everyone on the same call at the same time. It is important that you take this into consideration when setting up calls for meetings, especially as some may fall outside people’s regular working hours.

You may consider a poll to understand what times work better for people across all time zones. You may consider alternating the times of the meetings, so that there is more equity around time zones. It is also important to set barriers around times for calls – for example, not setting calls at times that fall between 7pm and 7am at any given time zone. And if people need to take a call outside their hours, work with HR so they can take that time back.

The role of HR

Be aware that in many countries, the role of HR is different. In many less developed economies HR resources are often limited. You might expect to see that HR plays a more administrative role and themselves have little time or resource to dedicate to staff networks.

They may also, in some instances, not necessarily be aware of what a staff network is, or the role that it plays.

In addition, there are also varying degrees of trust with HR depending on the culture of a market. While it is important to connect with HR in other markets to gain intelligence, their ability to support may vary. So consider leveraging local leads instead.

5. Where do you start?

Have you decided that going global is the way forward? Here are a few ideas on how to get started.

Understand where the different regions are in the inclusion maturity model

To better understand the challenges and opportunities you may encounter, it is essential to assess the inclusion maturity range (for the community supported by the staff network) of the regions you are connecting with are.

This can be an exercise you do with HR and leaders of the organisation, or with employees in those regions who have shown an interest in doing inclusion work specifically for an affinity group they wish to support. Once you gather your intel, assess where in the model they are and where in the model your region is. This should give you some guidelines of how to adapt your approach.

The model below can be used to assess where different networks or working groups are:



Start building a global network of allies

It will be easier for you to begin if you already have a network of people you can rely on to start the conversation. You could start by engaging with the local HR teams to understand if there are any actions already happening in that region. Is there anyone they could connect you with? Is there someone more senior that would be interested in getting involved as a sponsor? Note that here the word ‘allies’ applies to anyone with an interest in doing inclusion work as it relates to a specific staff network affinity.

Consider creating an initial ‘global committee’ with the allies and what positions will be needed for that committee. If you are from HR or an I&D team, support employees by helping them get the senior support they need or access to relevant people in other countries.

Create a brand

Creating a name, a logo and brand guidelines (including fonts, style, tone, etc.) or even a global staff network video. These are ways of inspiring communities with your vision. Consider materials that can resonate around the world and can be used in global meetings like townhalls, team calls or that can be shown on public area screens in different work locations.

Give global employees a platform

Once you have your group of allies ready to be involved in a global staff network, it is important to start building connections with them. To understand the challenges and opportunities from that region, consider running ‘inclusion huddles’ or ‘focus groups’ where colleagues are given the space to talk about their experience – what inclusion means to them, what challenges they experience, what they would like to do in that region. This will help you with your plan on how to best support them, and how to take their needs into consideration depending on which of the three approaches you decide to use.

You may also wish to consider having a safe space in the form of an online platform that could be used (whether developed by the organisation specifically or using an existing digital platform). Consider who should be in these so that employees feel safe and can speak freely.

For example, if leadership, HR/I&D teams are part of these conversations, it may have an impact on people’s ability to feel safe to be open about their experiences.

Focus group conversations

Host focus groups conversations with employees from different countries to understand their experience and what they would like to see/feel in their region. It is essential that a space of psychological safety is created, and where the sensitivity of the conversations is respected. Employee networks should refer to HR for support in hosting such conversations. Inclusive Employers can support you hosting focus groups.

Tell the story of your network to inspire others

Are you looking to inspire other regions to create their own networks? Or maybe you are looking to inspire local allies to join your network?

Consider how you can tell the story of your network and it got started: What were your successes and challenges? How did you get organised? How did you engage with allies and stakeholders? and Who can people contact for help?

You could consider an online event open to all or being part of a meeting where you can present your story and achievements. Use storytelling to capture people's hearts and minds. To be truthful and authentic the story should be told by employees who are part of the global staff network.

Provide terms of reference

These are key to help networks succeed – this includes providing a vision, an action plan and suggested roles.

If you are following the 'Global expansion' approach, provide as much detail as possible on how to replicate the staff network elsewhere including, for example, the types of committee roles, the key events, the related policy goals and any other elements of the staff network framework.

If you are following the ‘Global consultancy’ model and are helping other networks get started, you may want to share your terms of reference to provide some inspiration so they can adapt it to suit local needs and requirements.

A ‘Global governance’ model will require a terms of reference that make clear what should remain centrally governed and followed locally, versus what is possible to be adapted locally.

In all instances, thinking ‘glocal’ is important. Glocal brings together the words ‘global’ and ‘local’ and considers both global and local needs.

Besides creating terms of reference and sharing best practice, it is important to have a plan of action. Although the plan should be realistic based on the capacity of the people involved in the global staff network. If you work in HR or I&D, do make sure that expectations on the work required are fair and based on the capacity agreed between the employee and their line manager.

For more information, refer to our [Sustainable Staff Networks](#) guide available on the Member’s Resources area of our website.

Empower employees to succeed

To ensure the longevity of the network, it is essential that people feel empowered as employees and that they have the tools to succeed. This is especially important for support staff in HR and I&D. If you work in these departments make sure:

- You can provide any training that might be needed, in any country or region.
- You can help the global staff network to visualise what good looks like, and help them measure success.
- You can share any Global Inclusion strategy work to help inspire the global staff network and you can support them by including some of its goals in the Global Inclusion Strategy.
- You should also ensure that employees are not judged or discriminated against by their participation (or lack thereof) in any staff networks (global or local).

Global staff network buddy system

Sett up a 'buddy' system where network members are paired with a network member in a different country. The buddies could have regular monthly meetings where they connect, talk about challenges and opportunities, and share inclusion resources.

Global inclusion allies

A programme created by Inclusive Employers where global cohorts of inclusion allies are trained on what it means to be an ally – actions, behaviours and impact. As a result, the organisation can have a global network of allies who are equipped and empowered to make positive change in the organisation.

Inclusive Employers can work with your local inclusion allies to adapt the training for local needs.

6. Global staff network engagement

Now that you have made the connections, found allies, sponsors, defined how working on the global staff network is part of your job remit (working with HR & I&D leads for that support if needed), driving momentum is key.

Here are some tips for continuously engaging people around the world as your global staff network evolves.

Internal

Internal events at global organisations have seen a huge shift due to Covid, as organisations have realised that even more people can now collaborate and engage with each other than ever before through online meetings, workshops and conferences. If budgets are limited it is always a great option. Do think about interesting ways to keep people engaged (polls, breakout rooms, live and recorded sessions) and keep the events short to avoid 'Zoom fatigue'.

Global staff networks should not sit in a vacuum and everyone involved must work hard to continue to educate leadership on how the network benefits the organisation as well as on specific affinity topics, challenges and issues. Ensure you are constantly pushing for visibility in wider the organisation or meetings where things like company results and plans are being presented.

- If there is budget for face-to-face events do it in a country that has strong anti-discrimination laws: it is a great opportunity for those who are unsafe in their home market to travel and meet other members who identify in the same way - and may even open up mobility opportunities.
- A great way for HR or I&D leads to champion and support networks is to help arrange 'network huddles' for various global staff networks. This can build a culture of allyship across groups, collaboration and learning.

- Consider having a regular virtual meeting where global networks come together to share highlights and challenges. This could be a great opportunity for collaboration and mutual inspiration.
- Set up a ‘buddy’ system where network members are paired with a network member in a different country. The buddies could have regular monthly meetings where they connect, talk about challenges and opportunities, and share inclusion resources.
- Global Inclusion Allies is a programme created by Inclusive Employers where global cohorts of inclusion allies are trained on what it means to be an ally – actions, behaviours and impact. As a result, the organisation can have a global network of allies who are equipped and empowered to make positive change in the organisation.

Inclusive Employers can work with your local inclusion allies to adapt the training for local needs.

External

An organisation does not have to do all the heavy-lifting as it relates to ensuring a consistent stream of communication and engagement. As mentioned earlier, all around the world there are cultural and sporting events that can be leveraged in all kinds of ways (Gay Games, Invictus, Paralympics, Mental Health Week, International Women's Day etc.).

- Consider the following approaches to drive engagement: For any of these actions, it is recommended that employee networks consult with and collaborate with the relevant stakeholders.
- Investigate if the organisation can sponsor a relevant event pertaining to the staff network affinity. This would be particularly meaningful if the event is not in North America or Europe, so that employees all around the world can begin to understand that the organisation is committed to inclusion truly across all cultures and countries.
- If sponsorship is not possible, consider other ways that the global staff network can support – perhaps a volunteers at the event, or providing a specific service that the organisation specialises in for free.
- Run a ‘mini version’ of the event at various offices to generate excitement.

- Simply focus on a communications calendar where you can run some social posts highlighting your support of the events as a global staff network showing the outside world how truly global you are. It's also a chance to highlight employees who are key members of the network (with their permission of course).

7. Case studies

In this section we highlight two case studies from organisations that have developed successful networks with a global reach.

1) WPP Unite - Navigating a complex structure

WPP Unite is WPP's global staff network for the LGBTQ+ community. WPP Unite recently won 'Outstanding Employee Network of the Year' at the British Diversity Awards in 2022. WPP is a British-headquartered company that employs over 100,000 people worldwide across dozens of operating companies. It has a vast and complex matrix structure. WPP Unite was designed to be open to anyone from any WPP company with the aim of inspiring individual groups to pursue LGBTQ+ objectives and activities within their companies in the way that feels right for their culture.

The role of WPP Unite is to join the dots of existing entities that already existed in different companies and countries, therefore taking more of the governance approach outlined above.

WPP Unite's workstreams are extensive ranging from managing governance, central committee responsibilities, and branding through to impact on workplace policies.

When WPP Unite launched it took care to create a clear brand and positioning that could be used anywhere around the world. Video content introducing the network could be streamed as far as the Hong Kong offices.

WPP Unite has its own social pages, including [LinkedIn](#), where they stay engaged with the community internally and externally by posting on key events like LGBTQ+ History Month amongst others.

Outside of some of the basic work required to operate a global staff network WPP Unite was also involved in creating work to raise awareness for the Equality Act in the US in February 2022 in support of the Human Rights Campaign. The campaign was designed to rally support for the act to guarantee explicit and consistent non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+

people in key areas of life around the USA.³ It is a great example of the impact that a global staff network can have on an organisation and wider society.

The success of WPP Unite has not been without the support of board-level sponsors, allies in other countries and budget.

2) Deloitte's Multicultural Network (MCN) – Multiple and continuous activities

Deloitte is a large professional services company that employs over 300,000 around the world. Its Multicultural staff network has been running for over 18 years and it continues to engage employees and wider society on important multicultural topics.

As recently as 2022 Deloitte's MCN was nominated at the British Diversity Awards for Outstanding Employee Network, but back in 2016 it was a winner at the European Diversity Awards. The judges cited the impressive activities were:⁴

- Quarterly career webinars
- Graduate recruitment events
- Public speaking workshops
- Raising awareness of the refugee crisis
- Events to heighten awareness of mental health challenges and wellbeing issues in ethnic minority groups

The responsibility and work of this staff network is varied and spans the workplace and beyond. There is both internal and external communications on key topics that Deloitte MCN is responsible for.

Like WPP Unite, the MCN network at Deloitte is also active on external social channels such as their [Twitter](#) page.

³ <https://www.wpp.com/news/2022/02/human-rights-campaign-launches-huge-public-awareness-campaign-for-equality-act-with-support-from-wpp>

⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/deloitte-multicultural-network-wins-european-diversity-award.html>

What our members say...

“A great investment to help your inclusion agenda”

“Keeping us focused and up to date with best practice”

Support your inclusion agenda by becoming an **Inclusive Employers member!**

Join us and you'll have access to expert I&D guides and factsheets, aswell as...

- **Expert Support**

Inclusion and diversity advice on demand from a dedicated account manager

- **Webinars**

240+ hours of learning per year, for your team, via our webinar programme

- **Networking opportunities**

Opportunities to network with other member organisations via our community, 'Members United' and to participate in major projects

Want to know more?

www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/membership/



**Global
Inclusion Week**
2023 12 - 16 June

Sponsored by:



**WARNER BROS.
DISCOVERY**



Making inclusion an everyday reality

www.InclusiveEmployers.co.uk



**Global
Inclusion Week**
2023 12 - 16 June

Sponsored by:



**WARNER BROS.
DISCOVERY**