




EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP BEST PRACTICES

Your Playbook for an Engaging & Inclusive ERG

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, organizations are recognizing that diversity, equity, and inclusion aren't just moral imperatives—they're business necessities. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) have emerged as one of the most powerful tools for fostering inclusive cultures, driving employee engagement, and creating meaningful connections across organizational boundaries.

This comprehensive playbook will guide you through every aspect of building and maintaining successful ERGs, from initial conception to long-term sustainability. Whether you're an HR leader looking to launch your first ERG, an employee passionate about creating change, or an existing ERG leader seeking to revitalize your group, this guide provides the frameworks, strategies, and best practices you need to succeed.

Throughout this journey, we'll emphasize the critical role that mentorship plays in ERG success. Mentorship isn't just a nice-to-have feature—it's the connective tissue that transforms ERGs from simple affinity groups into powerful engines of professional development, cultural change, and organizational impact.



What is an ERG and Why Are They Important?

Defining Employee Resource Groups

An Employee Resource Group (ERG) is a voluntary, employee-led group that brings together individuals who share common characteristics, experiences, or interests. These groups serve as safe spaces for connection, professional development, and advocacy while supporting the organization's broader diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

ERGs typically form around various identity dimensions, including:

At Together Software, we've spoken with a number of Learning & Development professionals at companies like Glassdoor, Cisco, Lever, and many others. All of these professionals strive to make their initiatives more quantifiable. Common across all of these teams and initiatives are a set of metrics that are a requirement for any initiative. They are:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identity and expression
- Sexual orientation
- Age and generational differences
- Disability status
- Religious beliefs
- Veterans and military families
- Parents and caregivers
- Professional interests or career stages

The Strategic Value of ERGs

Modern ERGs have evolved far beyond simple networking groups. They now serve as strategic business partners that drive measurable organizational outcomes:



Employee Engagement and Retention

ERGs create a sense of belonging that directly impacts retention rates. A 2025 industry report highlights that companies with ERGs see a 40% higher retention rate among underrepresented groups compared to those without these programs.¹



Talent Development and Leadership Pipeline

ERGs serve as leadership development laboratories where employees can build skills in project management, event planning, public speaking, and cross-functional collaboration.



Innovation and Market Insights

Diverse perspectives drive innovation. ERGs provide unique insights into customer needs, market opportunities, and product development that can directly impact business outcomes. Companies with strong ERG programs report 15% higher revenue growth compared to those without.²



Cultural Transformation

ERGs act as change agents, helping organizations identify and address systemic barriers while promoting inclusive practices. They serve as early warning systems for cultural issues and provide grassroots support for organizational initiatives.



Recruitment and Employer Branding

In today's competitive talent market, ERGs serve as powerful recruitment tools. They demonstrate organizational commitment to inclusion and provide authentic employee voices that resonate with prospective candidates.

¹ [Gitnux, "Employee Resource Group Statistics."](#)

² [HMN Business Review, "30+ Vital Employee Resource Group \(ERG\) Statistics for Workplace Success in 2025."](#)

The Mentorship Foundation

At the heart of every successful ERG lies a robust mentorship ecosystem. Mentorship within ERGs takes multiple forms:



Peer Mentorship

Members support each other's professional growth through knowledge sharing, skill development, and career guidance.



Reverse Mentorship

Younger or more junior employees share insights on emerging trends, technology, and fresh perspectives with senior colleagues.



Sponsorship

Senior leaders within or allied to the ERG actively advocate for members' advancement and create opportunities for visibility and growth.



Cross-Functional Mentorship

ERGs break down organizational silos, enabling mentorship relationships across departments, functions, and geographic locations.



How to Start an ERG

Step 1: Identifying the Need

Before launching an ERG, conduct a thorough assessment to understand the specific needs and opportunities within your organization:



Employee Survey and Focus Groups

Gather data on employee experiences, interests, and perceived gaps in support or representation. Use both quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups to understand the nuances of employee needs.



Demographic Analysis

Review your organization's demographic composition to identify underrepresented groups or communities that might benefit from targeted support.



Organizational Readiness Assessment

Evaluate leadership support, available resources, and cultural readiness for ERG initiatives. Consider factors such as:

- Senior leadership commitment
- HR support and infrastructure
- Budget availability
- Communication channels
- Existing diversity and inclusion programs



Competitive Landscape Research

Study ERG programs at similar organizations to understand best practices and avoid common pitfalls.

Step 2: Building the Business Case

A compelling business case is essential for securing organizational support and resources:



Align with Organizational Goals

Connect ERG objectives to broader business priorities such as employee engagement, retention, innovation, and market expansion.



Define Success Metrics

Establish clear, measurable outcomes that demonstrate ERG value. Consider metrics such as:

- Employee engagement scores among ERG members
- Retention rates of underrepresented groups
- Internal promotion rates for ERG participant
- Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)
- Participation rates in company-wide initiatives



Resource Requirements

Detail the resources needed for ERG success, including:

- Time allocation for ERG activities
- Budget for events, training, and materials
- Technology platforms for communication and collaboration
- Meeting spaces and facilities
- Executive sponsorship and support



Return on Investment

Quantify the potential benefits in terms of reduced turnover costs, improved productivity, enhanced innovation, and stronger employer brand.



Step 3: Securing Leadership Support

Executive sponsorship is crucial for ERG success. Effective sponsors provide:

- ✓ **Strategic Guidance**
Help align ERG activities with organizational priorities and provide strategic direction.
- ✓ **Resource Access**
Facilitate access to budget, meeting spaces, communication channels, and other necessary resources.
- ✓ **Visibility and Credibility**
Lend executive credibility to ERG initiatives and help raise awareness across the organization.
- ✓ **Barrier Removal**
Identify and address organizational obstacles that might impede ERG effectiveness.
- ✓ **Mentorship and Development**
Serve as senior mentors for ERG leaders and members, providing career guidance and advocacy.



Step 4: Establishing Charter and Structure

A well-defined charter provides the foundation for ERG operations:



Mission and Vision

Clearly articulate the ERG's purpose, values, and long-term aspirations. Ensure alignment with organizational mission and values.



Goals and Objectives

Define specific, measurable goals that support both member development and organizational objectives. Common ERG goals include:

- Professional development and career advancement
- Cultural awareness and education
- Community outreach and social impact
- Recruitment and retention support
- Product and service feedback



Membership Guidelines

Establish criteria for membership, including whether the group is open to allies and supporters from different backgrounds.



Leadership Structure

Define leadership roles and responsibilities, including:

- Executive Committee or Steering Committee
- Chapter leaders (for multi-location organizations)
- Committee chairs (events, communications, professional development)
- Term lengths and succession planning



Governance Framework

Establish decision-making processes, meeting cadences, and communication protocols.



Code of Conduct

Define behavioral expectations and create mechanisms for addressing conflicts or concerns.

Step 5: Launch Strategy and Early Activities

A successful launch creates momentum and establishes the ERG's presence within the organization:



Soft Launch

Begin with a small core group of committed members to test processes and refine the approach before broader promotion.



Awareness Campaign

Develop a comprehensive communication strategy that includes:

- Leadership announcements
- Intranet articles and social media posts
- Department presentations
- Lunch-and-learn sessions
- Collaboration with existing diversity programs



Foundational Events

Plan initial activities that demonstrate value and build community:

- Networking receptions
- Professional development workshops
- Lunch-and-learn sessions with subject matter experts
- Mentorship speed dating events
- Community service projects



Mentorship Program Launch

Establish formal or informal mentorship programs as a cornerstone of ERG activities.

This might include:

- Mentor-mentee matching processes
- Mentorship training and resources
- Regular check-ins and progress tracking
- Recognition and celebration of mentorship relationship



Feedback and Iteration

Collect feedback from early participants and adjust programming based on member needs and preferences.

How to Keep Your ERG Thriving for the Long-Term

Creating Sustainable Leadership Structures

Long-term ERG success depends on developing sustainable leadership pipelines and governance structures:

✓ Leadership Development Programs

Create systematic approaches to developing future ERG leaders through:



Leadership training
workshops



Job shadowing and
rotation opportunities



Mentorship relationships
with current leaders



Cross-functional
project assignments



External leadership
development programs

✓ Advisory Boards

Create advisory structures that include senior leaders, HR partners, and external experts to provide strategic guidance and support.



Succession Planning

Establish clear processes for leadership transitions that ensure continuity and prevent burnout:



Staggered term limits for leadership positions



Knowledge transfer protocols



Documentation of processes and institutional knowledge



Mentorship relationships between outgoing and incoming leaders



Recognition and Incentives

Develop formal recognition programs that acknowledge ERG leadership contributions and integrate ERG participation into performance evaluation processes.



Designing Impactful Programming

Successful ERGs offer diverse programming that meets various member needs and interests:



Professional Development Focus Areas

- Leadership skills training
- Industry-specific technical skills
- Communication and presentation skills
- Project management and strategic thinking
- Personal branding and networking strategies



Mentorship Programming Options

- One-on-one traditional mentorship
- Group mentorship circles
- Peer coaching partnerships
- Reverse mentorship programs
- Cross-cultural mentorship exchanges
- Industry-specific mentorship tracks



Educational and Awareness Initiatives

- Cultural celebration events
- Educational speaker series
- Bias interruption training
- Inclusive leadership workshops
- Historical awareness programs



Community Impact Projects

- Volunteer opportunities aligned with ERG mission
- Fundraising for relevant causes
- Community partnerships and outreach
- Student mentorship and scholarship programs
- Environmental sustainability initiatives



Business Impact Activities

- Market research and consumer insights
- Product testing and feedback
- Recruitment and hiring support
- Customer experience improvements
- Innovation challenges and hackathons



Leveraging Technology and Platforms

Modern ERGs require robust technology infrastructure to support communication, collaboration, and engagement:



Communication Platforms

Utilize integrated communication tools that enable:

- Group messaging and announcements
- Event planning and RSVP management
- Document sharing and collaboration
- Virtual meeting facilitation
- Mobile accessibility for remote and field employees



Mentorship Technology

Implement dedicated mentorship platforms that facilitate:

- Mentor-mentee matching based on skills, interests, and goals
- Goal setting and progress tracking
- Resource libraries and development tools
- Communication facilitation and scheduling
- Program analytics and reporting



Content Management Systems

Develop centralized repositories for:

- ERG resources and toolkits
- Event archives and recordings
- Professional development materials
- Best practices and case studies
- Member directories and expertise databases



Analytics and Measurement

Implement tracking systems that monitor:

- Membership engagement and participation
- Event attendance and feedback
- Professional development outcomes
- Mentorship relationship success
- Business impact metrics

Building Strategic Partnerships

Sustainable ERGs develop strategic partnerships that expand their reach and impact:



Cross-ERG Collaboration

Foster relationships with other ERGs to:

- Share resources and best practices
- Plan joint events and initiatives
- Address intersectional identities and experiences
- Amplify collective voice on organizational issues



Business Unit Partnerships

Collaborate with different departments to:

- Support recruitment and retention goals
- Provide market insights and customer feedback
- Contribute to product development and innovation
- Enhance customer service and experience



External Partnerships

Develop relationships with:

- Industry associations and professional organizations
- Community organizations and nonprofits
- Educational institutions and student groups
- Other companies with similar ERG programs
- Diversity and inclusion consultants and experts



Executive Partnerships

Maintain strong relationships with senior leadership through:

- Regular strategic reviews and updates
- Executive mentorship programs
- Leadership development opportunities
- Visibility in senior leadership meetings
- Integration with organizational planning processes

Measuring Impact and Demonstrating Value

Effective measurement systems are essential for ERG sustainability and growth:



Member-Focused Metrics

- Membership growth and retention rates
- Engagement levels and participation frequency
- Professional development outcomes
- Career advancement rates
- Job satisfaction and belonging scores



Organizational Impact Metrics

- Employee retention rates by demographic group
- Internal promotion rates for ERG members
- Recruitment success in target demographics
- Employee engagement survey results
- Inclusion index scores



Business Outcomes

- Innovation metrics and idea generation
- Customer satisfaction improvements
- Market expansion and penetration
- Revenue impact from ERG insights
- Brand reputation and employer brand strength



Mentorship Program Effectiveness

- Mentorship relationship formation and duration
- Goal achievement rates
- Skill development outcomes
- Career advancement for mentees
- Mentor satisfaction and engagement

Addressing Common Challenges

Long-term ERG success requires proactive approaches to common challenges:



Avoiding Burnout

Prevent leader and member burnout through:

- Rotating responsibilities and shared leadership
- Setting realistic expectations and boundaries
- Providing adequate resources and support
- Celebrating achievements and recognizing contributions
- Encouraging work-life balance and self-care



Maintaining Relevance

Keep ERGs current and engaging by:

- Regular member feedback and needs assessments
- Staying current with industry trends and best practices
- Adapting to changing organizational priorities
- Refreshing programming and activities
- Incorporating new technologies and approaches



Managing Growth

Handle ERG expansion effectively by:

- Developing scalable processes and systems
- Training additional leaders and facilitators
- Creating chapter or regional structures
- Maintaining quality while increasing reach
- Preserving culture and values during growth



Demonstrating Ongoing Value

Continuously prove ERG worth through:

- Regular impact reporting and communication
- Success story documentation and sharing
- Alignment with evolving business needs
- Innovation in programming and approaches
- Strong relationships with key stakeholders

The Power of Mentorship in ERGs

Why Mentorship is Central to ERG Success

Mentorship transforms ERGs from networking groups into powerful professional development ecosystems. The unique environment of ERGs creates ideal conditions for mentorship to thrive:



Shared Understanding

ERG members often share common experiences, challenges, or identities that create natural mentorship connections based on genuine understanding and empathy.



Safe Space for Growth

ERGs provide psychologically safe environments where members can be vulnerable about their challenges and aspirations, enabling deeper mentorship relationships.



Cross-Level Connections

ERGs break down traditional hierarchical barriers, enabling mentorship relationships across organizational levels that might not occur naturally in formal structures.



Diverse Perspectives

ERG mentorship exposes members to diverse career paths, leadership styles, and problem-solving approaches that broaden their professional perspective.

Types of Mentorship Within ERGs



Traditional One-on-One Mentorship

Senior members guide junior colleagues through career navigation, skill development, and organizational understanding. This relationship provides personalized attention and sustained support over extended periods.



Peer Mentorship Circles

Groups of colleagues at similar levels support each other's growth through collective wisdom, shared experiences, and mutual accountability. These circles are particularly effective for addressing common challenges and building professional networks.



Reverse Mentorship

Junior members share insights on emerging technologies, generational perspectives, and fresh approaches with senior colleagues. This model recognizes that learning is multidirectional and that everyone has valuable knowledge to share.



Group Mentorship Programs

Experienced leaders mentor multiple junior colleagues simultaneously through structured programs that combine group learning with individual guidance. This approach maximizes the impact of senior mentors while building cohort connections.



Project-Based Mentorship

Members collaborate on specific ERG initiatives or business projects, with experienced colleagues providing guidance and skill development through hands-on work. This approach combines learning with meaningful contribution to ERG goals.



Cross-Functional Mentorship

ERG connections enable mentorship relationships across different departments, functions, and geographic locations, providing broader organizational perspective and expanded networks.



Building Effective ERG Mentorship Programs



Needs Assessment and Goal Setting

Begin by understanding member needs, career aspirations, and skill development priorities. Use surveys, focus groups, and individual conversations to identify specific mentorship goals and match them with available mentor expertise.



Mentor Recruitment and Training

Develop comprehensive recruitment strategies that engage potential mentors across organizational levels. Provide training that covers:

- Effective mentorship skills and techniques
- Cultural competency and inclusive mentorship practices
- Goal setting and progress tracking methodologies
- Boundary setting and relationship management
- Resources and tools for mentor support



Matching Processes

Create systematic approaches to mentor-mentee matching that consider:

- Career goals and development needs
- Personality compatibility and communication styles
- Availability and time zone considerations
- Specific expertise and experience areas
- Diversity of perspectives and backgrounds



Program Structure and Support

Establish clear frameworks that include:

- Program duration and time commitments
- Meeting cadence and format guidelines
- Goal setting and progress tracking tools
- Resource libraries and development materials
- Regular check-ins and program evaluation



Technology Integration

Leverage mentorship platforms that facilitate:

- Profile creation and compatibility matching
- Goal setting and milestone tracking
- Communication and scheduling tools
- Resource sharing and collaboration
- Program analytics and success measurement

Mentorship as a Leadership Development Tool

ERG mentorship programs serve as powerful leadership development pipelines:

- ✓ **Skill Building Through Mentoring**
Members who serve as mentors develop crucial leadership skills including coaching, communication, strategic thinking, and emotional intelligence.
- ✓ **Leadership Pipeline Development**
ERG mentorship programs identify and develop high-potential employees, creating pathways to formal leadership roles within both ERGs and the broader organization.
- ✓ **Cross-Cultural Competency**
Mentorship relationships across different backgrounds and experiences develop cultural intelligence and inclusive leadership capabilities.
- ✓ **Organizational Navigation**
Mentors help mentees understand organizational culture, unwritten rules, and political dynamics that are crucial for leadership success.
- ✓ **Network Expansion**
Mentorship relationships create extended professional networks that support career advancement and organizational influence.



Measuring Mentorship Program Success



Relationship Quality Metrics

- Mentor-mentee satisfaction surveys
- Relationship duration and engagement levels
- Goal achievement and milestone completion
- Communication frequency and quality
- Program completion rates



Professional Development Outcomes

- Skill development assessments
- Career advancement tracking
- Internal promotion rates for program participants
- Leadership role attainment
- Performance improvement indicators



Organizational Impact

- Employee retention rates for program participants
- Engagement and belonging scores
- Cross-functional collaboration improvements
- Innovation and idea generation from mentorship pairs
- ERG leadership pipeline development



Program Efficiency Metrics

- Matching success rates
- Time to establish productive relationships
- Resource utilization and cost per participant
- Scalability and growth potential
- Technology platform adoption and usage

Measuring Mentorship Program Success



Time and Availability Constraints

Address scheduling challenges through:

- Flexible meeting formats and virtual options
- Micro-mentorship opportunities with shorter commitments
- Group mentorship models that maximize mentor impact
- Technology tools that streamline communication and coordination
- Clear expectation setting around time commitments



Matching Difficulties

Improve mentor-mentee compatibility through:

- Comprehensive profiling and assessment processes
- Multiple matching criteria and algorithms
- Trial periods and re-matching opportunities
- Peer referral and recommendation systems
- Diverse mentor recruitment strategies



Maintaining Engagement

Sustain long-term participation through:

- Regular program communication and updates
- Recognition and celebration of mentorship achievements
- Continuous learning and development opportunities
- Program refreshes and innovation
- Community building and networking events



Cultural and Generational Differences

Bridge diverse perspectives through:

- Cultural competency training for all participants
- Clear communication guidelines and expectations
- Mediation and conflict resolution resources
- Celebration of diversity as program strength
- Regular feedback and program adjustments

Case Study

Avison Young's ERG Mentorship Success



Avison Young, a leading commercial real estate firm, demonstrates the transformative power of technology-enabled ERG mentorship. In 2020, they launched mentorship programs to support their Employee Resource Groups including Black professionals, Women's Network, LGBTQ+, and Emerging Leaders, but faced a significant scaling challenge.

Their previous manual matching process was unsustainable and overwhelming. Joan Skelton, Global Director of Diversity and Inclusion, described spreading employee responses "out all over the floor" to manually match thousands of participants across multiple ERGs. The administrative burden was so intense that their previous program manager said she was "losing her mind" trying to create meaningful connections at scale.



This program was better than I thought it was going to be. It will help the whole company grow as one.





The program successfully paired over 550 participants across multiple ERGs with an exceptional satisfaction rating



Remarkably, 98% of participants rated the program as satisfactory or very satisfactory

Avison Young partnered with Together to implement an intelligent mentorship platform that automated matching based on experience, career goals, and preferences. The platform included comprehensive resources like discussion agendas and mentoring handbooks, automated reminders to prevent missed meetings, and seamless calendar integration to eliminate scheduling friction. This technology-enabled approach maintained relationship quality while dramatically reducing administrative overhead.

The results exceeded expectations across every measure. The program successfully paired over 550 participants across multiple ERGs with an exceptional 3.97 out of 4 average satisfaction rating. Remarkably, 98% of participants rated the program as satisfactory or very satisfactory. Beyond satisfaction scores, Avison Young saw measurable improvements in retention rates during 2021, which Skelton attributed "at least in part, to the implementation of the Together Platform." The success also earned industry recognition, with Globest Real Estate Forum applauding them as "active supporters of women in the field."

Participant feedback highlighted the program's transformational impact. Comments included "This program was better than I thought it was going to be. It will help the whole company grow as one," and "The range of paired matches was fantastic. My mentor was exactly what I was hoping for!" Building on this success, Avison Young now plans to expand globally, connecting all 5,000+ employees across international offices, demonstrating how ERG mentorship programs can evolve into organization-wide strategic advantages.



Conclusion

Employee Resource Groups represent one of the most powerful tools available for creating inclusive, engaging, and innovative workplace cultures. When built on strong foundations of mentorship, strategic alignment, and sustainable practices, ERGs transform from simple affinity groups into engines of organizational change and individual growth.

The journey from ERG conception to thriving community requires careful planning, dedicated leadership, and ongoing commitment from both members and organizational sponsors. Success depends on understanding that ERGs are not just diversity initiatives—they are business imperatives that drive engagement, retention, innovation, and performance.

As you embark on this ERG journey, remember that mentorship is not just one component of a successful program—it is the connective tissue that brings together all other elements. Through mentorship, ERGs create lasting relationships, transfer institutional knowledge, develop future leaders, and build the human connections that make work meaningful.

The investment you make in building strong ERG programs will pay dividends in employee engagement, organizational culture, and business outcomes. More importantly, you will create communities where every employee can bring their authentic self to work, grow professionally, and contribute to something larger than themselves.

Whether you are just beginning to explore ERG possibilities or looking to revitalize existing programs, the principles and practices outlined in this playbook provide a roadmap for success. The specific tactics may evolve, but the core mission remains constant: creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

Your ERG journey starts now. Take the first step, gather your allies, and begin building the inclusive community your organization needs and your employees deserve. The future of work is inclusive, and ERGs are leading the way.

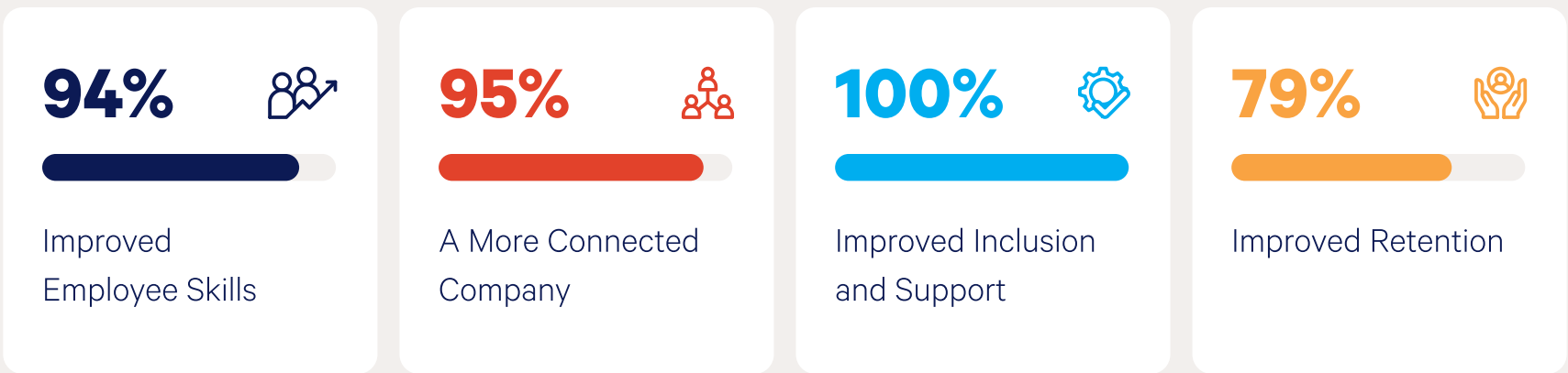


About Together

Together’s mentoring software empowers enterprise organizations to drive performance through relationships. Whether you’re running traditional 1:1 mentoring programs, peer or group mentoring programs, or just want to connect employees over a cup of coffee, Together matches employees at scale.

Together has consistently been granted the #1 mentorship software award for user experience by G2, the world’s leading software review site.

Together Administrators Report...



Some of our customers include



Book Demo

