

Creating an Armed Forces Staff Network

A Guide

Veterans of the UK Armed Forces have a multitude of transferable skills to benefit any employer. Just like many other minority communities in an organisation, an Armed Forces Staff Network, otherwise known as an Employee Resource Group (ERG) can prove lucrative for businesses and increase engagement from veteran staff. Not only do staff networks provide a safe space and sounding board for those with similar characteristics, but they have also proven to be innovative and useful resource for organisational change.

Here's a simple step-by-step guide for setting up an employee resource group (ERG) or staff network for armed forces veterans:

MISSION STATEMENT & OBJECTIVES

- Determine the purpose of the group. For example, peer support, mentoring and raising awareness of the armed forces – great for those working closely with veterans and the wider armed forces community.
- Set short-term and long-term goals that support the mission.

Top Tip:

Think SMART when setting your objectives, ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

STAKEHOLDERS, STRUCTURE & IDENTITY

- Find passionate veterans or reservists within the organisation to lead the group; perhaps forming a committee and defining roles to suit people's strengths.
- Having representatives in the network, such as Female Veteran Lead, Commonwealth Lead, or Families Lead, may result in splinter groups providing a further safe space for that demographic.
- Recruit employees with an interest in supporting veterans to join the network. If anyone is in a role where they interact with veterans regularly, but have no armed forces Service themselves, they should be encouraged to get involved to increase their awareness.
- If picking a name other than something like Armed Forces Network or Veterans & Reservists Network, be conscious of language being used to ensure that female veterans feel welcome and seen – exclusionary names such as 'Band of Brothers Network' should be discouraged.

Top Tip:

If you don't already, consider capturing data on who is a veteran when they join the organisation, or add it on your HR Management Information System for people to self-record. If this is not suitable, consider asking the question 'Have you ever served?' in your next employee engagement survey.



PROMOTION

- Announce the launch of the group through internal communications channels.
- Ensure you use imagery and language that is inclusive of female veterans / women in the armed forces.
- Encourage veterans and allies to join and participate.

Top Tip:

To launch an Armed Forces Network and get optimum buy in, consider a strong call to action, which can be armed forces related – it can be something fun like who can do the most push ups in one minute or a military knowledge quiz, or it can be something informative like a fireside chat with some veterans in your organisation.

FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS AND EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

- Collaborate with external veteran charities and associations – this can be considered part of your organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility.
- Provide opportunities for members to give back or participate in veteran-focused initiatives.

Top Tip:

You could consider creating a fundraising event for an armed forces charity. If you are an armed forces charity, you may be able to partner with an Armed Forces Network in the Statutory or Commercial Sector to attend their events and share best practice. It can also be useful to invite beneficiary ambassadors along to story tell, so donors know how their money is being spent.

By following these steps, not only can you establish a supportive space for armed forces veterans within your organisation but will have provided a group full of motivated team players who can prove to be a fruitful talent pool – especially if you work in an organisation directly supporting veterans.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP BUY IN

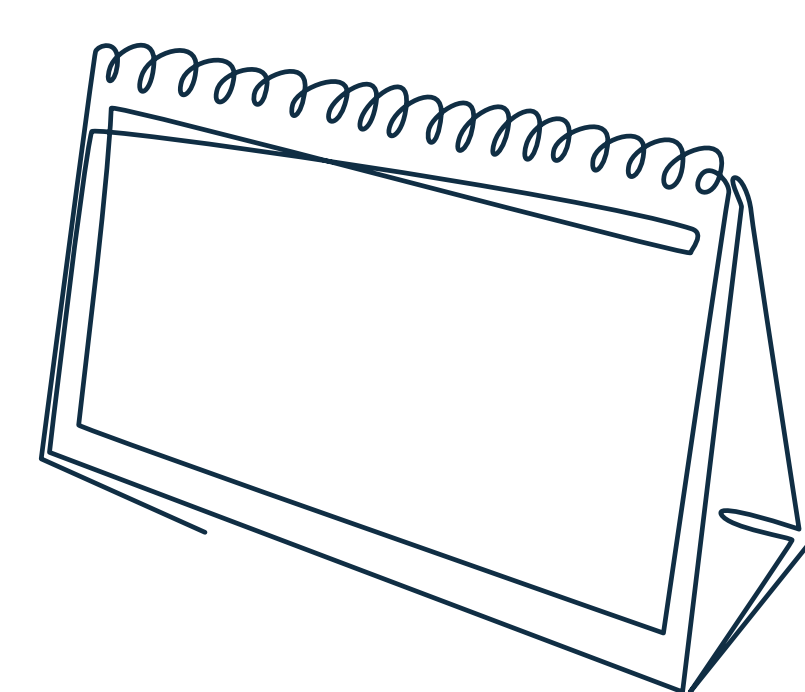
- Present the idea to leadership and seek formal endorsement, assigning an Executive or Senior Sponsor to drive forward initiatives and champion the network.
- Ensure alignment with organisational values.

Top Tip:

If your organisation has signed the Armed Forces Covenant and is in receipt of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Award, activities like this are great for moving up a tier from Bronze to Silver to Gold.

BUDGET AND ACTIVITIES

- Set a budget for events, activities and any resources needed.
- Plan initiatives such as mentoring programs, peer support system, networking & awareness events, and social gatherings.
- Create a calendar of events to keep engagement consistent.
- Commemorate key calendar days such as Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Sunday.



Top Tip:

Things don't need to be expensive! Some of the best events are often just people sharing their lived experience – whether that's storytelling about what it's like to deploy on operations or reminiscing about basic training.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- Set up communication tools like email distribution lists, Microsoft Teams Channels or Google Workspace for collaboration, and internal communications channels (such as Viva Engage or similar).
- Regularly share updates, events, relevant news and signposting with members.

Top Tip:

One of the easiest 'wins' to educate people on armed forces culture and language was to share memes depicting life in the forces. It enabled veterans to engage in friendly banter and civilians to understand the differences and preconceptions of the Services and cap badges.

EVALUATION

- Collect feedback from group members regularly. - Committee / steering group / key player meetings regularly (at 4-6 weeks) and wider network meetings (at 3-4 months) work for a lot of organisations.
- Assess the impact of the ERG on employees and the organisation, and refine activities as needed. Gathering feedback from awareness sessions and monitoring engagement on internal comms are both useful to evaluate what is working and what is not.

Top Tip:

Using short surveys during meetings (Teams or Slido) can get immediate feedback and make the meeting more interesting. Answers can be anonymised, so people do not have to hold back on answering personal questions or anything they are uncomfortable with.

CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

- Recognise milestones, achievements, and contributions within the group. A simple 'thank you', or 'I learnt something new today' can go a long way.
- Highlight the network's positive impact on veterans' careers and well-being. - If you're in an organisation directly supporting veterans, highlight how having veterans in the workplace is beneficial to your organisation or department.

Top Tip:

Celebration doesn't have to be costly. Acknowledgement and shout outs on LinkedIn or internally for recognition of effort can be just as motivating.

