



How remote work strengthened Prudential's inclusive culture

Three employees tell how business resource groups provided support, connection and career growth throughout the pandemic.

By Kara Corridan

In a time when most employees are working from home — and many have grappled with painful social issues and wellness challenges — Prudential's business resource groups (BRGs) have served as a source of connection and community.

This has happened while the leaders of the groups themselves have had to be creative and nimble. They've needed to work hard to maintain an open dialogue with members to create more opportunities to engage and feel supported.

Prudential's BRGs have been around for more than 20 years and play a vital role in the company's inclusive culture. They're run by employee volunteers in partnership with Prudential's Inclusive Solutions group and made up of members of eight distinct populations as well as the allies who support them. Each group has an executive sponsor, a senior leader who serves as an advocate, advisor and ambassador.

Of Prudential's eight BRGs, seven saw a jump in membership since the pandemic hit in March 2020. (The eighth, Women Empowered, launched in September 2020 as a consolidation of several previous groups, and grew nearly 30% in 2021.) APA, the group for Asian Pacific Islander Americans and their allies, had the biggest leap, with a 45% increase in members.

Average monthly signups are more than double what they were in the six months prior to the pandemic. Now 36% of Prudential employees in the U.S. belong to at least one BRG.

Meet three employees whose Prudential experience during the pandemic has been enriched by being in a

BRG:



Svetlana Ivanyutin

Svetlana Ivanyutin: Women Empowered gave her the courage to pursue a new career path

Ivanyutin felt increasingly overwhelmed during the pandemic, trying to work and care for her children, ages 7 and 2.

“I was hearing stories about women leaving the workforce because it was just too hard, and I was dealing with that, too. I was a caregiver and suddenly a kindergarten teacher — and not a good one — while trying to do my job well.”

She was grateful to be on the board of Women Empowered because her fellow members were having candid conversations about their struggles. They were normalizing the not-normal-ness of it all.

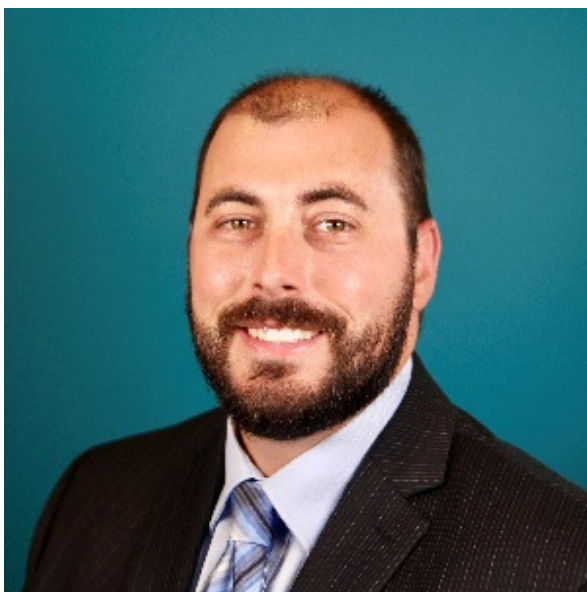
The benefits extended beyond work-life camaraderie. Ivanyutin also found support and encouragement when she was ready to take the next step in her career.

When COVID-19 first hit, she was a director of operational risk management in Financial Management. Last summer, through the company’s Talent Marketplace online portal, she learned of a role that intrigued her: vice president, process management, Enabling Solutions. But she was unsure whether she was a solid enough candidate. Her mentor and fellow WE board member talked her out of that defeatist thinking immediately. “You’ve got this!” Ivanyutin recalls her saying. “If that’s what you want and it sounds interesting to you, why wouldn’t you at least apply?”

Ivanyutin tapped into her risk mindset.

“My motto is: What’s the worst that could happen? And I realized that the worst thing that could happen is I don’t get the job. So I went for it.”

She got the job. She loves the job. And she credits her WE colleagues for setting her on the right path. “Honestly, I’m so thankful for the people who pushed me to do it, because this has been awesome.”



Alexander Verrone

Alexander Verrone: VETNET provided him with a much-needed outlet at a pivotal moment

In August, Verrone, regulatory supervision analyst, Prudential Advisors, was among the many military veterans who found themselves facing painful memories and emotions when the U.S. withdrew troops from Afghanistan. Verrone, who served in the U.S. Army from 2004 to 2009, had been stationed in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007.

He was grateful for the opportunity to work through his feelings a few weeks later, when VETNET offered listening sessions for its members that included U.S. Navy veteran Andy Sullivan, head of U.S. Businesses, and VETNET executive sponsor Yanela Frias, president of Group Insurance.

Verrone thinks about the “power through the pain” mentality often ingrained in the military community.

“How you get through physical pain bleeds over into the emotional side of things, to the point where I usually don’t want to say anything when I’m struggling,” he explains.

But during that session — especially when the conversation turned to suicide, which has impacted many members of Verrone’s unit — he simply could not hold back his emotions. “I kind of lost control, and I was embarrassed about that later. But I told myself that if what I shared helps somebody else, it was worth it.”

In fact, Verrone sees the talking session as exactly what the moment called for. “It showed that there’s nothing wrong with speaking up, and that’s the first hurdle for veterans.”



Julie Oh

Julie Oh: The virtual environment made her more comfortable participating in APA

Oh, director, Human Resources for Total Rewards, Prudential’s employee benefits program, describes herself as “quite inactive” for the first four years she was a member of APA. For one thing, she often had conflicts and couldn’t attend events.

But working from home changed this. Oh found herself with more flexibility. APA’s events were “a welcome break” from her often-mundane routine at home.

The remote environment also helped her contribute and share more.

“I’m not the most outspoken person in an in-person setting,” she explains. “But when it’s virtual, you’re in the comfort of your home and don’t have a big group of people staring at you.”

She participated in a Lunar New Year event, sharing how her native Malaysia celebrates the new year. And last spring, when APA created a video series, “The Power of Authenticity” to highlight the impact of anti-Asian sentiment on APA’s members, families and communities, Oh raised her hand.

She spoke not about overt violence but of the subtle racism she faces whenever someone notes — with surprise — how well she speaks English.

When she was an international student, 17 years ago, she was flattered. Today she’s just annoyed. Sometimes she’ll explain that English is her first language and provide a brief history lesson on Malaysia, a former British colony.

“It may sound trivial and I know people don’t mean any harm, but this is a microaggression,” Oh says, referring to an indirect or unintentional discrimination against a marginalized group. “It bothers me. I figure it’s better to talk about it so that others may understand.”

Sure enough, Oh has heard from colleagues who feel the same way she does.

This feeling of belonging, these opportunities to grow and learn, are exactly why employees are grateful for Prudential’s business resource groups right now. Ivanyutin sums it up this way: “To me, being part of a BRG is important for your own growth and for the company to succeed.”

Prudential’s BRGs At-a-Glance:

- ADAPT (Able and Differently Abled Partnering Together)
- APA (Valuing Asian Pacific Islander Americans)
- BLF (Black Leadership Forum)
- Generations (Bridging Age, Culture and Experience)

- Juntos (Elevating and Empowering Latinos)
- PRIDE (Embracing Identity, Equality and Belonging)
- VETNET (Supporting the Military, Veterans and their Families)
- Women Empowered (Leading, Empowering and Inspiring Change)