

How to set up an early career researcher (ECR) group: Tips and Tricks

Define the scope of the group: Why do you want to meet? Is it solely about socializing? Do you want to generate output or address problems affecting your ECR community? Share your plans with your peers.

Create a safe space: Peers should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, concerns and ideas. Some ways to achieve this are to talking openly about your values, discuss setting a confidentiality rule or setting an example on how to be vulnerable or set boundaries in case others don't feel comfortable sharing.

Find or nominate co-organizers: Don't leave the responsibility to one person only.

Choose a meeting platform: Some free digital platforms include Wonder.me or Gather.town. You may also want to discuss plans for a return to post-pandemic work.

Decide on the meeting interval: Ask your peers how often they have time to meet (week, biweekly, monthly), and try to keep the meetings regular.

Be inclusive! You might want to alternate meeting times to make sure that everybody has the opportunity to join (consider ECRs with caregiving responsibilities or workload outside of office hours). Give everyone an equal opportunity to express their ideas (written and vocal). Create documents where people can anonymously post ideas (before and after a meeting). Where appropriate, summarize meeting topics for those who could not attend.

Involve your peers: Actively ask them about interests, concerns, topics, post questions, and make a list of "hot topics" to address with the group. Ask colleagues working in administration roles for help with advertising your group. Choose different channels to advertise - not everybody reads all emails, and sometimes a poster in an elevator or on the institute's door might reach more people.

Ask for support from leadership. If you want to address issues affecting your ECR community, talk to leadership within your lab, department or organization from the beginning. Make sure that they are receptive to hearing from, and potentially working with, representatives from your peer community. Let leadership know how they can help.