



Affinity Groups

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Affinity Group?

Affinity groups, also called caucuses or employee resource groups (ERGs), serve as a way to build community and amplify employee voice. They are forums for those who share common experiences, identities, or other interests to support each other in developing safe spaces, maintaining equitable and inclusive practices, and innovatively addressing concerns. As a voluntary, staff-led, agency-recognized space, these groups can contribute to the agency's overall culture of racial equity and inclusion professionally and socially.

Affinity groups offer an opportunity to:

- Cultivate a safe space to be in community, share resources, and engage in open and honest communication aligned with the agency's REI vision, values, and goals.
- Organize events and programs that celebrate and promote community development.
- Serve as an advocate and collaborate with the REI Staff Committee to identify critical barriers, gaps, or other issues.
- Establish a platform to connect across departments, staff levels, and beyond.
- Develop leadership and facilitation skills.
- Welcome new staff and develop a sense of belonging at the agency.
- Serve as an advocate and organizational REI change agent.
- Work with the REI Staff Committee to identify critical barriers, gaps, or other issues.

What are some examples of affinity groups?

- BIPOC Administrative Professionals
- BIPOC Active Military or Veterans
- Latinx Parents/Caregivers
- Black Males in Healthcare
- Children of Immigrants in Non-Profit
- Asian Women Professionals
- African American LGBTQ+ Professionals
- and many more...

What happens in affinity groups, and what are their benefits?

Affinity groups meet regularly throughout the year to build a sense of community and belonging among staff members, help introduce new and current staff to the organizational culture, and

provide mentoring and networking opportunities. They can be anything from book clubs or hobby groups to caucuses around a specific gender, race, sexual orientation, or other identity.

To learn more about what happens in affinity groups, check out these videos:

- [Affinity Groups in the Workplace: Benefits for the Employee and Employer](#)
- [King County, WA Affinity Groups](#)
- [Racial Affinity Groups at Ann Bremer Education Center](#)
- [Amazon Affinity Groups](#)

What are the criteria for affinity groups?

All affinity groups will:

- Be open to all current staff regardless of race, sex, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, or other protected category.
- Be voluntary.
- Promote equity, openness, understanding, and inclusiveness.
- Adhere to the agency's policies and procedures.
- Strive to provide professional and personal benefit to the agency, staff, and clients.
- Align with the agency's REI guiding principles.
- Have at least a chair and a co-chair.
- Maintain at least three members.
- Keep a record of general meeting topics, agendas, and group materials.

How does one start a new group?

To start a new group, follow these steps.

1. Identify the group's main goals.
2. Submit your idea to REI Program Manager II (REIPMII) on the [Affinity Groups website](#) (ideas here can be general and will be further defined as the group develops).
3. Check-in with REI PM and group leadership to discuss idea and next steps.
4. Recruit Affinity group members.
5. Hold an interest session (optional but recommended) to help define purpose and goals, topics, scheduling, etc.
6. Create a draft of the purpose statement, goals, infrastructure, ground rules, expectations, etc.
7. Connect with the Executive Sponsor regarding collaboration and intended goals. (optional)
8. Share logistics with the REI staff committee for feedback.
9. Finalize group logistics with the REI Program Manager II (REIPMII) and HR.
10. Hold the first meeting and set community guidelines and group agreements.

Who can participate in affinity groups?

Participation in an affinity group is voluntary and open to all Health Care for the Homeless staff members.

What do I need to do to join and participate in an affinity group?

Staff members need their supervisor's approval to join an affinity group. With prior supervisory approval, staff members can participate in affinity group activities as long as it doesn't affect their regular work or lead to overtime work.

Can I join more than one affinity group?

During the initial rollout of affinity groups, staff members may only join ONE affinity group. After the pilot period, participation in multiple affinity groups would depend on availability and supervisor approval.

What is the role of the co-chair?

The co-chairs are leaders in the space who help guide the group and facilitate meetings or activities. Each group can have up to 2 formal co-chairs for each group. Each co-chair will receive a bonus for their role of \$250 for each year of successfully meeting as a group. Other group leadership positions can be created as the group deems necessary.

When will affinity groups meet?

Groups will meet based on staff availability and at a specific time determined by each group. While affinity groups will have the ability to meet informally after agency hours, they would need to meet during agency working hours to be considered an official convening and thus sanctioned agency programming. Affinity groups may have the opportunity to meet during operational hours, but participation must yield to position expectations. Groups must ensure timing does not disrupt general workflows.