

Affinity Group Framework

"To Promote Diversity and Inclusion, not Exclusion."



Office of Human Resources
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Florida State University

Affinity Groups

Affinity Groups are voluntary associations of people who have common interests. Affinity Groups play a vital role in articulating, promoting and supporting the needs and goals of their various communities and organizations. Their primary focus is to develop and improve the campus climate by increasing the presence of diverse faculty and staff. The Groups can assist the organization with the recruitment, retention and promotion of top diverse talent. In addition, they can help increase morale, provide insights into diverse areas, build bridges to the community and empower members. Affinity Groups also serve to spotlight the achievements and accomplishments of the organization's faculty and staff.

Questions to consider before starting an Affinity Group

- What are the group's goals?
- Can an existing group accomplish these goals?
- Is there sufficient interest among current faculty and staff to support the new group?
- Is this a viable short-term and/or long-term organization?
- Does this organization offer value to the faculty and staff?
- How is the group different from other groups at the University?

Starting Affinity Groups

Information on how organizations have gone about starting an affinity or employee network group varied among the AAU Universities researched. They include:

- establishing the rationale, policy and practice for affinity groups by doing industry research for best practices,
- initiating employee or student-initiated informal surveys, through word-of-mouth, to see if there is an interest in beginning a group,
- marketing campaigns by current network groups (i.e. word of mouth, posters, membership drives, intranet and social networking sites)

Set the Mission and Goals

The mission and goals should be established in collaboration with all of the group members and be linked to specific goals. Together, they should align with the organization's mission and vision as well as communicate the group's core values and common interest.

- What are the core values of the group?
- How is the group different from other groups at the University?
- What steps need to be taken to achieve the group's mission?
- What are the short and long term goals of the group?
- What resources are needed for each goal?
- Who will take the lead and implementation of each goal? (*See Attachment C*)

Name the Group

The name of the Affinity Group should reflect the group's mission and values and should be decided upon collaboratively.

- Soliciting name recommendations from the group
- Having a meeting to discuss ideas or an alternative method for making suggestions
- Choosing a name that reflects the purpose or values of the group
- Ensuring that this name clearly communicates the mission of the group and is interesting enough to make someone want to learn more or join

(See Attachment C)

Design Structure

In this phase of the framework process, the governmental structure and meeting schedule should be decided on by the group.

- Decide specific roles for members
- Determine the day, time, length and frequency of meetings
- Create an alternate plan for those who may not be able to attend in person (i.e. teleconference, Skype, etc.)
- Select a location

(See Best Practices Section pg. 7)

Access to University Resources

Affinity Groups shall have access to university facilities for meetings and other services similar to other organizations such as student organizations and alumni organizations.

Challenges

When faced with challenges during development, implementation, or maintenance; identify the root causes and then take steps to reduce or eliminate them.

- Define the challenge (i.e. low membership, lack of participation, etc.)
- Analyze the cause
- Explore solutions
- Decide whether the challenge is worth solving
- Implement solutions to overcome the challenge
- Consider the necessary steps to avoid similar challenges
- Reach out to other established Affinity Groups for guidance *(See Attachment C, websites)*

Maintain Momentum

An important aspect to having a successful group is member support. The ownership for maintaining the momentum resides with the entire group. To maximize effectiveness and to ensure continued momentum the group should follow the below tips:

- Establish credibility by adhering to mission, objectives and timelines
- Communicate the group's efforts utilizing all available resources
- Build a network to increase enrollment
- Create visibility by conducting or participating in special events

Sustaining an Affinity Group

- Recruit at least 5-10 new members per year
- Publish a quarterly newsletter
- Host one annual event
- Design two group activities
- Increase participant attendance at meetings and events by being inclusive of all people

How to Measure the Success of your Affinity Group

- Develop a mission and goals that align to the affinity group's strategy.
- Develop and maintain an annual plan of activities and events.
- Create measurable indicators for each area of focus within the activity plan.
- Track activities of members and progress towards achieving goals (i.e. recruitment, retention and promotion).
- Communicate the value of the activities to the organization's administrators, leadership and members.

Authorization of Affinity Group

The Assistant Vice President of Human Resources will be responsible for authorizing requests to establish an affinity group on FSU's campus.

Dissolving an Affinity Group

Affinity Groups authorized by the Assistant Vice President of Human Resource may be dissolved when:

- The group is specifically formed to undertake one or more short-term project(s) and has completed the task,
- The group chooses to dissolve itself. Such dissolution should be reported to the office of Diversity & Inclusion,
- The group does not submit its annual report to the office of Diversity & Inclusion,

- The office of Diversity & Inclusion, or the Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, concludes that the group no longer has clear relevance to FSU's mission and vision, or has become insufficiently accountable to FSU for its activities, or presents a legal or ethical liability to Florida State University.
- Pre-existing groups can be dissolved by the respective Vice President or Division head.

Best Practices

Establishing strategic initiatives and core values are additional best practices implemented by the affinity groups researched. Below are sample initiatives and values that can be used by all Florida State University Affinity Groups.

Initiatives:

- Foster an environment that is supportive and respectful of all University employees.
- Connect all diverse faculty, staff and students across the University.
- Increase the visibility of diverse faculty and staff within the University community.
- Provide an environment that is conducive to the recruitment, retention and career advancement of all minority employees.
- To discourage stereotyping.
- Serve as role models to students, staff and junior faculty.
- Encourage university officials and diversity focused committees to support minority faculty, staff and students through diversity programming, events, recruitment and retention.

Core Values:

Development – Focus on serving the professional development needs of our members.

Representation – To advocate and cultivate full participation of minorities throughout the university, including fair representation at all levels of University leadership.

Community – Foster an environment of collaboration between faculty, staff, alumni, students and the institution.

Awareness – Raise awareness of the experiences, contributions, needs and concerns of minorities on campus.

Self-empowerment – Enjoying the responsibility of continually improving ourselves.

Leadership – Strive to be role models for faculty, staff, students and the community at large.

Goals and Objectives:

Affinity Groups from various AAU Universities were researched and the following common goals and objectives were identified:

- Assist in the recruitment, retention and promotion of minority faculty, staff and students.
- Create a safe space where Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender faculty and staff can be themselves.
- Promote and assist in creating an atmosphere that fosters growth and development of minority faculty, staff and students.

- Strive to stimulate and develop minority student interest in fields that are not inundated with minorities such as engineering.
- Network with like affinity groups in the community.

(See Attachment C)

Activities implemented by the affinity groups to obtain their common goals and objectives include:

- recruiting diverse Graduate Students
- senior level faculty assisting junior level faculty on how to obtain grants,
- hosting “Meet ‘n Greet” events for visiting minority faculty,
- providing tours, activity groups and conferences that illustrate the value of the group,
- presenting engaging speakers on minority issues,
- developing library and archival resources to promote research,
- hosting university-wide events that celebrate diversity (i.e. Black history month, Hispanic heritage month, Native American month, etc.),
- awarding scholarships to the top talent in their respective affinity group,
- recognizing students, alumni, faculty and staff by hosting an annual premiere event in which they are honored for outstanding achievements,
- assisting in disaster relief efforts,
- assisting the Red Cross with its annual blood drive,
- participating in university functions (i.e. parades, homecoming events, etc.)
- creating an annual calendar that celebrates the traditions of co-workers, neighbors and friends,

(See Attachment C)

Additionally, the Affinity Groups benchmarked contribute their success to the support of the organization’s administration and community. Specifically,

- the support of their Assistant Vice President of Human Resources,
- the support of the Vice President and/or President of the University,
- the support of the Diversity offices at each institution,
- financial support from alumni, faculty, staff, students and various outside, businesses/agencies within their community

Online Sample Forms:

Furthermore, the utilization of affinity groups’ websites or social networks for membership requests is a common practice among some of the researched affinity groups.

Example: <http://www.rochester.edu/diversity/affinity/lpa/membershipform.html> – Membership Form

Roles & Responsibilities

The leadership structure of Affinity Groups varies from school to school.

For example, Harvard University's Association of Black Faculty, Administrators, and Fellows are comprised of elected Officers. The Officers of the Association present the concerns of the Association to the president, deans, and other administrators of the university and its affiliates; emphasizing the president's stated commitment to work with the Association to respond in a positive manner to the issues raised.

The Association also maintains an Executive Committee whose purpose is to accomplish the mission of the Association and guide it through the selection and election of Officers, and assist the elected Officers. The Executive Committee actively participates with and supports the programs established by the elected Officers. The Executive Committee normally does not consist of less than six (6), or more than twelve (12) members who have volunteered to serve. This does not limit the elected Officers who may appoint persons for special projects or assignments to join the Executive Committee as required.

The elected Officers consist of two (2) Co-Chairs, normally consisting of one (1) Faculty, one (1) Administrative member, one (1) Secretary, and one (1) Treasurer.

Brown University's Asian/Asian American Alumni Alliance (A4) is comprised of 13 Governors: four (4) Officers and nine (9) board members. The Officers include a President, President-Elect, Secretary and a Treasurer. Officers are elected by the general membership, and board members are appointed by the Officers. Their collective responsibility is to ensure A4's mission for serving fellow Asian and Asian Americans on the Brown University campus is carried out (Board of Governors).

Conversely, Johns Hopkins Employee Resource/Affinity Groups (ER/AG) are comprised of administrators, faculty or staff with varied status, who actively engage in communicating and/or gathering around a central unifying purpose, mission, background or activity. John Hopkins encourages these connections by supporting such groups (Employee Resource/Affinity Groups).

Sample Mission Statements

"The mission of the Nontraditional Student Program is to enhance the educational and interpersonal experiences of nontraditional students while supporting and promoting their degree attainment."

"Endorsing advocacy on behalf of the black community of Harvard University and its affiliates (and) providing a means of communications, interaction, and counseling."

"The mission of the Stanford Business School Black Alumni Association is to continuously improve the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB) by helping to recruit, retain, and support Black GSB students, alumni, faculty, and staff."

"The mission of the Latino Professional Alliance (LPA) at the University of Rochester is to build and maintain a positive work environment and to support the growth and development of

Latinos/Latinas. This will be accomplished through networking, mentoring, educational and professional programs, community service, multicultural events, and diversity awareness. Each individual employed at UR is considered a professional, and therefore, LPA aims to build an alliance among all employees in our workplace who support LPA's mission."

(See Attachment C)

Grants

John Hopkins University and the University of Rochester are two AAU Universities that utilize grants for financial self-supporting and sustainability of their affinity groups.

- The faculty at The John Hopkins University must submit investigator-initiated research proposals, educational proposals and responses to relevant Pas, RFAs and RFPs to local, regional, and national governmental and philanthropic organizations.
- The University of Rochester's Office of Faculty Development and Diversity is charged with an initiative to research and monitor faculty development and diversity related grants University-wide. They have a specific staff member who searches for grants on behalf of the affinity groups at the University of Rochester.

Legal Ramifications of Affinity Groups

Affinity groups do create legal risks that the University should be aware of and should attempt to minimize, as much as possible.

The first arises under the National Labor Relations Act ("NLRA"), which makes it an unfair labor practice for an employer to "dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization or contribute financial or other support." Thus, if FSU encourages or sponsors Affinity Groups, this action may be seen as "dominating" or "interfering" with a "labor organization." As the University has several collective bargaining units on campus, this is a concern. To minimize this risk, it must be clear to the Affinity Groups that they cannot duplicate or replicate the work of the unions. Specifically, they are not to deal with the terms and conditions of employment (the jurisdiction of the unions), which include working conditions, working hours, assignments, pay and promotions. Another legal risk is that of employment discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Florida Civil Rights Act (or the perception of such discrimination). Since most Affinity Groups would likely be organized around protected categories, like race, gender, or sexual orientation, there is a substantial risk that University decisions regarding Affinity Groups (whether those decisions are positive or negative as they affect a particular group) could be perceived as violating anti-discrimination laws. Therefore, it must be clear that Affinity Groups are open to all who support the mission of the group, regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, age, etc. In addition, the University must be very careful to treat all Affinity Groups the same. Further, the University must work to ensure that no group is perceived as getting special treatment compared to other Affinity Groups, to employees who don't belong to such a group and to the University workforce in general.

Another concern is that the Affinity Groups could become polarizing. This could occur in a couple different ways. One way, as mentioned above, is that employees who are in majority classifications and/or not members of an Affinity Group may feel that members of a certain Affinity Group are receiving preferential treatment. The other way is that the Affinity Groups could become gripe sessions against the University, administration, etc. In addition to accomplishing the opposite of what is intended, this last point is also concerning because such complaints, once discussed openly in an Affinity Group meeting, may be imputed to the University, even if the University is not actually on notice of such complaints.

Legal Recommendations

- Affinity Groups must be formed voluntarily, not dictated by management, and individual employee membership and participation in such groups must be voluntary.
- Meetings and activities of Affinity Groups must be open to all employees, not just employees of a particular race, color, national origin, gender, age, etc.
- The University should establish clear criteria and written guidelines/policies for forming and recognizing Affinity Groups.
- The focus of Affinity Groups should be a clear strategy or business objective (such as productivity, team work, customer relations, or public image) and must not deal with issues within the jurisdiction of labor unions (such as work hours, pay, promotions, working conditions, or work assignments).

- The University should not formally track employees' participation in Affinity Groups (or lack thereof) and participation in such a group must not be part of an individual employee's performance evaluation.
- Affinity Groups must not intervene in particular employee disputes.
- The mission statements of the Affinity Groups should be reviewed by the General Counsel's Office to ensure that there are no statements that could be viewed as evidence of favoritism or discrimination.
- Human Resources should periodically monitor the activities and agendas of the groups to confirm that they are complying with the policies and pursuing appropriate goals and objectives.
- Any University support of the groups must be equal to avoid the practice/perception that one group is favored over another.
- Human Resources and the leadership of Affinity Groups should direct those raising complaints in group meetings to utilize the existing University reporting mechanisms, through EthicsPoint, the Equal Opportunity & Compliance Office and the Office of the Inspector General.

ATTACHMENT A

Learning & Development – Affinity Groups

Sample: Cornell University - Effective Affinity Groups Training

Effective Affinity Groups :: \$920

9:00am - 4:30pm

Affinity groups have emerged in the American workplace as a standard component of diversity initiatives. For many organizations, the benefits of affinity groups have evolved over time from the primary intent - to provide a forum in which members of an organization who share common interests, issues, or concerns meet to address those issues - to multifaceted benefits that impact recruitment, retention, marketing, and customer relations.

There is still considerable debate over the efficacy or benefit of affinity groups to an organization. Many believe that these groups divide rather than unite the workplace, and in some organizations, affinity groups and diversity councils are often in conflict. This workshop will examine:

- Fundamentals of affinity groups
- The best practices in group formation and operation
- The top ten characteristics common among high-functioning affinity groups

Key Topics

- Core competencies of effective affinity groups
- A strategic approach to assessing effectiveness in the long and short term
- Productive relationships with diversity councils: a step-by-step approach
- Privileges and disadvantages of membership
- Sustaining membership
- Enlisting the support of the entire organization
- Functioning as a productive member
- Setting expectations for affinity groups
- Conflict resolution
- Advocacy skills
- Charting the progress of dynamic affinity groups
- The need for a strategic approach to affinity formation and governance

Special Features

- An invaluable resource for managing affinity groups
- Assessment instruments at the individual, interpersonal, group, and organizational levels
- Best practices in affinity group development & operation

Who Will Benefit

EEO, AA, diversity and other HR specialists with diversity responsibility; members of diversity councils or affinity groups; diversity consultants; anyone who wants to know how to create an affinity group

ATTACHMENT B

SAMPLE: EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP PROGRAM GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in creating an Employee Resource Group at The Johns Hopkins Hospital ("JHH"). The JHH definition of an Employee Resource Group is a group of employees, with varied status, who actively engage in communicating and/or gathering around a central unifying purpose, mission, background or activity.

JHH considers Employee Resource Groups to be a vital component that connects various members of the Hopkins workforce with each other and with the institution. Therefore, an inherent element of the mission of an Employee Resource Group is to promote the welfare of Johns Hopkins Medicine and to establish mutually beneficial relationships between JHH, its workforce, members of the Employee Resource Group, and the communities JHH serves.

These Guidelines are intended to provide general information for employees interested in establishing an Employee Resource Group and as a resource for any Employee Resource Groups that currently exist. Please note that this is a working, organic document and is subject to change. If additional information is needed or you have subsequent questions, please contact the Office of Workforce Diversity as follows:

Office of Workforce Diversity
550 N. Broadway, Suite 401
Baltimore, MD 21287
(410) 955-3516 (T)
(410) 955-8243 (TTD)
www.hopkinsmedicine.org/jhhr/EqualOpportunityDiversity/

ESTABLISHING AN EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP

The success of a new Employee Resource Group most often depends on a small nucleus of dedicated and interested employees. It takes commitment from these individuals to ensure the group organizes itself in such a way as to guarantee continuity. Below are a few helpful criteria and suggestions for establishing your new Employee Resource Group and to assure consistency with Employee Resource Group program objectives:

1. Complete an Employee Resource Group Application.
2. Establish a list of at least five (5) interested employees willing to volunteer to join your Employee Resource Group.
3. Identify your targeted members.
4. Prepare a mission statement for your Employee Resource Group as well as the goals of the group.
5. Prepare an introductory message that will be used to construct an electronic invitation that will be delivered via email blast to targeted members.
6. The first meeting must be coordinated with and acknowledged by the Office of Workforce Diversity.

7. At the first meeting, a general discussion must take place to:

- Establish a general purpose and mission of your group
- Establish the process for selection of a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.
- In electing officers, consideration should be given not only to an individual's standing in the JHH community, but also to the amount of time and unselfish interest it takes in establishing and maintaining the group's affairs. All officers must be approved by JHH to assure that none are under disciplinary action including, but not limited to, a Performance Improvement Plan.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP OPERATING PRINCIPLES

1. Members must be employed by The Johns Hopkins Hospital or within the affiliated institution within which the individual works.
2. The formation of the Employee Resource Group must rely on volunteers, and efforts must stem from a grassroots nature and neither JHH nor members of the group may pressure any employee into joining.
3. Membership in an Employee Resource Group shall be entirely voluntary.
4. The Employee Resource Group must be operated exclusively for educational, civic, social and other charitable and non-profit purposes.
5. The Employee Resource Group should be organized to assist and support the Hospital's mission by hosting activities such as the following:
 - a. Recruitment events
 - b. Community relations programs
 - c. Promoting social and intellectual enrichment
 - d. Networking opportunities
 - e. Provide alternative educational and civic activities deemed to be advantageous to the membership of the Employee Resource Group
 - f. Identifying and minimizing health disparities
6. Enhance the public image and presence of JHH.
7. Any programs sponsored by the Employee Resource Group must be financially self-supporting.

ATTACHMENT C

Comparative Summary of Employee Advocacy/Affinity Groups

Institution

Cornell University Colleague Network Groups (CNGs)

CNGs Purpose	The Cornell University Colleague Network Groups (CNGs) are university sponsored employee resource groups for traditionally underrepresented minorities and allies of those groups. The CNGs provide a professional support system that can extend beyond the workplace. Each CNG advocates for a specific demographic within the Cornell faculty and staff community to improve the recruitment and retention efforts as well as the climate for the community as a whole. The CNGs enhance the Cornell culture by providing feedback and programs to develop an environment that fully engages and cultivates all of the faculty and staff of Cornell University.
Men of Color Colleague Network Group	The Cornell University Men of Color Colleague Network Group is a university sponsored employee resource group. The group's mission is to provide a professional support system within the staff, faculty, and administrator community to increase the recruitment and retention of men of color, as defined by affirmative action.
Women of Color Colleague Network Group	The mission of the Cornell University Women of Color Colleague Network Group is to develop and create engaging opportunities for networking, professional and leadership development with a particular focus on empowering, recruiting, retaining, and mentoring women of color.
Key Strength	11,756 (Fall 2009)
Key Limitation	11,756 (Fall 2009)

Source: <https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/fostering/>

Comparative Summary of Employee Advocacy/Affinity Groups

Institution

Yale University Latino Networking Group (YLANG)

Mission	The Yale Latino Networking Group (YLANG) provides Latino employees the opportunity to connect, share experiences and expertise, and promote professional development. Through programs and events, YLANG strives to promote cultural awareness in support of the University's diversity efforts.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Promote diversity education in alignment with the University's objectives▪ Provide opportunities and programming to enhance professional development.▪ Assist Yale in the area of retaining, engaging and recruiting Latino employees.▪ Partner with and give back to the Greater New Haven community.
Engagement	<p>Join one of four committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Career Development Committee▪ Communication Committee▪ Community Service Committee▪ Programming & Events Committee
Undergraduates	21,308 (Fall 2010)

Source: <http://www.yale.edu/hronline/diversity/hispanic-affinity-group.html>

Comparative Summary of Employee Advocacy/Affinity Groups

Institution

University of Washington Faculty & Staff Affinity Groups – Latino/a Faculty Staff Association

Mission/Vision	<p>The University of Washington (UW) Latino/a Faculty and Staff Association (LFSA) is an advocacy, leadership development and social network that addresses Latino/a issues in higher education, including the educational concerns and advancement of the UW Latino/a community. Its priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Highlighting scholarship produced about Latino/a communities; spotlighting the contributions of Latino/a staff▪ Assisting in the recruitment, retention and advancement of Latina/o faculty, staff and students▪ Creating community and a support network that nurtures Latina/os as a visible and viable part of the UW environment and leadership▪ Enhancing knowledge of Latina/o educational contributions related to Latino communities▪ Promoting social and cultural activities that relate to Latino communities on and off campus
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Source: <http://depts.washington.edu/lfsa/>
