

Affinity Groups FAQ

What is an affinity group?

An affinity group is a designated “safe space,” where everyone in that group shares a particular identity. This identity can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, physical/mental ability, socio-economic class, family structure, religion, etc. Affinity groups can be a place for underrepresented people in a community to come together to feel less isolated and more connected. During affinity groups participants might share and talk about their experiences or focus on working towards a particular mission or goal.

Who can be part of an affinity group?

Only people who identify with that particular group can be a part of it. This is so that affinity group members can safely express their experiences without having to worry about others not understanding their experience because they are of another identity.

Aren't affinity groups just exclusive and divisive?

Affinity groups are intended to bring people together over a commonality. We all benefit from interactions with people who share common identities or experiences. When you are in the numerical minority of a community, these bonding interactions may only occur during an affinity group. Affinity groups are only “exclusive” in order to create a safe space for people who may not feel safe in the larger community because they are in the numerical minority. During affinity group meetings, people can share freely and without inhibition about their experiences. These groups make them feel more visible and more included in our community and in doing so, enhance our commitment to inclusivity.

Don't affinity groups just promote segregation and not diversity?

Affinity groups are one aspect of creating a diverse and socially just world. They create the safe space needed for people to build strength and pride. But equally as important are the collaborative efforts between different groups of people towards creating equity for all. Allies are people who do not identify with a certain affinity group, but want to support the equal rights of people from that group. Ally work and affinity work are both important aspects of creating social equity.