

Health Care for the Homeless Affinity Groups

Frequently Asked Questions



What is an Affinity Group?

Organization-based affinity groups, also called caucuses or employee resource groups (ERGs), serve as an important mechanism to build community and amplify employee voice. They function as a forum for those who share common experiences, identities, or other REI-focused interests to support each other in developing safe spaces, maintaining equitable and inclusive practices, and innovatively addressing pertinent concerns. As a voluntary, staff-led, employer-recognized endeavor, these groups can contribute considerably to the agency's overall culture of racial equity and inclusion in both a professional and social capacity.

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 are committed to offering a sense of community and belonging to staff members, helping to introduce new and current staff to the organizational culture, and providing mentoring and networking opportunities. Additionally, affinity groups offer staff members the opportunity to:

- Hone leadership skills by spearheading initiatives for Affinity Groups
- Host professional development programs
- Welcoming new staff and developing a sense of belonging at the agency
- Create cultural and identity-based events to celebrate intersectional identities
- Serve as an REI change agent by working closely with the REI Staff Committee to identify key barriers, gaps, or other issues impeding REI efforts and initiatives

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 a 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 3 members
- Keep a record of general meeting topics, agendas, and group materials

In August 2022, Health Care for the Homeless will launch three affinity groups as a 6-8 month pilot to measure affinity group impact and efficacy. Given the agency's explicit focus and increased visibility around the importance of racial equity and inclusion, the pilot affinity will groups focus on creating a race equity culture, specifying the needs, desires, and concerns of BIPOC staff members.

Following the selection of three affinity groups during the pilot period, what are the next steps in the process?

Once the three affinity groups are launched, staff members will be selected from among peers to serve as chairs/leaders for each group. The chairs will work affinity group members to do the following:

1. Identify group's main goals
2. Connect with human resources to identify the affinity groups core values
3. Recruit Affinity group members
4. Identify affinity group direction and mission:
5. Determine infrastructure, ground rules, and expectations
6. Connect with Executive Sponsor regarding collaboration and intended goals
7. Hold your 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 affinity group?

Staff members must obtain supervisory approval to participate in an affinity group. With prior supervisory approval, staff members may participate in affinity group activities as long as it does not interfere with the regular work assignments and must not result in overtime work.

Can I join more than one affinity group?

During the initial roll out of affinity groups, staff members may only join ONE affinity group.

When will affinity groups meet?

Groups will meet monthly for one hour and thirty minutes on Thursday afternoons – the specific time to be determined by each group. While affinity groups will have the ability to meet informally after agency hours, groups 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.