

Affinity Groups

Affinity v. Alliance

An affinity group is a bringing together of people who have something important in common, e.g. race, religion, gender, profession, or special interest.

An alliance group is a bringing together of people who have a common commitment to an identifier group (race, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) It includes members of that group and/or people who support and stand in solidarity with the group.

What do you do in affinity groups?

Shared Experience: Hey, this happened to me and hey, you get me!

Connecting: Hey, I know you!

Education: Hey world, this is who we are!

Shared experience is when members are able to check in and lean on each other for support. This is where group members can connect when a traumatic event happens or if there is a query or question in the community. Groups can sometimes get stuck here "in process" and are not able to come up with solutions to issues that arise. Although, sometimes it isn't necessary to do so because members may just need a place to express themselves with no judgement, it is important to recognize the times where it is good to allow for the expression of self, but then work together to mobilize change.

Connecting happens outside of the affinity space. Because the group has met, members of the group form a connection that make going about the larger community more empowering and gives group members a sense of validation.

Education is when the group organizes to present information to the rest of the community outside of their group. History month assemblies, round table discussions, holiday celebrations, potlucks or other programming ideas give a glimpse into what makes their culture unique. This instills pride and a place of belonging in the larger community for members of the affinity group.

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.