



URBANA



URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116

# AFFINITY GROUP GUIDEBOOK

2022

## Urbana School District 116 Welcome!

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Welcome and thank you for your interest in Affinity Groups at Urbana School District 116. Urbana School District 116 seeks to connect all employees and strengthen employee relationships within our organization.

The primary focus of the Affinity Groups is to help advance and support diversity and inclusion goals throughout the district and to assist the district with the recruitment, retention, and development of all its employees. Strong affinity groups that promote, celebrate, and empower the various identities of our employees are at the core of ensuring an environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

This document will be your guide to all areas of creating and managing an affinity group through the office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Human Resources department. Please note that this document will be reviewed and revised continually and is subject to change. If you need more information, please contact one of the Affinity Group coordinators listed on the contact page of this document.



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## Affinity Groups 101

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### Why Affinity Groups and What do they do?

Affinity Groups bring members of an organization together for the common purpose of fostering a culture of respect and inclusive community. Affinity groups, also known as employee resource groups, are voluntary, employee-led groups organized based on social identity, shared characteristics, or life experiences. Accordingly, they express the values of mutual understanding and shared community.



Affinity Groups encourage inclusive membership to learn about others and provide support for similar interest and concerns. Affinity Groups do not exclude based on sex, age, race, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, creed, or politics.

Employees should create and utilize these safe spaces to support, understand, and share resources to connect with diverse members of our school district and across job classifications. Successful Affinity Groups are imperative to engaging all employees and serve as intentional opportunities to become enthusiastic and involved. As such, each approved Affinity Group shall seek to do the following:

- *Build and create a sense of community*
- *Network and collaborate*
- *Advocate for, and support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of employees*
- *Create and promote programming for employees to attend*
- *Support and advocate all other programs and initiatives involving USD116 students and families*
- *Maintain a succession plan to assure continuity in group leadership*



## Expectations to consider before starting an Affinity Group

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The office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in conjunction with the department of Human Resources sets forth the following expectations for USD116 Affinity Groups:

- Each Affinity Group will maintain its own board and committee structure consisting of at least the following:
  - **President:** *The President will normally preside over all meetings and events sponsored by the group. The President of the group shall be the primary liaison to the Director of DEI, the Recruitment and Retention Coordinator.*
  - **Vice President:** The Vice-President shall have such powers and duties as prescribed by the President and shall discharge the duties of the President in his/her/their absence.
  - **Secretary:** The secretary shall be responsible for keeping the records of the group, preparing reports, conducting the correspondence with district employees, maintaining a membership roster, and publishing items as directed by the President.
- Each Affinity Group must maintain an active roster of at least ten (10) members.
- Affinity Group leaders must hold an Annual Meeting to provide all necessary reports to the district administration and to sketch an outline of upcoming events during the coming calendar year.
- Each Affinity Group must maintain good communication not only with the group members and leaders but also with the district level affinity group coordinators (Director of DEI and the Recruitment and Retention Coordinator).
- Each Affinity Group must complete a yearly review questionnaire supplied by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

## Affinity Group Categories

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Affinity Groups categories help to focus interest while providing an open structure to accommodate a broad range of affinities. The Affinity Group categories are (1) identity-based,



(2) professional communities, and (3) special interest and activity groups. We encourage employees to be involved in as many of these organized groups as possible as they are a great way to meet new colleagues outside of one's home base (site location), find mentors/mentees, learn new skills, and develop leadership skills. Officially recognized USD116 Affinity Groups must submit a charter application defining the group and its mission before launching.

**Identity-based Affinity Groups:** These groups honor the diversity of our employees, while offering a safe space to share, support, and learn about each other.



**Professional Community Affinity Groups:** Assemble to promote the interest and professional development in specific areas. Members of professional communities share knowledge and expertise to develop and refine skills beneficial to each person's daily practice.

**Special Interest and Activity Affinity Groups:** Provide camaraderie and encouragement with like-minded peers. These groups form through the pursuit of activities centered around sports, hobbies, and crafts, or to make connections with others experiencing similar life situations.

## Leadership Tips for Affinity Groups

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Strong leadership is the key to a successful affinity group. To ensure your leadership team is the best it can be, here are a few tools and tips you can use:

- Establish a clear mission and vision for your group before anything else. Having something to work towards will help guide everything you do as a group.
- Balance your communications between in-person, over-the-phone, group chats, and video conferencing. Email is an effective communication tool, but it's not a replacement for the occasional in-person or video conference, which helps group members affirm their commitment to the group.
- Encourage open dialogue about how involved each member/leader wants to be. No two individuals have the same amount of time to give, so make sure you're having open conversations as a leadership team about who has the time and interest to do what.
- Constantly recruit new members! Every event you host is an opportunity to talk about being a member and to offer new employees a chance to get involved and make the group better.
- Talk with other leaders. Every group has something it can learn from another affinity group, so make the most of networking opportunities such as regular conference calls and reaching out to others directly.
- Start by asking potential members to participate in a single project or event. Once the event/project is complete, ask them to support another. Be sure to thank them along the way.



## Steps to starting an Affinity Group

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### Is it possible?



**Time:** Many factors must be considered when starting an official USD116 Affinity Group. First, time commitments. While an affinity group leader is a volunteer position, 2-3 hours a week should be set aside to manage group activities and keep the group active.

Having a strong leadership team will help disperse the workload and keep everyone happy. Since affinity groups are employee led, the central office support team will rely on the group leadership team to keep the group up and running.

**Available Members:** Before starting an affinity group, prospective group leaders will meet with the Director of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and examine data to determine if an appropriate number of employees who fit into the prospective affinity group target market exist. If numbers are not strong enough, other options may be explored at that time.

## The Process

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Once all points have been considered, the following steps may be taken towards starting a USD116 Affinity Group:

### Initial Request for Information

- Contact the Director of DEI to express interest in starting an Affinity Group
- Schedule an initial information meeting
- Employee data examination will take place during this meeting

### Submission of Required Documents / Roster

- Affinity Group application and prospective membership roster will be submitted to the Director of DEI
- The Director of DEI, Recruitment and Retention Coordinator, and appropriate Central Office administrators votes to approve/deny affinity group charter application

### Orientation

- If the charter application is approved, affinity group leadership will meet with the Director of DEI and the Recruitment and Retention coordinator to plan for the group launch.

### Launch

- The new affinity group will be established with all the rights and privileges outline in this guide.



## Policies and Guidelines

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### Operating Principles

1. Members of USD116 Affinity Groups must be employed by Urbana School District 116.
2. Membership and participation in Affinity Groups shall be entirely voluntary. USD116 administrators, or any one in a supervisory capacity, or members of the group may NOT coerce any employee into joining or participating.
3. Membership in Affinity Groups must be open to all interested employees.
4. Participation in Affinity Groups events must be open to all interested employees.
5. Affinity Groups are not intended to and shall not duplicate or replace the activities of the recognized bargaining units of the school district.

### Meeting Guidelines

1. Meetings are encouraged to have an agenda and to make decisions consensus.
2. Notes should be taken at Affinity Group business meetings and a copy of the notes for each group meeting should be submitted to the Director of DEI.
3. Each Affinity Group must hold at least two (2) meetings annually.

### Succession Plans

All Affinity Groups will be required to submit and maintain a yearly succession plan of leadership to ensure continuity of the group in the future.

### Use of the USD116 Logos

The district logo is the strongest link to our brand. That is why it is important to use only approved logos in all communications. It is best practice to refer to the Director of Marketing and Communications for branding policies and for all questions concerning marketing and promotional materials.

## **Social Media**

We encourage affinity groups to maintain active Facebook or Twitter pages to promote the activities of the group. In doing so, administrative privileges should be shared with the Director of Marketing and Communications. Violation of this policy can result in the group's charter being revoked.

If an affinity group desires to utilize more social media platforms than just Facebook or Twitter, a conversation must be had with the Director of Marketing and Communications about proper usage and differentiation of content before a page is created.

## **Annual Review**

Affinity group leaders will be required to submit a yearly evaluation of the group's activity and events. The evaluation will not be used as an annual determination of the groups charter worthiness but as a way for the Director of DEI and others to determine where more resources or time may be needed to ensure the groups success. The evaluation will be administered via survey near the end of each school year.

## **Financial Support**

At the discretion of the Superintendent, and with the approval of the Chief Financial Officer, approved Affinity Groups may request limited funding each academic year. An annual budget will be established and governed by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Funds may not be available to meet all requests on an annual basis.

## **Contracts and Agreements**

All signed agreements/contracts entered by an Affinity Group as an extension of USD116 must be submitted to and reviewed by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and/or the appropriate designee. Any agreement not reviewed by the proper administrator will not be honored making the signee(s) of the agreement completely liable.



## **Dissolving Affinity Groups**

Affinity Groups may be dissolved when:

1. The group chooses to dissolve itself. Such dissolution should be reported to the Affinity Group coordinator(s).
2. Affinity Group specifically formed to undertake one or more short-term project(s) has completed the task.
3. The Affinity Group does not submit required annual reports and/or financial statements to the Affinity Group coordinator(s).
4. The Affinity Group coordinator(s) concludes that the group no longer has clear relevance or has become insufficiently accountable for its activities or present a legal or ethical liability to the Urbana School District 116.

## Event Planning Checklist

The Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in conjunction with the department of Human Resources would love helping plan and celebrate events that bring people together. We've found events go better and are more well attended when organizers take some steps early on, when planning and organizing, as well as later when it comes time for the event.

### Three Months In advance

- Choose someone to oversee your event and someone who will be a point of contact
- Develop a project plan. Who is your audience? How many do you want to attend? Consider how much time is available to organize your event
- Select a date and time that suits the event. Be mindful of religious and government holidays when choosing your date.
- Research venue options and visit prospective sites
- Find out if you will be required to use the venue's catering service or if you can bring in food from another caterer.
- Consider food and drink options you'll offer.
- Make sure the venue can accommodate your setup. Do you need lecture-style seating? Do you need Room to mingle with stand-up tables? Or large round tables where people can sit and eat?
- Be sure to understand the venue's timeline when it comes to reservations, final head counts, and when you can access the space on the day of your event.
- Consider your Audio-Visual needs
  - o Projector
  - o Microphone
  - o Laptop connection
  - o Music/ DJ
- Research logistics such as parking
- Create an event budget to determine if an admission fee is needed to cover costs
- Create a promotion schedule
- Submitted any contracts / agreements for review

### One to Two Months in Advance

- Start recruiting volunteers to help at the event, if needed (for example, staffing the greeting and sign-in table, giving directions, decorating, or cleanup).
- Monitor RSVPs and get the most current headcount to your venue and caterer as needed.

### One to Three Weeks in Advance

- Finalize your catering menu
- Confirm how many have registered and get that final estimate to the venue and caterer

### Day of the Event

- Arrive early (45 minutes to 60 minutes before the start of the event)
- Set up a registration area with nametags and place directional and event signs
- Check in attendees as they arrive, record the names of people who did not pre-register
- Ask attendees to fill out a raffle prize slip (if applicable)
- Take photos throughout the event, both posed and causal. Upload the images to your social media pages to highlight the diversity and inclusion efforts.

### Post Event

- Send a personal thank you to your volunteers and event committee members
- Produce a final report for the group's records and archives.

## SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE DIRECTOR OF DEI & CENTRAL OFFICE

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Affinity Groups can expect the following support from Central Office administration:

- Dedicated staff member(s) within the central office team who will aid in group development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Support and guidance for getting organized, planning meetings, and growing membership.
- Development of succession plans
- Financial support based on approved fiscal budgets
- Access to USD116 buildings for meeting space and approved on campus activities
- Marketing support including calendar listings, event postings, and social media pages

### CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORT CONTACTS

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**Dr. Brandon Caffey (Primary)**

Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

[bcaffey@usd116.org](mailto:bcaffey@usd116.org)

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## APPLICATION FOR AFFINITY GROUP CHARTER

As the coordinator of the \_\_\_\_\_  
Affinity Group, I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
hereby submit my organization for consideration for affinity group status.

### ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of the group shall be the \_\_\_\_\_  
Affinity Group of Urbana School District 116.

### ARTICLE II – PURPOSE

The affinity group shall be formed with the purpose of:

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**Value Proposition:** Clearly define the benefits that employees will receive by joining and participating within the Affinity Group.

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### ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the affinity group shall be voluntary and restricted to employees of Urbana School District.

### ARTICLE IV – DUES

Membership in approved Affinity groups is voluntary and free of charge to district employees. Any collection of membership dues is strictly prohibited and a violation of district policies and procedures.

### ARTICLE V – OFFICERS

Officers of the Affinity Group must include President, Vice President, and Secretary, each with a term of \_\_\_\_\_ year(s). Officers will be voted upon at each Annual Meeting. If an officer position becomes available due to death, resignation, or termination, the remaining officers may appoint someone to fill the position until the next Annual Meeting.

**ARTICLE VI – MEETINGS**

The Annual Business Meeting should be held in the fourth quarter of each school year for the purpose of electing new officers for the upcoming year and conducting other business. *(It is highly recommended to have at least 1 meeting per quarter).*

**ARTICLE VII – COMMITTEES**

Committees may be formed at any time at the direction of the President or group officer

**ARTICLE VIII – AMENDMENTS**

Amendments or changes to this charter may be made at any meeting of the Affinity Group by a two-thirds vote of those present or represented by a proxy. Amendments to the charter cannot supersede Urbana School District policies and procedures.

**ARTICLE IX – DISSOLUTION**

If necessary, dissolution shall be completed in accordance with any applicable district rules and regulations. If any financial assets exist more than financial obligations, the assets shall be distributed as directed by the majority vote of the membership with consideration given to a donation to a USD entity or affiliate.

**AFFINITY GROUP APPLICATION AUTHORIZATION**

Following the successful submission of the application, including the requested information above, the officer(s) will be contacted by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and/or members designated to coordinate Affinity Groups to discuss next steps.

I understand that membership and participation are voluntary, and the group must be open to everyone.

As an organizer of this Affinity Group, you play a vital role in ensuring an inclusive environment where all employees are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

District Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



APPLY FOR AFFINITY GROUP STATUS ELECTRONICALLY



**AFFINITY GROUP APPLICATION STATUS REVIEWED BY:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**AFFINITY GROUP STATUS APPROVED:**

YES

NO