

Affinity Group Toolkit

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Why Affinity Groups Are Important

Why Affinity Groups Matter in Our Union

In any union space—especially one that brings together people across race, gender, class, language, ability, and more—it’s important to create structures that support both unity and equity. One of the ways we do that is through **affinity groups**.

What are Affinity Groups?

Affinity groups are spaces where people who share a particular identity—like Black workers, LGBTQIA+ members, Latinx workers, or disabled members—can come together in solidarity, reflection, and strategy. These are not exclusive or divisive

spaces—they are **spaces for care, connection, and power-building**.

Why are they important?

1. Healing and Safety

- People from marginalized groups often experience harm, microaggressions, or isolation—even inside progressive spaces like unions.
- Affinity groups provide a space to exhale, speak freely, and be in community with others who share lived experiences.

2. Shared Understanding and Strategy

- People with similar identities often face similar challenges on the job or in the union.
- Affinity groups are places to name those issues and come up with strategies that can be brought to the whole union.

3. Leadership Development

- These groups nurture confidence and skills, especially for folks who don't always feel heard or centered in big meetings.
- They create pathways for new leaders to emerge and bring their full selves into the union's work.

4. Stronger Collective Power

- When everyone has what they need to be fully present and engaged, our **whole union gets stronger**.
- Affinity groups don't separate us—they allow each of us to bring our full identities into the fight for justice. That leads to deeper solidarity across lines of difference.

5. Accountability and Growth

- Affinity spaces can help name dynamics—like racism, sexism, ableism, or transphobia—that may show up in the union.
- That helps the union grow into a more equitable space for everyone, and not just the loudest or most dominant voices.

In short: Affinity groups help us care for each other, build power together, and make sure no one is left behind in our fight for dignity and justice. They are not a detour from union work—they are essential to doing that work well.

More Resources On Why Affinity Groups Are Important

- [Witnessing Each Other: Reflections On Our Asian Affinity Space](#)
- [Racial Identity Caucus](#)
- [Working Apart So We Can Work Together](#)
- [What Is An Affinity Group and Why are They Essential To A Healthy Workplace](#)

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How To Build Your Affinity Group Structure

Establish the Purpose & Vision

Before introducing the structure, clearly define:

- Why this affinity group is needed within the local (e.g., addressing members' concerns, leadership development, advocacy).
- What it aims to achieve (e.g., policy change, cultural celebration, leadership pipeline).
- How it complements the local's broader mission while ensuring member voices are uplifted.

Build Leadership & Allies

- Identify 3-5 trusted, committed members who can serve on the Core Team.
- Engage potential allies within the local's leadership (especially if they control resources or decision-making power).

Introduce the Structure to the Group

Once the core team is in place, organize a launch meeting with members.

Structure it as:

1. Introduction – Why we're forming this group & what we hope to achieve.
2. Proposed Structure – Walk through the Core Team + Action Committees model.
3. Member Input – Ask for feedback and allow people to suggest changes.
4. Call to Action – Invite members to join a committee or step into leadership roles.

Engage the Larger Local's Leadership

- Meet with union/local leadership to present the affinity group's purpose and structure.
- Emphasize how it strengthens the local overall (e.g., improving member engagement, addressing racial equity, leadership development).
- Request resources/support (e.g., meeting space, funding for events, leadership training).

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Three Examples Of How Agendas Can Be Created

Rotating Facilitator Model

Best for: Shared leadership, grassroots feel

How it works:

- Each meeting has a different facilitator or co-facilitators.
- A shared doc (Google Doc or similar) is used where members add agenda items in advance.
- The facilitator reviews the items, organizes them into time blocks, and adds group agreements or prompts for check-ins.

Example Agenda:

- Welcome & Land Acknowledgment – 5 min
- Check-In (One word for how you're arriving) – 10 min
- Group Updates – 15 min
- Discussion Topic: Navigating Burnout in Our Workplaces – 20 min • Planning: Upcoming Event Brainstorm – 15 min
- Closeout (Shout-outs + What you're taking with you) – 10 min

Collaborative Slack or Email Poll Model

Best for: Remote groups or larger networks

How it works:

- A week before the meeting, a poll or thread is shared via Slack or email asking members to rank or submit topics they'd like to cover.
- A small planning team compiles the top topics and builds the agenda based on time available.

Example Agenda:

- Opening & Agreements Refresher – 5 min
- Reflection: What's bringing us joy right now? – 10 min
- Top-Ranked Topic: Supporting New Members – 25 min
- Secondary Topic: Addressing Interpersonal Conflict – 15 min
- Announcements & Next Steps – 5 min

Theme-Based Monthly Meeting Model

Best for: Ongoing learning and deeper conversation

How it works:

- Each meeting has a pre-set theme (e.g., "Healing from Racial Harm," "Queer Joy," "Resistance in the Workplace").
- Members help shape the discussion questions or bring related readings/art/music.
- The agenda is consistent in structure, with the theme woven in.

Example Agenda:

- Welcome & Theme Introduction ("Rest as Resistance") – 10 min
- Embodiment Practice or Poem – 5 min
- Small Group Discussion (How do we make space for rest?) – 25 min
- Shareback & Collective Wisdom – 15 min
- Announcements & Upcoming Actions – 5 min

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Four Sample Agendas For Affinity Group Meetings

Agenda 1: Affinity Group Kickoff Meeting

Objective: To introduce the group, discuss goals, and establish a basic structure for meetings.

Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes

Agenda

Time	Activity	Description
00-10 min	Welcome & Introductions	Brief introductions: Name, role/affiliation, and a personal reason for joining the group.
10-20 min	Group Purpose & Objectives	Facilitator presents the purpose of the group, the need for affinity groups, and what this particular group aims to accomplish.
20-30 min	Brainstorming Group Goals	Open discussion: What does the group want to achieve? Examples: advocacy, peer support, resources, networking.
30-45 min	Structure & Norms Discussion	Discuss and agree on meeting structure (frequency, location, format). Establish group norms: how will we

		make decisions, communicate, and support each other?
45–60 min	Next Steps & Action Planning	Assign initial tasks or outline what needs to happen next: scheduling, identifying leadership roles, or planning the next gathering.
60–75 min	Closing Reflection	Participants share one takeaway or commitment from the meeting and any questions/concerns for the next session.

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Agenda 2: Affinity Group Strategy Session

Objective: To build strategy for group initiatives and assign roles for specific actions.

Duration: 2 hours

Agenda

Time	Activity	Description
00–10 min	Welcome & Review of Group Purpose	Quick recap of group’s mission and vision, and a review of the group’s work since the last meeting.
10–25 min	Identify Current Issues & Priorities	Open discussion: What are the most pressing issues for this group right now? Discuss challenges faced and areas for immediate focus.
25–45 min	Brainstorm Solutions & Actions	Group brainstorms possible solutions or actions. What initiatives or projects can address the current issues? Identify resources needed.
45–75 min	Breakout Session: Strategy Planning	Break into smaller groups to plan specific strategies or actions for addressing the identified issues. Assign tasks (e.g., outreach, event planning, advocacy).
75–90 min	Group Report Back & Discussion	Assign specific roles to individuals or sub-groups. Set timelines for actions

		and identify any support or resources needed.
90–110 min	Assign Roles & Set Timelines	Participants share one takeaway or commitment from the meeting and any questions/concerns for the next session.
110–120 min	Closing Reflection	Each person shares a quick reflection on the session and any final thoughts or concerns.

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Agenda 3: Affinity Group Check-In Meeting

Objective: To assess progress, address concerns, and strengthen group bonds.

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

Agenda

Time	Activity	Description
00–10 min	Welcome & Group Update	Brief check-in on what has happened since the last meeting, including progress on action items, events, or campaigns.
10–20 min	Review of Group Goals & Progress	Review previously set goals. Are we on track? What progress has been made? What's working and what's not?
20–40 min	Identify & Address Challenges	Open discussion about challenges or obstacles members are facing, either within the group or externally (e.g., within the organization or community).
40–60 min	Problem-Solving Session	Small group discussion or brainstorming session on how to overcome the identified challenges. Participants provide feedback, ideas, and

		resources.
60–75 min	Action Plan Review & Updates	Review the action items from previous meetings and update any outstanding tasks or deadlines. Assign new tasks if necessary.
75–90 min	Closing Reflection & Next Steps	Each participant shares their main takeaway or a commitment they are making for the next phase. Agree on the next meeting's objectives and date.

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Agenda 4: Affinity Group Social & Bonding Session

Objective: To build stronger relationships within the group and deepen connection.

Duration: 1 hour

Agenda

Time	Activity	Description
00–10 min	Welcome & Introductions	Welcome and brief introductions. Icebreaker activity: "Share a fun fact about yourself."
10–20 min	Group Reflection on Shared Experiences	Facilitator leads a discussion on shared experiences within the group. What common challenges have we faced? How can we support one another in those experiences?
20–40 min	Small Group Conversations & Networking	Breakout into smaller groups to discuss personal interests or experiences outside of the group's focus. Could include informal discussions on hobbies, work, or community.

40-55 min	Team-Building Activity	Participate in a fun, low-pressure team-building activity (e.g., trivia, collaborative problem-solving, etc.).
55-60 min	Closing Reflection & Gratitude	Each person shares one thing they appreciate about the group or one takeaway from the session. Thank everyone for their participation.

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Customizing the Agendas

These general agendas are flexible and can be adapted depending on:

- *Group size* (small vs. large groups)
- *Meeting frequency* (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)
- *Specific group needs* (e.g., action planning, group bonding, emotional support, etc.)

Feel free to adjust the timing and content based on your group's focus, whether it's organizing, healing or advocacy.

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Anti-Oppressive Facilitation

ANTI-OPPRESSION RESOURCE & TRAINING ALLIANCE

www.aortacollective.org



MAKING MEETINGS AWESOME FOR EVERYONE

Inefficient and ineffective meetings can leave people feeling drained, exhausted or discouraged, rather than inspired and energized. Good meetings help build strong, effective organizations and successful projects. Even organizations with great meeting process inadvertently perpetuate barriers to full member participation and access to democratic process. This happens through group dynamics of power, privilege and oppression that often marginalize women, people of color, queer, trans and gender non-conforming folks, people with disabilities and those

with limited access to the cultural cues and financial resources that come with class privilege.

Whether or not you tend to act as facilitator at meetings you attend, building your facilitation skills will help you make your meetings better, more inclusive, and more fully democratic! Here are some foundational tips and suggestions that can have big impacts on your meetings!

WHAT IS FACILITATION, ANYWAY?

Facilitation ensures that the group is empowered as a whole.

- Be sure that everyone gets to participate and share ideas in a meeting, not just those who feel most comfortable speaking up and making cases for their ideas or proposals.
- Work to prevent or interrupt any (conscious or unconscious) attempts by individuals or groups to overpower the group as a whole.
- Keep an eye out for social power dynamics and work to interrupt these. Point out an address discrepancies in who is talking, whose voices are being heard.
- Help the group come to the decisions that are best for the organization/whole group. Help people keep an eye on what's best for the group, rather than their personal preference.
- Ensure the group follows its own agreed upon process and meeting agreements.

Facilitation keeps an eye on time, and juggles it with the (ever present) need for more time.

- Offer periodic time check-ins.
- Help keep the group conversation on topic and relevant. Prevent ramblings and tangents.
- Make process suggestions to help the group along.
- Summarize discussion and note key areas of agreement, to help move the group forward.

Containers for Your Meetings

Things like community agreements, an agenda, an available chart of your group's decision making process, a place to store important topics for future conversations, next steps, etc are important foundations for a meeting-- we call them "containers." They act as visual tools that participants and facilitators can come back to throughout the meeting to help keep the group focused, on track, on

the same page. They also offer direction for moments when things get sticky or tense.

Community Agreements

Community agreements help define your role as facilitator and clarify the group's expectations of you. One of your big responsibilities to the group is to make sure these agreements are upheld. This isn't about creating rules-- it's about creating and clarifying agreements and expectations that allow everyone in the group to participate. In order for these to be meaningful, they need to come from the group itself. Once a group creates its agreements, they can be used over and over. As a facilitator, you get to contribute to this list, too.

Here's some community agreements that can be helpful in meetings, to get you thinking:

ONE DIVA, ONE MIC

Please, one person speak at a time. (It can also be useful to ask people to leave space in between speakers, for those who need more time to process words, or are less comfortable fighting for airtime in a conversation.)

NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING; TOGETHER WE KNOW A LOT

This means we all get to practice being humble, because we have something to learn from everyone in the room. It also means we all have a responsibility to share what we know, as well as our question, so that others may learn from us.

MOVE UP, MOVE UP

If you're someone who tends to not speak a lot, please move up into a role of speaking more. If you tend to speak a lot, please move up into a role of listening more. This is a twist on the more commonly heard "step up, step back." The "up/up" confirms that in both experiences, growth is happening. (You don't go "back" by learning to be a better listener.) Saying "move" instead of "step" recognizes that not everyone can step.

WE CAN'T BE ARTICULATE ALL THE TIME

As much as we'd like, we just can't. Often people feel hesitant to participate in a workshop or meeting for fear of "messing up" or stumbling over their words. We want everyone to feel comfortable participating, even if you can't be as articulate as you'd like.

BE AWARE OF TIME

This is helpful for your facilitator, and helps to respect everyone's time and commitment. Please come back on time from breaks, and refrain from speaking in long monologues...

BE CURIOUS

We make better decisions when we approach our problems and challenges with questions (“What if we...?”) and curiosity. Allow space for play, curiosity, and creative thinking.

NOTE: There’s a few community agreements that participants often bring up that we don’t tend to use or bring with us. Two of the most common ones are “assume best intentions” and “default to trust.” The reason we don’t use these is because when someone is unable to do this (say they’re feeling untrusting of someone, or unsafe), having a community agreement telling to do so isn’t going to change anything. Put short, these agreements aren’t always possible, especially when we take into consideration that when people have been harmed by sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, they/we build up necessary tools to take care of and protect themselves/ourselves. Agreements we offer instead that capture the spirit of these are “we can’t be articulate all the time,” “be generous with each other,” or “this is a space for learning.”

The Magic of an Agenda

There are many different ways to build an agenda to match the style, culture, and needs of each group or meeting. However you do it, a clear and well-constructed agenda that all participants can agree to, is a crucial step for an efficient, inclusive, and awesome meeting. The facilitator’s job (generally) is to both keep the participants on track to both following the agenda as well as to pay attention to when the agenda isn’t working and changes need to happen.

Here are some best practices regarding agendas:

- Set the agenda before the meeting starts. Building it over email, through a list that is kept in an office, or at the end of the previous meeting. This helps everyone come well researched and mentally and emotionally prepared.
- Some groups like a more emergent and organic style for building an agenda. If this is your group, participants can spend the beginning of a meeting writing each agenda item they’d like to discuss on an index card, and then the group can use different visual tools to select the card(s) people are most moved to talk about. The down side: you don’t know what you’re talking about in advance, so can’t prepare, or share your thoughts in advance, if you’re not able to attend.
- Review the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Share your reasoning before asking for amendments or changes. It is important that the whole group.
- Announcements and report back at beginning can save a lot of time.
- Give it variety: mix up the length and type of agenda items.

- Put agenda items that will be easy successes early in the meeting. This sets a positive tone and builds momentum!
- Follow with the “big stuff.”
- Break after big discussions.
- Schedule breaks for any meeting more than 90 minutes. After this length of time, groups fall into the trap of “decision fatigue,” making big decisions rashly or getting stuck talking in circles on smaller decisions. • Finish on something short and easy-- end with a good tone.
- Have the agenda on paper, so that all can see it (either on flipchart, blackboard, printed out).
- Label items with their expected actions: decision, discussion, play, evaluate, brainstorm, review, update, silence, feedback, appreciations and concerns.

Garden/ Bike Rack/ Topics for Future Meetings

Whatever your group chooses to call it, have a sheet or on-going list to write down ideas, questions, and topics for future meetings that come up. Often in the course of talking about one topic, really important things surface that need to be addressed, but are not on the current meeting's agenda. Unless they are urgent/time sensitive, it can really help keep the group on topic to have a space to note them so that they can be incorporated into future meetings (and not forgotten about!).

Next Steps/ Who, What, When, Priority

It can be very helpful to keep a sheet where you're taking running notes on any next steps or tasks that are coming out of the meeting. We sometimes do this in three (or four) columns: one for **who** is doing the next step or task (this could be an individual or a group), **what** it is they're going to do, by when they will have done it, and what **priority level** the task is (1-3, 1-5). You can end the meeting by reviewing this sheet and filling in missing details. You can also start your meetings by checking in with the sheet from the previous meeting.

TIPS, TOOLS, TECHNIQUES

Tools You Can Use

Some simple tools that can drastically shift the energy of a meeting, might help you hear new voices, and invite the perspectives of quiet, introverted, or more silenced participants:

- Start the meeting off with **quick check-ins** (even something as simple as “three adjectives to describe how you're feeling,” or “one thing that went well

and one challenge from the week”) on how folks are doing, so you know where folks are at when they walk in the room.

- Build in a couple minutes for **quiet journaling/thinking** before launching into group discussion.
- Start an item off with conversations in **pairs or small groups** before coming back to the whole group. Often you’ll get deeper this way and end up with better, more creative ideas.
- Do a **round robin/go-around** to hear from everyone. (People can always pass if they’d like).
- Hosting part of a meeting with everyone **standing in a circle** (if they’re able) can help wake people up, decrease tensions, and support more concise statements.
- Asking participants to **switch seats** after a break or agenda item also helps to energize and mix things up. This can be really helpful when the group is feeling stuck.
- Taking a **straw poll** can help you get a quick read of how close the group is to a decision, whether or not there is unity, and which topics are key to focus discussion on. You can check in with folks whose opinions diverge most from the majority to see what’s going on for them. Straw polls can look a lot of ways:
 - Vote yes/no/maybe
 - Vote for your one favorite of multiple options
 - Vote for all the options you support (more than one is ok)
 - Rate how you feel about the proposal/idea on a “fist of five,” one finger meaning “I really do not support this,” five fingers meaning “I love this.”
- Incorporate ways of gauging people’s opinions that **involve their bodies**, such as asking folks to walk to one side of the room if they are for the proposal, the other side if they’re against it, and to stand in the middle if they’re unsure. Then, hear from a few people from each position. Let folks move as their opinions change.

Common Mistakes (will happen. Keep an eye out!)

- Not having a co-facilitator when you need one.
- Rushing the group. (Sometimes going slower takes less time in the long run).
- Not setting clear boundaries for yourself in your role as facilitator, getting pushed around by the group.
- Not taking a break when YOU need one. (When the facilitator needs a break, it’s to everyone’s advantage to have a break!)
- Spiraling down into group process about group process. (You know, when you spend 10 minutes deciding as a group by consensus whether you want to allot 10 more minutes of discussion to an item).

- Not leaving time and space for people's feelings.
- Becoming inflexible or unwilling to adapt the agenda/plan to meet the group's evolving needs.
- Forgetting to get additional support-- a notetaker, logistics coordinator, someone to set up the meeting space, etc.
- Meeting for too long a time period without food, water, and/or breaks.

Red Flags and Dynamics to Watch Out For

- Unhealthy, unchallenged, or unnamed power dynamics.
- People interrupting each other or the facilitator.
- People repeating or re-stating what others have said.
- Tone and body language: Do people look upset? Checked out? Bored? Angry? If you see this, check in with the group as a whole, or quietly with individuals.
- Individuals monopolizing conversation.
- Individuals or small groups bringing a fully-formed idea to the meeting, without any group conversation, brainstorming, or feedback, and wanting it passed that very day.
- Back-and-forths between individuals.

What to Do When You Get Stuck

- Use the agenda and expected actions. Have you switched into "decide" mode when the desired action was "feedback?"
- Take a break: Have small groups work out a proposal based on what they've heard about the needs of the group. (What's needed for a decision?)
- Ask questions to initiate discussion, as opposed to jumping directly into concerns. Questions assume the proposal writer(s) thought about the concern, and allow them to respond with their reasoning. • When people are voicing concerns, ask them what can be done to meet their concern. • Do people need a refresher of the decision making process your group uses?
- Listen for agreement and note it, no matter how small. This both builds morale and helps clarify where the group is at.
- Reflect back what you're hearing. Practice synthesizing and summarizing.
- Break big decisions into smaller pieces.
- Don't allow back and forths between two participants to dominate a discussion or agenda item: ask for input from others.

RESOURCES

- *Collective Visioning* by Linda Stout
- *Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision Making* by Sam Kaner

- *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers* by Dave Gray
- *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* by Adam Kahane and Peter M. Senge
- *Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes & Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity* by David Sibbet

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Some Possible Roles In Affinity Groups

Facilitator / Co-Facilitator

Purpose: Guide meetings and ensure space is inclusive, focused, and participatory.

Responsibilities:

- Set agendas (collaboratively)
- Guide discussions and timekeeping
- Encourage quieter voices, manage dominant ones
- Support emotional tone and group agreements

Needs: Comfort with facilitation, active listening, emotional intelligence, neutrality

Organizer / Coordinator

Purpose: Handle logistics and follow-up between meetings.

Responsibilities:

- Schedule meetings, send reminders
- Coordinate events or actions
- Maintain communication within the group

Needs: Time management, communication skills, reliability

Note-Taker / Archivist

Purpose: Document what happens in meetings.

Responsibilities:

- Take clear notes or summaries
- Track decisions, follow-ups, and action items
- Store/share records accessibly (Google Drive, email, etc.)

Needs: Attention to detail, consistency, comfort with tech

Wellness / Care Coordinator

Purpose: Support emotional health and community care.

Responsibilities:

- Check in on members' wellbeing
- Offer grounding activities or healing practices in meetings
- Coordinate mutual aid or support when needed

Needs: Compassion, boundary awareness, experience with care practices (optional but helpful)

Political Education Lead

Purpose: Support the group's learning and collective consciousness.

Responsibilities:

- Share readings, videos, or topics for reflection
- Facilitate political education discussions
- Outreach / Communications Liaison

Purpose: Connect the group with the broader organization or movement.

Responsibilities:

- Attend cross-affinity or general meetings (if applicable)
- Share updates between spaces
- Coordinate with allies or external groups when needed

Needs: Strong communication skills, clarity on group's boundaries and values

Action / Campaign Lead

Purpose: Help move from reflection to action.

Responsibilities:

- Propose and coordinate direct actions, campaigns, or projects
- Support strategic planning based on group goals
- Collaborate with others to mobilize resources or allies

Needs: Organizing experience (optional), strategic thinking, collaboration

Notes on Roles

Roles can rotate monthly or quarterly to prevent burnout and build collective skills.

In some groups, people co-hold roles or shadow each other to build leadership.

It's okay to be flexible—roles can shift based on capacity and needs.

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Facilitating Caucuses

Facilitator Responsibilities

- Meet with your co-facilitator and choose a topic/format. (3-4 weeks prior)
- Post any pre-readings on the Flow. (1-2 weeks prior)

- Create an agenda using the template if desired. (0-2 weeks prior)
- Guide the conversation with your co-facilitator.
- Make sure the agenda, with discussion notes, is shared with the POC Caucus.

Agreements

Adapted from several sources, the caucus is encouraged to adapt in the future if desired!

- Be present – limit distractions and other work.
- Practice equity by sharing the floor.
- Recognize listening as an active form of engagement
- Assume good intentions, but acknowledge impact.
- What's learned here leaves here; what's said here stays here. (Get permission to tell someone else's story.)
- Engage openly and honestly, practice vulnerability and authenticity.
- Strive for intellectual humility. Be willing to grapple with challenging ideas. Hold your opinions lightly.
- If you think, "I already know this," ask yourself: "How can I take this deeper? What new insight or application can I find?"
- Recognize how your social location (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability) informs your perspectives and reactions.
- Notice your own defensive reactions and attempt to use these reactions as entry points for gaining deeper self-knowledge, use curiosity as a tool.
- Differentiate between safety and comfort. Accept discomfort as necessary for anti-racist, anti-oppressive growth.
- Maintain awareness of natural or imposed power dynamics and imbalances.
 - Celebrate that no one knows everything, but together we know a lot. The facilitator(s) for this space are your peers, not anti-racism/anti-oppression experts.
- Don't expect closure. We are engaging in ongoing, lifelong work.

Fractured Atlas White Caucus Resources to Share

[Caucus Facilitator Responsibilities](#)

[Agreements](#)

[Resources](#)

[About Caucusing](#)

[Facilitation](#)

Case Studies: How Affinity Groups Make A Difference

Key Takeaways

- Affinity groups help dismantle employer-driven racial divisions (Justice for Janitors).
- They create leadership pathways for marginalized workers (UAW Black Caucus and Women's Committees).
- They ensure that union demands reflect racial justice priorities (Chicago Teachers Union).
- They bridge language and cultural barriers in immigrant-led organizing (Domestic Workers United).

Justice for Janitors (SEIU) – Latinx and Black Worker Affinity Groups

Context

The Justice for Janitors campaign, led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), organized low-wage janitorial workers, predominantly Latinx and Black, in cities across the U.S. The campaign faced internal racial tensions between Latinx and Black workers, often fueled by employer divide-and-conquer tactics.

Affinity Group Role

SEIU created separate affinity spaces for Latinx and Black workers to discuss their unique workplace experiences, histories of racial division, and shared struggles. This allowed each group to build solidarity internally while also developing strategies to overcome employer tactics. Over time, these affinity groups held cross-racial meetings to strengthen their collective bargaining power.

Impact

The campaign successfully organized thousands of workers, built deeper Black-Latinx unity, and secured significant wage and labor protections for janitors. The affinity groups played a key role in addressing racial tensions and fostering a united labor movement.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) – Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) and Black Educator Affinity Groups

Context

The CTU, one of the most powerful teachers' unions in the country, has a strong history of organizing educators across racial and socioeconomic lines. However, Black educators faced disproportionate layoffs, and racial justice was not always centered in union demands.

Affinity Group Role

Black teachers formed affinity groups within the CTU to address the racial disparities in school closures, layoffs, and curriculum policies that disproportionately harmed Black students and educators. These groups worked within the broader CTU reform caucus, CORE, to push for racial justice in union policies.

Impact

Affinity groups helped shape CTU's demands to include not only salary and benefits but also racial equity issues, such as stopping school closures in Black neighborhoods and increasing Black teacher retention. This broadened the union's vision beyond traditional labor issues to include racial and educational justice.

Domestic Workers United (DWU) – Asian and Latina Worker Affinity Groups

Context

Domestic Workers United (DWU) organized nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers—mostly immigrant women of color—who faced low wages, exploitation,

and little legal protection. While many were united by their precarious work conditions, differences in language, immigration status, and cultural background created organizing challenges.

Affinity Group Role

DWU supported the creation of language-based affinity groups, particularly for Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking domestic workers, to ensure that all workers could fully participate in organizing efforts. These groups provided spaces for education, leadership development, and discussions about workplace abuses specific to different communities.

Impact

These affinity groups helped bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, ensuring that all members had an equal voice in organizing. This contributed to the successful passage of the 2010 New York Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, which secured labor protections for domestic workers statewide.

ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)

Context

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. government, media, and healthcare system failed to adequately respond to the AIDS crisis. As thousands—primarily gay men, trans people, sex workers, and drug users—were dying, they were also facing stigma, medical neglect, and political silence. Formed in 1987 in New York City, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) emerged as a direct action advocacy group demanding urgent policy change, research funding, and equitable healthcare access for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Affinity Group Role

ACT UP used affinity groups as a foundational organizing strategy. These were small, self-governing collectives of activists—often organized around shared identity, location, or political strategy. They functioned autonomously but coordinated with the broader network for mass actions.

Impact

The use of affinity groups within ACT UP inspired organizing tactics in later movements like Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and climate justice actions. Affinity groups ensured that women, people of color, trans people, and people who

used drugs were not just represented but were organizing from the center. Their model emphasized autonomy, trust, shared risk, and collective care—key principles for sustaining movements over time.

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Additional Resources

About Caucusing

[Racial Identity Caucusing: A Strategy for Building Anti-Racist Collectives](#) by Crossroads

[Caucus and Affinity Groups](#) from Racial Equity Tools

[Principles for White Affinity Study Groups](#)

[Tips and Resources for Creating Effective White Caucus Groups](#) by Craig Elliott

[Tools for White Anti-Racist Organizing](#) by the Catalyst Project

[White Awake Manual](#) – a set of educational resources for guiding white affinity processes

[SURJ Political Education Site](#)

Vital critique: [Whites Only: SURJ And The Caucasian Invasion Of Racial Justice Spaces](#) by DiDi Delgado, Black Lives Matter–Cambridge

Facilitation

[Anti-Oppressive Facilitation](#) by AORTA Collective (and other great resources there too – love the Resource Zine!)

[Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops](#) by Seeds for Change

[Social Justice Toolbox](#)

[Notes about Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre](#)

Anti-Racism

These are some of the readings that the Fractured Atlas White Caucus has read.

["From White Racist to White Anti-Racist: the life-long journey"](#) by Tema Okun

["What Motivates People from Dominant Groups to Support Social Justice"](#) Diane J. Goodman and Lee Anne Bell

["Costs of Oppression to People from Dominant Groups"](#) by Diane J. Goodman and Lee Anne Bell

["The Work Is Not The Workshop: Talking and Doing, Visibility and Accountability in the White Anti-Racist Community"](#) by Catherine Jones

["white supremacy culture"](#) by Tema Okun

["What is White Supremacy?"](#) by Elizabeth Martinez

[Dismantling Racism Works Web Workbook](#) - dense website with so many resources. Sources for years of caucus sessions!

[A Call for Moral Courage in America](#) by Darren Walker, Ford Foundation

[Detour-Spotting for white anti-racists](#) by jona olsson

[Talking points – Effective Strategies for Confronting Racism in Conversation](#) by WHAT'S UP?! Pittsburgh

[Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) (SURJ) - national organization organizing white people for racial justice. Links to groups around the country can be found here.

[SURJ Resources for Calling In](#)

[SURJ Guide to Talking White Supremacy Post-Charlottesville](#)

[What is the role for white people working for racial justice in this current period?](#)
(Aug 22, 2017) A Joint Statement from the Organization for Black Struggle and the Anti-Racist Collective

["The Costs of Racism to White People"](#) by Paul Kivel

["Grieving the White Void"](#) by Abraham Lateiner

["Accountability in a Time of Justice"](#) by Vivette Jeffries-Logan, Michelle Johnson, Tema Okun

[The Subtle Linguistics of Polite White Supremacy](#) by Yawo Brown

[White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement](#) by Robin DiAngelo

[White People, It's Time To Prioritize Justice Over Civility](#) by [Tauriq Moosa](#)

[White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism](#) by Dr. Robin DiAngelo

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