



## Affinity Groups Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is an Affinity Group?**

An affinity group is a self-organized group of TCC employees with a shared identity or interest. These groups seek to support and amplify the priorities and concerns of \*systemically non-dominant peoples. Affinity groups also provide individuals sharing dominant identities the space to examine the negative impacts of white supremacy and dominant identity culture. According to the 2020 TCC Campus Climate survey (p. 12), Affinity Groups can support the retention efforts of TCC employees and may improve employee's perception of our campus climate.

\*This term is created by Dr. Debi Jenkins at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington and refers to membership outside of the dominant group within systems of oppression. Systems of oppression are created to provide benefits and assets for members of specific groups. The recipient groups are referred to as dominant groups because such advantages grant impacting levels of power, privilege, and status within social, economic, and political infrastructures of a society. For example, such frameworks are established to specify who is in control and who is not, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and who will have access to resources and who will not. This is sometimes referred to by others as, "disadvantaged groups," "marginalized groups," "minorities," "under-represented minorities," etc.

### **What is the purpose of an Affinity Group?**

The primary purpose of an Affinity Group at TCC is to disrupt the status quo by providing institutional space for those with shared identities, especially those identities that have been systemically oppressed.

These groups offer a safe space for folx to affirm, support, and celebrate one another. They provide time and structure for discussions on topics such as, but not limited to,

oppression, marginalization, representation, and racism that impact AG members and the entire TCC community.

The secondary purpose is to develop and improve campus climate. (See TCC's 2020 [Campus Climate Survey](#))

### **How are Affinity Groups organized and funded?**

Coordination and funding for TCC's Affinity Groups is provided by the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. The EDI Specialist manages the applications for affinity groups and provides a means of connection and communication to the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council (EDI-C).

### **Where can I go with other questions about Affinity Groups?**

Please contact Julie in the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at:  
[jlancour@tacomacc.edu](mailto:jlancour@tacomacc.edu)

### **Why does TCC have Affinity Groups?**

Here at TCC, we consider Affinity Groups to be a vital component in our work towards anti-racism and eliminating systemic oppression. These groups connect various members of the TCC workforce with each other and with the institution.

Affinity groups benefit the College by supporting community building, providing visibility and practical support to its diversity and inclusion efforts (e.g. identifying and raising concerns that might not otherwise be visible, building diversity competence and cultural sharing in the community, recognizing the importance and necessity of safe spaces for systemically oppressed groups).

Affinity Groups also provide important feedback to leadership and assist with realizing TCC's strategic vision. Specifically, Affinity Groups can share their thoughts, ideas, concerns, and recommendations with the Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and may make recommendations for the formation of action committees within the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council.

## **How do Affinity Groups Obtain Financial Support?**

The focus of affinity groups work is inward-to affirm and support groups based on shared identities or interests. AGs are not expected to create events or institutional actions. As such, funding is mostly allocated for resources that will help the group internally, e.g., for the purchase of books, a film, or a speaker.

### **NOTE: These funds may not be used for food or gifts**

Fund distribution is based on the amount available, and the number of registered affinity groups created for the academic year, and the number of requests made. Decisions are made by the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

- Funding requests must be made using the [AG Funding Application](#)
- Please check with the Office for EDI, after October 15, 2021, for approximate funding amounts.
- Completed funding requests will be processed and responded to within 10 workdays.
- For the 2021-2022 academic year, all funding requests must be submitted by Monday, May 2, 2022.

## **Affinity groups seem or appear to be segregationist or even racist...**

Affinity groups seek to disrupt the status quo by allowing space and resources for groups with shared identities, especially those identities that have been and continue to be marginalized and oppressed.

Affinity groups, especially those based around racial and ethnic identities, are critical spaces to have on campus, as many members of non-dominant identity groups feel marginalized, threatened, psychologically unsafe, or fearful.

Here at TCC, we understand the need for these spaces to exist because in the traditional areas of campus (classrooms, gathering places, offices, meetings rooms, etc.) their voices and experiences are not always heard or valued. Our 2020 TCC Campus Climate Survey took a closer look at these issues and was one of the catalysts for the formation of Affinity Groups at TCC.

Affinity groups are spaces for people who have the same experience, to empower and lift one another up. Part of the work of these groups is separate (not segregated) AND

affinity group members also work together in the TCC community collaborating and forming coalitions and do work together.

### **How to TCC Affinity groups respond to the needs of employees with identities that are subjected to systemic oppression and marginalization?**

By providing:

- The critical need of validation and representation without fear of harm. A safe place to share and discuss with those who have the same shared identity and lived experience. Our BIPOC and other systemically oppressed employee groups must navigate and negotiate with the dominant power structures and identities daily and manage the harm that results from microaggressions, explicit bias, and oppression.
- By supporting affinity groups, encouraging participation in and development of these identity-based groups, TCC offers access to collective leadership – the opportunity to bring forth issues of structural and systemic disenfranchisement, directly to President Harrell.

### **How do TCC Affinity groups provide a structure for employees in dominant identity groups?**

By providing:

- A place to practice talking about race, gender, sex, ableness, power, privilege, and how these can maintain inequities and oppression
- A place to learn about and acknowledge the dominate white supremacy culture in the United States
- A place to examine dominant identity cultures and privileges as well as reflect on how these negatively impact our colleague and our community

### **Who may join an Affinity Group?**

All TCC employees are encouraged to join an Affinity Group with fellow employees they share an identity with. Specifically:

- Affinity group members must be employed by TCC
- Any TCC Employee may apply to start an Affinity Group during the open application period
- The formation of the Affinity Group must rely on volunteers and efforts must stem from a grassroots nature
- Neither TCC nor members of the group may pressure any employee into joining or participating.
- Membership and participation in an Affinity Group shall be entirely voluntary.

All TCC employees are encouraged to join in the general Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council (EDI-C) meetings and find out how you can learn more about the work being done.

### **What do I need to consider before joining an Affinity Group?**

When seeking to join an affinity group, ask yourself:

- What is the shared identity of the group I wish to join?
- Do I authentically share this identity, background, and lived experiences?

Below are examples of NOT authentically sharing an identity or being adjacent to this identity.

- I'm in a relationship with someone who has this identity
- I have child(ren) who share(s) this identity
- I have traveled to/lived in a location where this racial/ethnic identity is dominant (ex. Peace Corps, study or work abroad)
- I speak/teach a language associated with this racial/ethnic identity
- I am just interested in learning more about this racial/ethnic identity and/or culture

### **May I join any Affinity Group I want to?**

All TCC employees are encouraged to join an Affinity Group with fellow employees they share an identity with. **Individuals will cause harm by attempting to join an affinity group whose identity they do not authentically share and/or they are adjacent to (see previous question).**

### **What if I do not see a current Affinity Group that I share an identity with or share an identity with but am not interested in joining?**

- Please consider creating your own Affinity Group. If you would like support in creating your own Affinity Group, please contact Julie Lancour (EDI Specialist) at [jlancour@tacomacc.edu](mailto:jlancour@tacomacc.edu)