

City of Tacoma Affinity Group Guidelines

1. Background

The first goal of the City's Equity and Empowerment Framework is that the City of Tacoma workforce reflects the community it serves. In addition to ensuring inclusive recruiting and hiring practices, we must also create a truly inclusive and equitable workplace culture that attracts and retains a workforce that is reflective of our diverse community. Affinity Groups are employee-led groups formed around common interests, issues, and backgrounds, and are helpful tools in creating and sustaining equity, inclusion, and belonging in the work place.

Affinity groups promote equity and social justice, foster employee engagement, strengthen workplace effectiveness, improve leadership abilities, and enhance personal and professional growth within the City of Tacoma. Protected category-specific Affinity groups address racism and other forms of oppression and advance the City's equity and empowerment goals. Affinity groups are a tool for employees to build fellowship, leadership opportunities, and an inclusive environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

Affinity groups are citywide, open to all employees, and work with leadership to inform City policies and procedures that influence equity and empowerment plans and goals.

2. Definitions

Affinity Group: An employee-led group formed around common interests, issues, and backgrounds focused exclusively on protected classes.

Affinity Group Steering Committee: A cross-departmental group that supports and advises OEHR in the formation and administration of Affinity Groups. At a minimum, this group must have representation from the City Manager's Office and Human Resources.

Executive Committee: The organizing body for an Affinity Group.

Protected Category: Categories set forth in federal, state, and local anti-discrimination laws. For Tacoma, these are race, creed, color, family status,

ancestry, marital status, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, age, religion, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal, or status as a veteran, in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This includes, but is not limited to recruitment, hiring and employment with the City of Tacoma.

3. Eligibility to Form and Join Affinity Groups

- a. City affinity groups will focus exclusively on protected categories, and demonstrate a business need such as retention of underrepresented employees.
- b. Affinity groups must have at least 5 members.
- c. Each affinity group is open to all employees.
- d. People can join multiple affinity groups.
- e. All City employees are eligible to join, including appointive, elected, event staff, permanent employees on temporary appointment, permanent, project, temporary, and contractors. Both represented and non-represented staff are eligible to join.
- f. Employees are eligible to join affinity groups on their first day of employment with City.

4. Application and Approval Process

OEHR, in partnership with the Affinity Group Steering committee, will host an informational session on how to start and operate affinity groups at least once a year. More sessions may be added as needed.

Existing affinity groups need only submit whatever charter documents they already have for file-keeping purposes.

Employees wishing to establish a new affinity group must

- a. Form an Executive Committee;
- b. Complete and submit a cover sheet and draft charter to the Office of Equity and Human Rights for approval. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, groups wanting to start an affiliate chapter of a larger organization can submit whatever documents the parent organization requires in lieu of OEHR's application and charter templates.
- c. Agree to coordinate with the City's efforts to promote workplace and workforce equity.

It is recommended that affinity groups identify and maintain a sponsor. (See below for sponsor roles.) In order to ensure visibility and buy-in from organizational leadership, it is recommended that the sponsor be at a level that reports to a Director, or Superintendent. If a group cannot find a sponsor, the Office of Equity and Human Rights can designate someone to serve in that capacity, or help find someone.

Existing affinity groups shall renew their applications each biennium by submitting a current charter.

5. Budget

The Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR) currently negotiates, in collaboration with affinity groups, a biennial appropriation for affinity groups in the regular biennial budget process, and renegotiates if necessary during the mid-biennium budget modification process. We will propose that Affinity Groups have a stand-alone budget that is assessed from all departments, including Tacoma Public Utilities beginning in the 2021-22 biennial budget. OEHR will provide guidance for affinity groups to propose budget requests/plans to the Affinity Group Steering Committee at least once per year, and up to quarterly. Affinity groups can collaborate on events and budget requests. Affinity Groups shall report expenditures compared to budget to OEHR quarterly and at year-end. Reports are due on April 15, July 15, October 15, and January 15 each year. OEHR will provide a report template.

In addition, groups may raise funds on their own through dues and other activities.

Eligible expenses include supplies, food and speaker fees for events. Alcoholic beverages are not eligible expenses. Affinity Groups must follow all City policies and procedures for procurement and purchasing. Affinity Groups are also highly encouraged to patronize women and minority owned businesses as provided for in the City's Equity in Contracting program.

6. Activities

In order to maintain active status, Affinity Groups must offer at least one professional development event each year. Social activities during work hours must have some kind of professional development or educational component.

Affinity groups should offer meetings and events at varied times so that employees with different shifts and levels of flexibility can participate, and be careful not to schedule events that conflict with other cultural events at the City, or other equity related events.

Affinity groups engage in activities that:

- Enhance professional and personal development
- Promote equity and social justice
- Foster employee engagement
- Strengthen workplace effectiveness
- Provide leadership opportunities
- Address racism and other forms of oppression
- Center the voices of historically marginalized communities
- Advance the City's equity and empowerment goals
- build relationships and promote networking
- Create an inclusive environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed
- Inform City policies and procedures that influence equity and empowerment plans and goals
- Provide recommendations to leadership
- Support the City's cultural celebration program
- Community service

7. Employee Participation and Work Time

- a. Employees and supervisors shall refer to Policy #XXX governing work time.
- b. Participation in affinity group meetings and activities are considered Professional Development.
- c. When using work time to participate in affinity group activities, employees shall request prior approval from their manager/supervisor, following the process of the employee's work group for such requests. Managers/supervisors must ensure the business unit's needs are being met.
- d. Affinity group activities that are strictly social in nature must be scheduled during non-work time.

8. Affiliations

Affinity groups may be affiliated with established professional associations such as but not limited to:

- National Forum for Black Public Administrators (<https://www.nfbpa.org>; ICMA)
- Local Government Hispanic Network (<https://lghn.org/>; ICMA)

Employee dues to professional associations such as those listed above are eligible Training and Professional Development expenses that departments can cover. Employee dues to professional associations may be approved as Affinity Group expenses on a case-by-case basis.

Affinity groups acting as a regional affiliate may have members who are not employees of the City; however, non-employee members are responsible for paying their own individual membership dues.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

a. Executive Committee:

- i. Functions as an organizing body for the affinity group;
- ii. Develops documents and is responsible for affinity group annual reporting;
- iii. Develops the roles and responsibilities for the executive committee beyond what is required in these guidelines;
- iv. Sets meetings and activities including frequency, location, purpose, and content;
- v. Submits a report (template provided) to the Office of Equity and Human Rights annually;
- vi. Acts on behalf of the group. This includes, but is not limited to, serving as the group contact for employees who are interested in joining, as well as serving as a liaison with management and/or senior leadership;
- vii. Requests technical assistance from the Office of Equity and Human Rights as needed;
- viii. Collaborates with other government agencies, private businesses, nonprofits or other agencies on events or activities that support affinity group goals, if desired and approved;
- ix. Defines group agreements within the affinity group, and what constitutes violation of those group agreements.

b. Employees

- i. Engage in constructive dialogue and avoid disparagement of others.
- ii. Approach difficult conversations with curiosity, humility, and authenticity.

- iii. Care for themselves and each other. This includes utilization of professional supports (clinical, medical, and consultative) as needed.
 - iv. Center the work of the affinity group on the City of Tacoma's Equity and Empowerment Framework.
 - v. Foster direct communication and feedback to the fullest extent possible.
 - vi. Utilize the Office of Equity and Human Rights as a resource.
- c. Sponsors
- i. Support the work of their sponsored affinity group(s) by advocating for the functional needs of the affinity group(s) and communicating the needs and goals of the affinity group(s) to top City/TPU leadership, as requested by the affinity group(s).
 - ii. Possess and/or develop a core set of competencies regarding the focus of their sponsored affinity group(s) to ensure they are competent and reliable representatives of their sponsored affinity group(s).
 - iii. Promote affinity group membership where appropriate.
 - iv. Ensure that the group's activities adhere to affinity group and business objectives;
 - v. Provide mentorship and coaching to the affinity group's leadership and members;
 - vi. Serve as a sounding board for issues and recommendations; provide high-level project oversight and assist with resources where feasible;
 - vii. Take an active role in advancing the mission of the group.
- d. Managers/Supervisors:
- i. Approve employee affinity group participation based on their department and/or unit needs and/or operational requirements of the department;
 - ii. Work with interested employees to identify ways to participate in affinity group activities, while meeting their employment obligations;
 - iii. May grant permission for employees to participate on a one-year basis. However, each meeting or activity during work time is subject to additional approval;
 - iv. If the employee's request is denied, the manager and/or supervisor shall provide a reason to the employee, which includes the explicit job duties and the departmental operating needs that preclude the employee's participation. The manager and/or supervisor shall also

provide a timeframe for when the employee can reasonably expect to participate in the affinity group.

- e. OEHR shall provide support to affinity groups, including:
 - i. Consultation to individuals seeking to start an affinity group;
 - ii. Feedback and approval for new affinity groups;
 - iii. Reviewing quarterly and annual reports submitted by each affinity group;
 - iv. Identifying any deficiencies that preclude recertification for the following year;
 - v. Consult with Human Resources before discontinuing an affinity group;
 - vi. As available, provide funding to support affinity group activities;
 - vii. Coordinating and convening affinity group representatives as needed and providing consultation on advancing the City's equity and empowerment goals;
 - viii. Facilitate connections with similar affinity groups in other organizations to support affinity group success.
- f. Human Resources
 - i. Allocate time in the New Employee Orientation to brief new employees on affinity groups;
 - ii. Provide consultation to OEHR;
 - iii. Provide guidance to departments and/or divisions regarding whether or not employees on a Performance Improvement Plan can participate.

10. Reasons to Discontinue an Affinity Group or an Individual Employee's Participation in an Affinity Group

- a. Activity or speech that runs counter to the City of Tacoma's Equity and Empowerment Framework, as determined by the Office of Equity and Human Rights.
- b. Inability to demonstrate sufficient achievement of affinity group goals.
- c. Inability or unwillingness to comply with the requirements of the Affinity Group Guidelines.
- d. Inability to maintain a minimum of 5 members.
- e. Failure to submit required application, charter, and budget documents.