

*Please note:* Schools and Central Office departments must make a deliberate, accurate self-assessment to consider whether 1) affinity groups are the right tool at any given [stage of moving toward becoming an anti-racist department or school](#), and 2) whether internal or external staff are available who have the vision, relationships, facilitation skills, and knowledge of racism and anti-racism to be effective conveners. We must each consider our individual, organizational, and institutional levels of readiness for setting and implementing discussion norms, leading these conversations, and following up when affinity groups surface individual, group, and organizational issues that call for bold action.

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Why Do We Need Affinity Groups Based on Racial/Ethnic Identity?

Depending on the stage of the anti-racism work at a particular school or department, it is often useful to hold affinity groups based on racial/ethnic identity. This continuum is a way to assess the current stage of that work on an organizational level:

- Bread for the Journey: An Online Companion to Radical Welcome [Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist, Multicultural Institution](#)

These charts summarize several frameworks that describe stages of racial and ethnic identity development on the individual level:

- Interaction Institute for Social Change: [Stages of Racial Identity Development](#)

Affinity groups are one important and effective tool in moving departments and schools along the continuum to become an anti-racist organization and institution (see above), along with other vital steps such as application of the [Boston Public Schools Racial Equity Planning Tool](#), and training on and implementation of [Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices](#).

For various reasons (resistance to affinity groups, lack of skilled facilitators, urgency of particular triggering events), a school or department may choose to begin with interracial discussion. However, holding affinity groups early and often will greatly improve the likelihood that later interracial dialogue will be honest, constructive, and effective.



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These articles explain the value of distinct affinity groups based on racial/ethnic identity:

- White Students Confronting Racism, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, [Becoming an Anti-Racist White Ally: How a White Affinity Group Can Help](#)  
The value of anti-racist affinity groups for White people, and the role of White people in ending racism.
- JustLead Washington; [Caucuses \(Affinity Groups\) as a Racial Justice Strategy: What We Have Learned](#)  
This article aims to support individuals and organizations to organize and effectively facilitate "caucuses," or affinity groups, to support learning about racial justice.
- [National Association of Independent Schools; How Racial Affinity Groups Saved My Life](#)  
How affinity spaces can be a place of affirmation and empowerment that is often desperately needed in school districts.
- National Association of Independent Schools: [Identity, Affinity, Reality](#)  
The need for student affinity groups.
- Racial Equity Tools; [Racial Identity Caucuses or Affinity Groups](#)  
Discusses what affinity groups are and some reasons to make them available for staff.
- Seattle Girls' School; [So What, Now What? How Identity Development Applies in Schools](#)  
Illustrates ways that identity work can be incorporated in schools.

### Essential Steps for Launching Affinity Groups

1. Establishing Buy-In from Leadership: It is essential that the department head or school leader is integrally involved with developing the plan for affinity groups.
2. Evaluating the Context in Broader Organizational Anti-Racism Work: Affinity groups should be developed in the context of broader anti-racism work at a particular school or department. This continuum is a way to assess the current stage of that work:
  - Bread for the Journey: An Online Companion to Radical Welcome [Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist, Multicultural Institution](#)



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- National Juvenile Justice Network; [Anti-Racist Organizational Development](#)  
This page provides resources for anti-racist organizational development.
3. **Selecting Facilitators and Planning Collaboratively:** The ideal affinity group facilitators are skilled at group facilitation, demonstrate a well-developed understanding of racism, and have strong existing relationships with potential participants or the ability to build those relationships. Affinity group facilitators should meet to form a common overarching vision and implementation plan for their independent and collective work, including regular opportunities to debrief together (without violating participants' confidentiality).
- [Teaching Tolerance; Toolkit for Making Space](#)  
This toolkit describes how affinity groups help students of Color to be seen and heard, and provides step-by-step recommendations on how to launch or revamp student affinity groups. This resource can be adapted for staff affinity groups.
  - [Giddens School; Affinity Group Facilitators Training](#)  
This slide presentation was used to prepare affinity group facilitators at the Giddens School in Seattle, WA.
  - [Intergroup Resources: Facilitation Skills](#)  
A helpful guide to facilitation skills in the context of affinity group work.
  - [People of Color Caucus Facilitator's Guide](#); American Friends Service Committee  
Structural guidance for a caucus or affinity group meeting.
  - [SessionLab; Essential Facilitation Skills for an Effective Facilitator](#)  
Provides useful facilitation tools, though not in the specific context of affinity group work.
4. **Clarifying Membership Guidelines:** Affinity group membership is based on self-identification. Ask people what group or groups they would like to join; never assume you know how someone identifies. Some people with mixed heritage may want to join more than one group (ideally, groups should be scheduled at non-overlapping times for this reason). Sometimes it is helpful to have a separate affinity group or breakout sessions within an affinity group for people of mixed heritage.



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However, it is important to clarify that these groups are not intended for those who want to learn more about someone else's identity group, or learn how to advocate for another group. Affinity groups are for people who share a common identity.

5. **Setting Norms for Affinity Group Meetings:** It is essential for affinity groups to set norms or ground rules at the start, and continue to remind participants of the norms as needed. This will give the facilitator(s) the opportunity to create and maintain a group culture most likely to lead to safety, openness, connection, and learning.
  - [Culture Connecting; Addressing Race Relations in the 21st Century](#)  
Information on norms for engaging in conversations about racism and privilege.
  - [Advancing Racial Equity in Schools; Establishing Norms](#)  
Provides an example of group norms adapted from Singleton & Linton's Courageous Conversations model.
  - [Iowa State University; White Fragility: Book Discussion Ground Rules](#)  
An example of ground rules established for discussions on the topic of race.
  - Catalyst; [Conversations Ground Rules Infographic](#)  
A one-page infographic outlining useful ground rules for conversations on any challenging topic (not specific to issues of race).
6. **Following Up:** It is useful to bring all affinity group facilitators together periodically to share successes and challenges, communicate lessons learned, elevate themes, consider intergroup collaboration of various kinds, and calibrate with broader anti-racist organizational change efforts. Some or all affinity groups may decide to take specific action.

### Resources and Best Practices for Affinity Groups for People of Color

Affinity groups for people of Color provide safe spaces of support and relief. Participants can discuss and address lived experiences with internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism, and how these experiences affect them personally and professionally. Affinity groups for people of Color can give participants an opportunity to discuss and build capacity for anti-racist work, deepen their understanding of patterns of White culture, privilege, and supremacy, and to build relationships and solidarity.

Sometimes, affinity groups for people of Color choose not to adhere to a highly structured agenda, preferring to focus on simply being together and sharing experiences. Other groups



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may opt to focus on collective study, such as reading and discussing books about the history and current reality of how racism impacts people with that particular identity. Others focus on action: goal setting, implementation, and leveraging the power of the collective voice.

- The Arrow; [Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People](#)  
This article discusses why people of Color need their own affinity group spaces.
- [Sample Agenda: BPS Black/African-American School Leader Affinity Group](#)  
These slides provide an outline of the agenda for an affinity group developed by Gene Roundtree, headmaster of the Snowden International School, in June 2020.
- [The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)  
This resource from the [Dismantling Racism Workbook](#) lists the characteristics of White supremacist culture, and how it shows up in institutions and organizations.
- CompassPoint; [Race Caucusing in an Organizational Context: A POC's Experience](#)  
In this blog post, Kad Smith shares what he learned from facilitating a caucus for people of Color.
- [Internalizations](#)  
This resource offers a way to explore how internalized racism operates.
- Race: The Power of An Illusion  
This three-part PBS documentary details the role that racism has played in history and societal structures, and the pseudoscience of race.
  - [Part 1: The Difference Between Us](#) (Full Video)
  - [Part 2: The Stories Will Tell](#) (Abbreviated)
  - [Part 3: The House We Live In](#) (Full Video)
  - [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Perspectives on the Value of Black and Brown Lives](#)  
This resource is a collection of videos, and commentary that could be used to frame discussions in Black and Brown affinity spaces.
- Roots of Justice: [The Wisdom of Caucusing for People of Color](#)  
Discusses specific values for people of Color when convening.

Resources and Best Practices for Anti-Racist Affinity Groups for White People



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Anti-racist affinity groups for White people are an opportunity to develop their understanding of the historical and current realities of how internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism manifest; to face their indoctrination and participation in White supremacy; and become increasingly effective at disrupting racism, applying racial equity strategies, and building authentic relationships with people of Color. These affinity groups are a place for White people to take responsibility for their own learning.

- The Arrow: Going to the Root: [How White Caucuses Contribute to Racial Justice](#)  
Why it is important to participate in White anti-racist affinity groups or “caucuses.”
- Sample Agenda: [BPS White School Leaders Committed to Anti-Racism](#)  
Sample agenda for an initial meeting of a White affinity group, developed by principals Michael Baulier and Julia Bott in June 2020, a week after George Floyd’s murder.
- Sample Agenda: [BPS White Central Office Staff Challenging Racism](#)  
Sample agenda for a White anti-racist group held for Central Office staff the week after George Floyd’s murder. Led by Becky Shuster, participants included some employees with deep experience with anti-racist affinity group work and others new to the work.
- Sample Curriculum: [4 Session Affinity Group for White Parents and Staff at the Mendell](#)  
During SY 2019-20, White parents and staff at the Mendell School participated in a pilot anti-racist affinity group series. This document provides the four session agendas.
- [Building Anti-Racist White Educators](#) (BARWE)  
Resources produced by a group of district and charter school educators in Philadelphia.
- [Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites](#) (CARW)  
After the transformative dialogue initiated by people of Color that followed the 2001 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, White folks formed the CARW.
- Diversity Best Practices; [Five Ways an Anti-Racist White Caucus/Affinity Group Supports Diversity and Inclusion](#)  
How White caucuses or affinity groups help White leaders become more self-aware and increase their knowledge of the dynamics of race and allyship.
- [Helm’s White Racial Identity Development Model](#)  
The White Racial Identity Model was developed by psychologist Janet Helms in 1990.



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- Perspectives on Urban Education: [Becoming an Anti-Racist White Ally: How a White Affinity Group Can Help](#)  
How a White student affinity group helps participants understand their racial identities and work to become effective anti-racist allies.
- Social Justice Training Institute; [Facilitating White Caucuses](#)  
Provides a structure for how to facilitate a caucus or affinity group meeting.
- [Tips for Creating Effective White Caucus Groups](#); Craig Elliott  
How to set up an effective White caucus or affinity group.
- White Anti-Racism Affinity Groups: [I Used to Be a Skeptic, But Now I'm an Evangelist](#)  
How a White man moved from being a skeptic of White identity work to a believer.

### Resources and Best Practices for Interracial Conversations in Staff or Community Meetings

For various reasons, such as resistance to affinity groups, lack of facilitators with the needed knowledge and skills, or the urgency of particular triggering events, a school or department may choose to begin with interracial discussion without first holding affinity groups. Generally, the same six essential steps provided above for launching affinity groups apply, including establishing buy-in from leadership, evaluating the organizational change context, selecting highly skilled facilitators, setting clear norms, and ensuring follow up.

Some additional tips for staff or community meetings for people of all racial and ethnic identities include:

- Ideally, have two co-facilitators who represent two of the largest demographic groups represented in the meeting. The co-facilitators should consciously plan the roles each will take during the meeting. For example, sometimes it is helpful if a White facilitator steps in if a White participant goes off track.
- Define the desired outcomes in advance, ensuring that the participants are ready to engage in respectful, constructive conversation that may be uncomfortable at times. If the White participants have had limited exposure to learning about racism, extra care will be needed to ensure that this is a useful experience for participants of Color.



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- Prioritize the voices of people of Color. Consider using a timer to ensure that none of the participants, particularly White participants, dominate the conversation.
- Consider breaking into small groups based on identity, especially if there will be more than one meeting.
- Avoid making any particular participation mandatory. For example, remind participants they can pass or just share one word for how they are feeling. Discussions that may feel like a relief for White people may feel burdensome to people of Color, and the explicit chance to opt out of responding to every prompt may be important.
- Place the conversation in the context of long-term collective work toward racial equity, including applying the Racial Equity Tool and Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices to the team's or school's work. Share next steps before the conversation closes - and then follow through on those commitments.

If your department or staff are interested in a multi-session interracial dialogues, here are some resources:

- Dozens of BPS schools have held interracial dialogues in partnership with YW Boston for staff, parents, and high school students. More information about their Inclusion Boston program is available [here](#).
- Critical Conversations: [Dialogue Across Racial Divides](#)  
This interracial dialogue project seeks to build understanding across racial divides.
- Crossing Borders Education; [Initiating Interracial Dialogue](#)  
Resources for intentional cross-cultural interactions
- [Dialogue for Affinity Groups: Optional Discussions to Accompany Facing Racism](#)  
A guide to encourage public dialogue and problem solving on the issue of racism
- PBS Interracial: [Honest Conversations](#)  
Documentary featuring the first encounter between Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr. John Hope Franklin.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers





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- [Affinity/Alliance Groups Frequently Asked Questions](#); Seattle Girls' School, Seattle, WA  
This document provides answers to commonly asked questions about affinity groups.
- Roots of Justice: [Building an Effective White Caucus](#)  
Answers questions about the formation of white caucus or affinity groups.