

Leadership Activity: Initiating an Affinity Group

It is important for students to have the opportunity to interact with their peers and not have to explain their backgrounds to the rest of the group. Perhaps you, a teacher, or a student sees a need for an affinity group. While a school leader can guide and support this process, any educator or staff member can take these steps to ensure students have safe, identity-affirming spaces to gather.

Objective: Create or foster a group where students feel safe and supported.

Materials:

- Student interest survey (can be adapted from the appropriate-level “Sense of Belonging Tool” reproducible in the appendix, page 139)
- Staff interest and skills inventory
- Meeting-space access request form
- Markers
- Notebooks
- Snacks

Duration: Allow four to six weeks to initiate a new affinity group, including planning, outreach, and first meeting launch.

Follow these steps.

1. **Assess student interest:** Survey and interview students, asking about their interests, identities, and needs for specific groups.
 - Ask, “If you could create any group at this school where students felt they belonged, what would it be?”
 - Review current student demographics to ensure underrepresented populations are not overlooked.
 - Talk to teachers and staff who may notice unmet student needs.
 - Consider patterns from existing climate or belonging surveys.
2. **Select staff advisers:** Consider who has what interests and the expertise to lead such a group.
 - *Staff*—Identify which staff members could lead an affinity group. They do not have to personally identify with the group members, although that can be a strength. What’s more important is that the adviser can lead with humility, advocate when needed, and support students in planning and reflection.
 - *Outside help*—Consider inviting a community member or former student to serve as a guest mentor and coaching the adult facilitator to create a reflective and culturally responsive space.
 - *Professional development*—Facilitate a brief training on how to advise student groups and develop student leadership.

3. **Establish purpose and goals:** Together with student leaders, the adviser should help articulate why the group exists.
 - What will this group be about?
 - What issues will we explore or act on?
 - How will we know we're making an impact?
4. **Create structure:** Set expectations for how the group will function. This structure should evolve with student input and be responsive to group needs.
 - How are meetings run?
 - How are decisions made?
 - How do new members join?
5. **Provide necessary resources:** Determine meeting spaces, technology needs, and other supports.
 - Consider input from students and advisers about what will help them feel welcome and equipped.
 - Materials may change depending on events, guest speakers, or projects, so flexibility is key.
6. **Schedule meetings:** Decide when and how often the group will meet. Consider timing and member accessibility (such as transportation).
 - *Regular*—Meetings can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly during designated club time, after school, or during advisory periods.
 - *Flexible*—Some groups may meet during lunch, recess, or breaks. Build in time for guest speakers or planning larger events.