

Starting an Affinity Group

One of the most valuable resources of a nonprofit professional is a peer network. These are the people you call to brainstorm ideas, share successes and try to work through challenges. A great way to meet peers early in your career is through affinity groups.

What is an affinity group? A group of fellow nonprofit professionals who meet from time to time to talk about something they share in common. They might work in the same sector or have the same job title. They might live in the same region or have insights about a role that's on your list of career aspirations. Whatever it is you share in common, these are people who relate to the many tactical and strategic challenges you juggle in your work as a professional. These are your people.

Suggestions for creating a successful affinity group:

1. **Make it fun and welcoming**– we all have enough meetings to attend so try and think of ways you can be creative.
2. **Networking is key** – the value in affinity groups lies in the peer network. Incorporating a little bit of structured learning with a lot of group discussion gives attendees a chance to get to know each other, learn and build community.
3. **Confidentiality** – encourage a space where failures as well as successes can be shared. A good tip is to have a rule that ideas (both good and bad) can be shared outside the room but details of people and organizations are cannot.
4. **Free** (or very cheap) – keeping the price point free or very low will encourage greater attendance. You will never have 100% participation at every meeting so removing barriers is a good thing. Do this by meeting at participant's offices, coffee shops, libraries, parks, etc.
5. **Have 1-2 organizers per year** – there is some coordination that is involved, so assigning that to designated individuals for a year will maintain the continuity of the group.
6. **Keep logistics simple** – find ways that communication and logistics can be streamlined. Use a free listserv so that one person doesn't have all the emails in their personal inbox. Set the day/time at the same time each month or quarter. Use the same location or create a pre-determined schedule.

Good luck getting your affinity group started! Once you are set, contact AFP Advancement Northwest to be added to the list of affinity groups in Washington State listed on the website at <http://www.afpadvancementnw.org/finding-your-community>.