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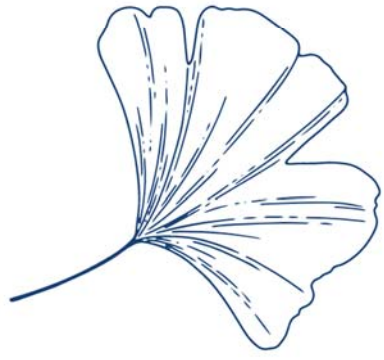# Staff Affinity Group Handbook

Welcome and Introduction to Staff Affinity Groups

Thank you for your interest in Staff Affinity Groups at Mississippi University for Women. These protocols and procedures are intended to provide general guidelines for staff members interested in starting Affinity Groups.

These groups connect members of Mississippi University for Women staff with each other and strengthens employee relationships with the institution. The primary focus of the Affinity Groups is to help advance and support inclusion and diversity goals throughout the institution, and to assist the University with the recruitment, retention, and development of its employees.

By empowering its members, these connections will aid in promoting and ensuring an environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

Please note that this document will be reviewed and revised continually, and it is subject to change. If you need more information or have questions, please contact the Staff Affinity Group Coordinators (current Staff Council President and Vice President):

Ashley Hammack
Staff Council President
aahammack@muw.edu or 662-241-6092

Jewel Bishop
Staff Council Vice President
jbishop1@muw.edu or 662-329-7190

Mississippi University for Women Mission

Employee organization of Affinity Groups is encouraged to provide opportunities for individuals to become more involved in campus life and to foster a culture of respect and inclusive community. This purpose reflects the intentions of President Miller's Strategic Priority to create a welcoming, diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus climate for all.

Staff Council created Staff Affinity Groups to coordinate and assist staff members in making connections across campus to build supportive safe havens, grow interests and hatch ideas, and spotlight achievements and accomplishments to improve University recruitment, retention, and promotion.

Affinity Groups are voluntary, employee-led groups that express the values of mutual understanding and shared community. Affinity Groups encourage inclusive membership to learn about others and provide support for similar interests and concerns. Affinity Groups do not exclude on the basis of sex, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, mental illness or ability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, sex characteristics, religious, creed, or individual political opinions.

Staff may use these safe spaces to support, understand, and share resources to connect with diverse members of Mississippi University for Women across colleges, units, or job classifications. Affinity Groups offer individuals numerous opportunities to become more enthusiastic and involved contributors to campus life.

Objectives:

1. Build and Create a Sense of Community
   - Develop a community and support network that nurtures and values the contribution of its staff;
   - Play a role in fostering a community of support, respect and advancement;
   - Broadening cultural awareness on campus;
   - Recognizes the beneficial connection between excellence and diversity and pursues activities to embrace equitable access for learning and growth
2. Advocate for, and Support the Recruitment, Retention and Advancement of Staff
   - Support the growth and professional development of staff
   - Assist the University in the area of recruiting, engaging and retaining employees
   - Promote and celebrate Mississippi University for Women staff contributions and achievements
3. Network and Collaborate
   - Provide opportunities for social and professional networking between staff
   - Be a collective voice for the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Revised 3/24/2022

Goal: To encourage the formation of employee organization of affinity groups to engage and connect Mississippi University for Women staff members across a variety of interests, identities, and support groups.

Affinity Group Categories

Affinity Groups categories help to focus interest while providing an open structure to accommodate a broad range of affinities. The Affinity Group categories are 1) identity-based, 2) professional communities, and 3) special interest and activity groups. We encourage staff and faculty to be involved in many of these Affinity Groups as they are a great way to meet new colleagues outside of one's home department, find mentors/mentees, learn new skills, and develop leadership skills.

1). Identity-based Affinity Groups honor the diversity of our employees, while also offering a safe space on campus to share, support, and learn about each other.

2). Professional Community Affinity Groups assemble to promote the interests and professional development in specific fields. Members of Professional Communities share knowledge and expertise to develop and refine skills beneficial to each person's daily practice. Professional Communities believe in on-going leadership training and mentorship to enhance progress and growth in one's career.

3). Special Interest and Activity Affinity Groups provide camaraderie and encouragement with like-minded peers. These groups form through the pursuit of activities centered around sports, hobbies and crafts, or to make connections with others experiencing similar life situations.

Affinity Group Leader Expectations:

Each Affinity Group should have a defined Leadership Team to include:

- Chair – this individual leads and oversees the function and meetings of the group.
    - Help ensure that the established guidelines for the Affinity Groups are supported and outcomes are successful.
    - Act as the main contact between Staff Council and the affinity group members. In most cases that means at least monthly communication reporting on activities.
    - Understand and uphold the university's branding
    - Schedule regular meetings, reserve meeting spaces, and communicate to campus when meetings or other events are being held
- Vice Chair – individual(s) that assist and/or act in the absence of the Chair to oversee the function of the group. The Vice Chair helps ensure that the group is supported and outcomes are successful and other duties assigned

Operating Principles

1. Members must be employed by Mississippi University for Women.

2. Membership and participation in Affinity Groups shall be entirely voluntary. Mississippi University for Women officers, administrators, or any one in a supervisory capacity, or members of the group may NOT coerce any employee into joining or participating.

3. Membership in Affinity Groups must be open to any and all interested staff.

4. Participation in Affinity Groups events must be open to any and all interested employees.

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5. Staff members may join as many Affinity Groups as they wish. Staff Affinity Group members are eligible to request for release time to attend Affinity Group meetings up to 2 (two) hours monthly. Additional release time requested may be considered and granted at the discretion of the supervisor.

6. Affinity Groups must schedule meetings to be held during standard operating hours, Monday-Friday, 8 AM-5 PM. Any gatherings outside of these hours is considered a social event, and attendance will not qualify as work hours.

Forming Affinity Groups

1. Those interested in forming an Affinity Group must complete an online registration form found at https://rfwccl.wufoo.com/forms/affinity-group-registration-form/.

2. Each proposal must include the following:

   a. Proposed name of group

   b. Names of coordinators (at least 2 required) with contact information

   c. Description of Affinity Group, including a brief statement of what you want the group to represent and accomplish, its purpose, and reason for existing

   d. Value of Affinity Group: clearly defined benefits that MUW can expect as a result of your group being formed

3. Once submitted, the MUW Staff Council will review your proposal and notify you of approval status. If there are any follow-up questions, the Staff Affinity Group Coordinators will reach out to the coordinators listed.

Meeting Guidelines

1. Each Affinity Group must hold at least 2 meetings annually.

2. Meetings are encouraged to have an agenda and to make decisions consensus.

3. Notes should be taken at Affinity Group business meetings. Note takers should reproduce and distribute the notes in a timely fashion. A copy of the notes for each Affinity Group meeting must be submitted to the Affinity Group coordinating committee (Staff Council).

4. All marketing and promotional materials should be submitted to the Affinity Group coordinating committee (Staff Council) and University Relations for approval.

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Dissolving Affinity Groups

Affinity Groups may be dissolved when:

1. The group chooses to dissolve itself. Such dissolution should be reported to one of the Staff Affinity Groups coordinators.

2. An Affinity Group specifically formed to undertake one or more short-term project(s) has completed the task.

3. The Affinity Group does not submit required reports to Staff Council.

4. The Affinity Group coordinator concludes that the group no longer has clear relevance or has become insufficiently accountable for its activities, or present a legal or ethical liability to Mississippi University for Women.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Staff Affinity Group Coordinators listed on page 2 of this document.

This handbook was derived from the University of Hartford Affinity Group Handbook and edited to align with Mississippi University for Women's mission and vision.

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