

# A Guide for Starting a Faculty or Staff Affinity Group or Employee Resource Group at APSU



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Office of Institutional Culture

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# Starting an Affinity Group/ERG

Guide provided by the Office of Institutional Culture

Affinity Groups or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are designed to build an inclusive environment for Austin Peay State University (APSU) employees from various employment groups, with particular attention to employees from historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds. Affinity Groups or ERGs are established and operated by employees with modest support from the Office of Institutional Culture (OIC).

*“Employee Resource Groups are a powerful part of any organization.”*

*Farzana Nayani, Author*

## HOW TO START AN AFFINITY GROUP/EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP (ERG)

Thank you for your interest in seeking official recognition of an affinity group/employee resource group from the Office of Institutional Culture. The OIC operates under the guidance of the President of Austin Peay State University with the goal of connecting APSU faculty and staff with individuals who share common interests or backgrounds. Affinity Groups/ERGs are designed to build an inclusive environment for APSU employees from various employment groups, with particular attention to employees from historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds. Examples of Affinity Groups/ERGs on campus include the Women’s Group; the Black Faculty Staff Association; G.R.A.C.E., Grief, Restoration and Caring Employees; and the LGBTQ+ Faculty Staff Association; with other groups adding every day. Affinity Groups/ERGs serve to advance the university’s employee experience through strategic goal two in pillar three.

**Affinity Groups/ERGs are established and operated by employees with modest support from the Office of Institutional Culture. To receive support, all Affinity Groups/ERGs must have:**

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- *A Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary*

**A roster listing at least 10 members who actively participate in Affinity Group/ERG meetings.**

- *Affinity Groups/ERGs are strongly encouraged to have representation from both faculty and staff.*

**Have bylaws with a plan of rotating leadership between APSU faculty and staff (if applicable).**

- *The purpose of requiring bylaws is so that applicants have a mechanism to share with us how they operate. Applicant organizations are free to write bylaws that are appropriate for them, in whatever format they see fit. (The Affinity Group/ERG Bylaw template is merely a sample to be helpful.)*

**Have planned events or activities that show how Affinity groups/ERG efforts will support the primary objectives of the Office of Institutional Culture and the University Strategic Plan.**

**Each year continuing Affinity Groups/ERGs applying for renewal must also provide a narrative summary form describing their events and activities for the past year, as well as descriptions of how the group and their activities have served their mission and goals. This form will be filed in the OIC.**

- *The OIC will work with any groups worried about the membership requirement to ensure they are not prohibited from participating.*

**In addition, Affinity Groups/ERG leaders must agree to participate in new employee orientation if applicable, and in periodic cross-ERG meetings and events. ODI reserves the right to approve and continue recognition of Affinity Groups/ERGs based on existing resources, level of participation, and adherence to APSU policies and procedures.**

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***Please note:*** The Affinity Groups/ERGs are not bargaining agents for any units, including on terms and conditions of employment, or act in any official capacity for the University. Please complete the application by contacting the Office of Institutional Culture to begin the process of establishing or reaffirming an Affinity Group/ERG.





### **What are Affinity Groups/ERGs?**

Affinity Groups/ERGs are designed to build an inclusive environment for APSU employees from various employment groups, with particular attention to employees from historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds. Examples of Affinity Groups/ERGs at APSU and other universities include but are not limited to: the Latinx Faculty Staff Association, the Black Faculty Staff Association, the Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Faculty Staff Association, the Pride Faculty Staff Association, the First-Generation College Student Faculty and Staff Association, etc.

### **Why does APSU think Affinity Groups/ERGs are important to creating an inclusive environment that supports an institutional culture of appreciation and belonging?**

The growing body of research and best practices literature suggests that Affinity Groups/ERGs have the potential to foster community building, stronger employee ties to the university, opportunities for professional development, and leadership experiences. When Affinity Groups/ERGs are employee-founded, designed, and managed but administratively recognized and supported, they can contribute greatly to creating a more welcoming and inclusive work environment, one that supports and celebrates appreciation and belonging.

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## **How do I get involved/What do I need to do to join an existing Affinity Group/ERG?**

You can indicate your interest in joining any existing Affinity Group/ERG by emailing the leadership of those groups (the contact information can be found by contacting the Office of Institutional Culture or visiting the Institutional Committee Website and clicking the link on then on the specific Affinity Group/ERG you are looking for) or by emailing LaNeeça R. Williams (Chief of Institutional Culture & Title IX Coordinator) at [Williamslr@apsu.edu](mailto:Williamslr@apsu.edu). You will then be placed on a membership roster and in some cases, an email list.

## **How much work is involved if I decide to join an Affinity Group/ERG?**

The participation levels vary widely and depend on the Affinity Group/ERG and also on your role/interest. Feel free to attend a meeting or contact the Affinity Group/ERG leadership to inquire.

## **What do I need to do if I'd like to propose a new ERG?**

A good place to start is to discuss your proposed group with LaNeeça R. Williams (Chief of Institutional Culture & Title IX Coordinator) by emailing your interest and queries to [Williamslr@apsu.edu](mailto:Williamslr@apsu.edu) or by setting up a meeting. A meeting is preferred as this can facilitate a more detailed discussion to answer your questions and to help ensure that your group is positioned for success. Ultimately you will need to recruit colleagues who agree to be listed on your membership roster, identify leaders/officers, articulate a mission to include goals and by-laws, and apply. For the application form and for information about deadlines, check our OIC webpage or contact the office on how to start an affinity group/employee resource group.

## **What kind of "Shared Identity" is appropriate for a new Affinity Group/ERG?**

Priority will be given to Affinity Group/ERG groups that are inherently designed to advance the mission of the Office of Institutional Culture by contributing to the recruitment of faculty and staff who are reflective of the diverse students and communities served by APSU. In addition, Affinity Groups/ERGs should foster an

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environment of inclusion for faculty and staff from underrepresented groups with the goal of enhancing the career pathways of faculty and staff from these underrepresented groups. Furthermore, through visibility, awareness, and/or mentorship, Affinity Groups/ERGs should work to bolster the pipeline of diverse students through the pathways of higher education by cultivating relationships with the local community in an effort to advance the well-being of diverse individuals and communities. Groups that are not designed with these goals in mind, or whose mission, structure, and/or by-laws are inherently exclusive or counter to the goals of inclusivity.

**Do I have to be a member of an underrepresented, historically disadvantaged, or minority group to participate in Affinity Group/ERG?**

ALL Affinity Groups/ERGs are inherently inclusive. This means that while their mission might focus on the cultural issues of a particular group of people around a shared identity, all are welcome! Affinity Groups/ERGs strongly encourage participation from anyone in the APSU community. They especially welcome “allies” from groups that claim other social identities but who share the same commitment, values, and goals as the members of the particular Affinity Group/ERG.

**Does the APSU administration have plans for specific Affinity Groups/ERGs?**

No. ALL Affinity Groups/ERGs are employee-founded, designed, and managed. The APSU administration does not create specific Affinity Groups/ERGs; however, through the application process, APSU does officially recognize and provide structural support for those Affinity Groups/ERGs that meet the eligibility requirements.

Why must Affinity Groups/ERGs have articulated their mission, goals, and by-laws? In order to warrant official recognition and support by APSU, it is important that Affinity Groups/ERGs can articulate a level of organization and thus sustainability. One way to ensure this is to ask Affinity Groups/ERGs to provide documentation in the form of the application (and renewal paperwork). APSU does not provide evaluative comment or feedback on the choices made in the content or format of the Affinity Groups/ERGs’ mission, goals, or by-laws (other than determining whether they meet eligibility requirements); that stated, APSU does require Affinity Groups/ERGs to keep APSU administration informed and updated in order to provide better support and services.

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Each Affinity Group/ERG is responsible for making decisions about governance and structure.

### **Why do Affinity Groups/ERGs have to apply every year for renewal?**

The growing body of literature documenting best practices for Affinity Groups/ERGs suggests that a regular renewal process helps Affinity Groups/ERGs to stay active and revisit their goals and priorities from year to year. In addition, a renewal process provides opportunities for rotating leadership and facilitates communication between the APSU administration and employee groups.





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**BYLAWS\***  
**Sample Bylaws**

**ARTICLE 1 – Name**

The name of this Affinity Group/Employee Resource Group (ERG) shall be the \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association).

**ARTICLE 2 – Mission and Objectives**

Section 1. The mission of the \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association is to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment at APSU for individuals interested in issues facing the \_\_\_\_\_ community.

Section 2: There are three primary objectives of the \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association.

These objectives include:

- a) Recruiting \_\_\_\_\_ faculty and staff who are reflective of the diverse students and communities served by APSU;
- b) Fostering an environment of inclusion for \_\_\_\_\_ faculty and staff;
- c) Enhancing the career pathways of \_\_\_\_\_ faculty and staff

**ARTICLE 3 – Meetings**

Section 1. Annual Meeting - The \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association will hold an annual meeting to conduct elections of officers. The meeting will be announced at least \_\_\_\_\_ weeks in advance.

Section 2. Regular Meetings - The \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association will meet monthly at a time and date that is set in advance by the association's leadership. Meetings will occur at times that increase the likelihood that all faculty and staff members can attend. All official meetings should be announced at least seven days in

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advance. The body must have at least 10 members present to have quorum for meetings.

Section 3. Meeting Minutes – The secretary of the \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association will document all formal business that occurs at the meeting. Meeting minutes must be sent to all members within seven days of the meeting and must be approved at the following meeting.

#### **ARTICLE 4 – Officers Section**

1. Leadership. The \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association shall have a Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. Each Officer must be a member of the Affinity Group/ERG. No individual can serve more than \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive one-year terms in the Office of Chair or as

Vice Chair. However, service as Chair or as Vice Chair shall not count against this term limit. All Officers must be in good standing at the time of election.

Section 2. Chair. The Chair shall preside over Affinity Group/ERG meetings and serve as the official liaison between the Affinity Group/ERG and other University entities. The Chair shall appoint all leaders of special committees with the approval of the membership. The Chair also represents the \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty and Staff Association at public meetings and events, university programs, and other authorized occasions. The Chair should rotate between faculty and staff, with neither group serving more than \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive terms.

Section 3. Vice Chair. The Vice-Chair shall support the Chair in presiding over Affinity Group/ERG meetings and serves as a representative between the Affinity Group/ERG and other University entities in the absence of the Chair. The Vice Chair is responsible for the collection and distribution of all monies as well as keeping accurate financial accounting of all Affinity Group/ERG monies and resources. The Vice Chair also assumes the duties of the secretary in their absence.

Section 4. Secretary. The Secretary will record, maintain, and distribute minutes for each meeting with the membership. The Secretary is also responsible for handling,

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receiving, and retaining any administrative paperwork between the Affinity Group/ERG and the University, including both formal and informal correspondence. The Secretary serves in the absence of the Vice Chair when not present.

Section 5. Participation. Officers are responsible for attending Affinity Group/ERG monthly meetings. All Officers are members of the executive board. The executive board has the authority to carry out the provisions of these bylaws and to expend funds in line with the wishes of the membership. An officer who is absent from three (3) consecutive meetings without approval from the Chair must vacate their role. Officers may be removed by a  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote of the active membership.

## **ARTICLE 5 – Membership and Elections**

Section 1. Membership in the Affinity Group/ERG is open to all individuals of any race who have a commitment to issues facing \_\_\_\_\_ faculty, staff, and students. To maintain active membership, faculty and staff are responsible for \_\_\_\_\_ membership fees (dues) per year. Dues should be paid within 30 days of the beginning of the new academic year.

Section 2. Elections. All members with updated dues can vote in elections. Votes are affected by a simple majority vote of active members. The bylaws can only be changed with a vote from at least two-thirds of the active membership.

## **RATIFIED ON (Date Bylaws Accepted)**