

## AGO POLICY

### I.01

## AFFINITY GROUPS

**Contact:** *Deputy In Charge of the Diversity Advisory Committee*

**Cross References:** *RCW 42.52; Diversity/Inclusion Policy; Discrimination Complaint Policy and Procedure; Non-Discrimination / Equal Opportunity Policy; Reasonable Accommodation of Persons With Disabilities Policy; Sexual Harassment Policy; Language Access for Limited English Proficient Policy; Use of State Resources Policy; Electronic Mail Use Policy; Telephone Policy; Bar Association and Legal Professional Association Activities Policy; Overtime/Compensatory Time Policy*

**Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_

### I. POLICY STATEMENT:

**Employee affinity groups provide forums for employees to gather and share ideas about matters that affect their professional development and work at the AGO.** The AGO recognizes that such Affinity Groups foster employee development, contribute to the AGO's commitment to diversity, strengthen networking and cohesiveness across the agency, and promote career and professional development. Affinity groups are an important resource to the AGO in other ways, as well. They provide important feedback to management and assist with efforts to attract and retain highly qualified job candidates.

Because of the benefits to the workplace and contribution to the AGO's diversity program and core values, affinity groups are welcomed and provided access to the resources listed in this policy.

#### A. AFFINITY GROUP FORMATION AND ORGANIZATION

Affinity groups are employee-formed and employee-led. Affinity groups must:

- Be formed around a shared characteristic or common interest that can affect professional development. Examples include national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, being a working parent, and caring for aging family members while working.
- Be open to all AGO employees and volunteers. As required by state and federal law and AGO policy, affinity groups may not discriminate on the basis of race,

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color, age, religion, veteran's status, sex, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability.

- Adhere to all AGO policies.
- Be composed of only AGO employees and volunteers. Guest speakers may be invited to affinity group meetings.
- As required by the Executive Ethics Act, affinity groups may not use AGO resources to support or oppose any ballot proposition or candidate for public office. Additionally, affinity groups may not be formed to promote or benefit any private company or organization.

Employees interested in forming an affinity group should contact the *Deputy in Charge of the Diversity Advisory Committee* about presenting their request to the AGO Operations Committee. Employees must articulate how the group's formation relates to professional development. If the Operations Committee agrees, the group will be welcomed as an affinity group and bound by AGO policies and use of AGO resources as listed in this policy.

## **B. AGO RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO AFFINITY GROUPS**

Affinity groups provide a forum for employees to gather and share information about their work and professional development. Some group members will informally mentor others, enhancing employee professional development and contributing to AGO career success. Many will also provide informal training at affinity group meetings or, more formally, will work with the Human Resources Training Manager to participate in or offer more formal agency training. Affinity groups each have representation on the AGO Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC), and are encouraged to communicate suggestions for improvements in AGO policy or practices to management through the DAC or by contacting a member of the Leadership Team or other manager. Affinity group members may also be contacted by AGO management or recruitment and asked to help the AGO reach particular audiences or expand the applicant pool during employee recruitment activity.

Affinity groups are welcomed, but not supervised, by the AGO. Their meetings and other efforts positively affect the work environment and contribute to AGO core values and strategic planning goals, including helping to recruit and retain a high quality, highly skilled workforce (providing employees with the skills, knowledge and tools they need to be successful, and promoting diversity, inclusiveness and cultural competence across the organization).

The AGO has determined that affinity group meetings, informal mentoring, and training activities enhance employee professional development, contribute to one's professional role in the AGO, and are reasonably related to a number of other official AGO purposes. In accordance with *Use of State Resources Policy*, affinity groups are authorized to make use of the following state resources for the listed purposes:

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### Physical Space:

- AGO shared space, including conference and break rooms may be used for group meetings on a space available basis. Because shared space is limited and priority for use must be given to the performance of legal business (e.g., holding a deposition), it is possible that a scheduled affinity group meeting will be bumped when a room is necessary for legal business.
- Other AGO space (generally office space or cubicles) may be used when providing mentoring.

### Employee Time:

- Meetings, informal mentoring and training may occur during regular working hours.
- Meeting Preparation: Employees preparing meeting agenda and/or training materials may use work time to prepare.
- Supervisor approval is not required to join an affinity group. An employee's participation may not interfere with performance of the employee's assigned work. Where an employee's performance is affected by participation, supervisors may limit use of work time on affinity group activities in order to improve performance.
- Employees who are overtime-eligible are reminded that any time spent engaged in AGO-sponsored activities constitutes work time. AGO-sponsored activities are activities in which an AGO supervisor asks an employee to participate. Examples include providing employee training (e.g., CLEs) and recruitment efforts (e.g., attending a job fair). Such work, like all assigned work performed by overtime eligible employees, is subject to the requirements of the Overtime/Compensatory Time Policy.

### Computer, Electronic Mail, and Telephones:

- Affinity Group meetings may be conducted using teleconference, GoToMeeting, or Skype to facilitate participation of employees across the state.
- AGO computers may be used to prepare meeting agenda and/or training materials.
- Email and phones may be used to hold meetings by teleconference, convey information about upcoming meetings, communicate with one another between meetings, communicate with speakers or potential speakers, and provide advice and mentoring to others.

The AGO anticipates that some affinity groups and/or affinity group members will ask to participate, or be invited to participate, in the development of AGO-sponsored training programs and in AGO outreach and recruitment. When affinity group members are

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involved in such AGO management approved training or recruitment and outreach they are performing AGO assigned work. As such, they will be able to make use of the same resources provided to any employee performing the assigned tasks.

## II. RESPONSIBILITIES

The *AGO* and *Division Management* will make resources available for affinity group use as outlined in this policy.

The *Operations Committee* will review and act upon employee requests to form affinity groups.

*Employees* and *volunteers* wishing to form an affinity group must present their request, which must articulate how the proposed group enhances professional development, consistent with policy guidelines on formation and organization, to *Deputy in Charge of Diversity Advisory Committee* for submission to the *Operations Committee*.

*Employees* and *volunteers* participating in affinity groups must comply with all AGO policies.

*Employees* and *volunteers* participating in affinity group activities must ensure that this participation does not interfere with their regular work assignments.

*Overtime eligible employees* must ensure that time spent participating in formal, AGO-sponsored activities is performed in accordance with the Overtime/Compensatory Time Policy.

*Supervisors* are responsible to ensure that a supervisee's participation in affinity group meetings and activities does not interfere with the performance of that individual's regularly assigned duties.

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