

## AFFINITY GROUPS AT ISU – RECOGNIZING “CONNECTIONS”

1. What is an employee affinity group?
2. Value to University and individual participant
3. Purpose
4. Distinctive characteristics
5. Process
6. Ingredients for successf

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## AFFINITY GROUPS AT ISU – RECOGNIZING “CONNECTIONS”

1. **What is an employee affinity group?**
  - An affinity group is a group of people who share interests, issues, and a common bond or background, and offer support for each other
  - Typically members are individuals from groups historically and/or currently under-represented in the institution
  - Common synonyms include: resource group, network group, professional network, special emphasis group
  - Rationale comes from an acknowledgement that “one size” does not fit “all”
  - Names reflect the culture of the organization; thus ISU affinity groups will be called “Connections”
  - Groups form by employee request and organizing effort and may reflect:
    - groups designated by descent: e.g., African American or Black; Latinos/as or Hispanic; Asian American; Native American; people of mixed racial/ethnic ancestry;
    - groups designated by other identities: e.g., International (i.e., born and holding citizenship outside of the US); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ); Veterans; and People living with disabilities
2. **Value to University and individual participant**
  - *Connections* groups enhance communication between the University and all employees.
  - *Connections* groups help build a favorable reputation for the University within diverse communities.

- *Connections* can make a difference in diversity recruitment and retention efforts. *Connections* can provide referrals and be featured in testimonials and on diversity and career web sites.
- *Connections* enhance marketing and outreach initiatives and ISU's external communication (to everyone from prospective students and families to residents of the Wabash Valley and state legislators in Indianapolis).
- *Connections* can serve as diversity ambassadors by initiating branded events and networking opportunities.
- *Connections* can mentor and improve career development programs for all.
- *Connections* provide opportunity for authenticity.
- *Connections* contradict isolation and counteract marginalization.
- *Connections* advance our strategic plan goals regarding climate and faculty diversity.
- *Connections* facilitate people connecting!

### 3. Purpose

- *Connections* are outcome-based
  - Recruitment - growing ISU's visibility and presence in under-represented and under-reached communities
  - Retention
  - Promotion and lateral moves
  - Job satisfaction
  - Feedback to administration, to Council on Diversity, to Office of Diversity, to Office of Affirmative Action
  - Mutual support

### 4. Distinctive characteristics

- **What an affinity group is NOT**
  - *Connections* are not a forum for disgruntled employees; neither are they book clubs
  - *Connections* are not exempt from any University policy or procedure
  - *Connections* do not have any governance role
  - *Connections* do not supplant the Diversity Council
- **Support is crucial to the success of *Connections***
  - *Connections* groups will be supported with model reciprocal communication practices
  - *Connections* will be championed in administration with solid, unqualified support that includes financial support, organizational resources, and a commitment to stay the course
  - *Connections* leaders will be supported with training

## 5. Process

- Invitation for membership
- Clear expectations for membership
- Clear direction and expectations of leadership including a process for rotating leadership (i.e., leadership appointed for first year, but subsequently selected by group from group)
- Tackle real issues that are central to ISU's goals and objectives
- Develop priorities that are short, medium, and long-term

## 6. Ingredients for success

- Executive leadership and organizational culture that supports, encourages, and engages diversity
- Executive sponsorship and commitment to *Connections* – this includes time and funding promises
- A plan for training and development
- Committed *Connections* leaders and members
- Internal and external returns
- Degree of independence and autonomy
- Trust and open communication