

Forming an Affinity Group

Suggested Agenda for Your First Gathering

Congratulations on forming an affinity group! We hope you're excited to get started. This agenda can be used and adapted for your first meeting. Your meeting will look different depending upon a range of factors, including how well participants already know each other and whether you have already decided to work on a particular direct action or campaign.

If your group has formed to prepare for a particular direct action, you probably don't need this agenda! You can simply take steps to prepare (for guidance on how to prepare for an action with an affinity group, visit <http://bit.ly/KMiSrX>). However, if your group has an open-ended purpose, this agenda may be helpful.

The suggested agenda has three basic components: 1.) getting to know each other, 2.) a discussion about issues and social action, and 3.) a discussion about the group itself – whether it will continue, and if so, what's next. You might not want to do all of the listed activities, but you'll probably want to do cover each of these broad categories in some way.

For facilitation tips, including balancing group participation and timekeeping tips, visit <http://bit.ly/JV1pMo>.

SUMMARY AGENDA

Total time: 90 Minutes

Opening (5)

Activity 1: Common Ground (5)

Activity 2: What Brought You Here Today? (25)

Activity 3: Social Action (25) - *Choose between an open-ended conversation, the "Spectrum Exercise," or both*

Activity 4: What's Next? (25)

Closing (5)

DETAILED AGENDA

Opening (5)

Some groups may want to open with a reading, song, or ritual. Others might skip this.

Invite each person to state their name and where they live; note that we will do longer introductions momentarily

Activity 1: Getting to Know Each Other - Common Ground Exercise (10)

Invite people to stand in a circle.

Read: In order to learn more about one another, I'm going to read some statements. If it's true for you, move into the "common ground" at the center of the circle. If you prefer to not respond to any of the statements, just don't move forward.

- *You were born in this state/region.*
- *Grew up in this state/region.*
- *Were born outside of state/region (ask where).*
- *Were born outside the U.S. (ask where).*
- *You are a parent.*
- *Have kids at home or kids that are still dependent on you.*
- *Have a pet at home.*
- *Have any young people in your life for whom you have a special connection or concern.*
- *Have any older people in your life for whom you have a special connection or concern.*
- *Slept less than seven hours last night.*
- *Watch news on television.*
- *Are a grandparent.*
- *Have lived in this neighborhood for more than 10 years.*
- *Have a vegetable garden.*
- *Have a practical hobby (ask to mention some).*
- *Have an impractical hobby (mention some).*
- *I want to be part of shaping a more hopeful vision for our nation.*

Add others if you wish.

Activity 2: What Brought You Here Today? (25)

Read: We are now going to give folks a chance to talk about what brought them here today. What are your reasons for being here? What do you hope to gain by participating in this group?

Go around the circle and give each person a chance to share. Anyone can pass if they like. Be mindful of time – you might ask each person to speak for no

longer than 2 or 3 minutes. To wrap up, thank the group for sharing, and read or summarize the following:

One of the main changes we need to make is to create stronger communities. A Duke University study found that one in four Americans said they had no one to confide in about personal troubles. Another one in four had only one person to talk to, usually a spouse.

Banding together is one of the best ways to create a stronger social movement and a better world. By working together we can accomplish things that no one person or family can accomplish – like a barn-raising a century ago. This is a ***new story*** that shows how inventive, creative and cooperative we can be, even during hard times.

Activity 3: Social Action (25)

This is a chance to discuss your group's interests in social action. Much of this may have already come up in the go-round. If many people seem interested in a particular topic or campaign (labor rights, the environment, overturning Citizens United), you might simply facilitate a conversation on one or two of these topics. Consider the following questions:

- What do people already know about this issue?
- What actions have people already taken?
- What opportunities for action are coming up?
- What larger networks or campaigns might we connect with?

Another fun way to gauge people's opinions is the "Spectrum Exercise." In this exercise, you hang signs reading "Completely Agree" and "Completely Disagree" on opposite ends of the room. Then say:

On this end of the room, I have put a sign that says "Completely Agree," and on the other end of the room a sign that says "Completely Disagree." Imagine that there is a straight line between the two signs. I am going to read a statement. If you "Completely Disagree," go toward that sign. If you strongly agree, go toward the other sign. If you are in between, stand along the imaginary line to show where you stand in terms of your views and feelings. Make sure everyone forms a single file line. Anyone can choose not to participate for any of the statements.

Statements to Read Aloud:

- *I am interested in working on _____.* [Fill in an issue. Repeat with more issues as needed.]
- *I am comfortable taking direct action.*
- *I am sure that direct action is effective at creating social change.*

- *I am willing to risk arrest for a cause that is important to me.*
- *I would like to support those who risk arrest for an issue that is important to me.*
- *I am more likely to take action if I have the support of a small group.*

Feel free to add other statements that might draw out people's feelings about social action, or ask participants to provide a statement.

Activity 4: What's Next (25)

Assuming your group will continue, here's your chance to figure out what's next. At minimum, you'll want to schedule one more meeting and decide who will facilitate. You might also talk about a longer-term future, including:

- **Decision-making:** Most affinity groups use a consensus decision-making model. Note that consensus is not the same as unanimity! Ask if someone would like to read up on how consensus works for the next meeting. The more people who can read up, the better. See War Resisters' International for guidance at <http://wri-irg.org/node/5139>.
- **Facilitation:** If no one in your group is an experienced facilitator, you might also suggest that a few folks read up on facilitation tips and small group dynamics (see <http://bit.ly/JV1pMo>). Again, the more the better.
- **Issues and Action:** There might already be clarity that the group would like to work on a particular issue or take a certain action. Identify what, if any, next steps can be taken around this.
- **What's Your Group's Name?** You can save this conversation for the next meeting, or have fun jumping into it now!

Closing (5)

Evaluation - It's a great habit to evaluate each session at the end. The facilitator asks the group: *What worked well today*, and *What suggestions do you have for the way we structure future sessions?* This isn't a time to revisit the content of the session, but rather a time to think about how to ensure that future activities work well for the group. When wrapping up, try to solicit positive feedback about the meeting to leave things on a positive note.