

Powering Change: Affinity Groups

What is an Affinity Group? An affinity group is a small group of people who support each other and work together to change the world.

Social activism can be tough work. Acting alone, we may feel powerless to create real change. An affinity group can provide practical support as well as inspiration, motivation, and fun. Your affinity group might work together to prepare for a particular direct action or campaign, or it might stick together for years.



Support and community. Americans are increasingly isolated. Mainstream culture encourages us to be cut-off from each other, relying on money, corporate products, and screen time to fill our needs. Even as activists, we often act as individuals, rather than in solidarity with others.

Forming community is one of the best ways we can undermine consolidated power. Many of us have lost community-building skills, so we can relearn them by being part of a small, supportive group. These skills make us all better activists, organizers, and leaders.

Taking action. Affinity groups support each other in taking “direct action,” such as attending a rally. Members take on different roles so everyone can participate.

It’s fun! In addition to your commitment to social change, your group might share a common interest. You might get together just to have a potlucks and share laughs.

Affinity Groups in Social Movements

From the Spanish Revolution in the 19th century, to the Pledge of Resistance in the 1980s, to the anti-globalization actions of the 2000s, affinity groups have formed an essential part of social movements. Some go by other names, such as consciousness-raising groups in the women’s movement. These small groups power the individuals who take part in them, and so power the movement itself. Small groups power lasting change.

How Can I Form an Affinity Group?

Are you part of a campaign or network? Ask organizers if there is a way you can connect with a small group of others in the network who are nearby. Many campaigns could be significantly strengthened by embedding small groups into their structure.

Or, just think about a handful of folks you have “affinity” with. These should be people who can get together conveniently and who have some shared beliefs. Gather this group at your home over a potluck and talk about what it means to be an affinity group. See ideas for how to structure your initial gathering: <http://bit.ly/Lenede>. See 5 Tips for Forming an Affinity Group: <http://bit.ly/KQTu3A>.