Utilizing Race-Based Affinity Spaces

*White people and [Black, Indigenous] People of Color [(BIPOC)] each have work to do separately and together [with respect to addressing racism]. [Affinity spaces] can provide spaces for people to work within their own racial/ethnic groups. For white people, an [affinity space] provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally on understanding white [dominant] culture and white privilege [often utilizing resources previously created by People of Color] and to increase one's critical analysis around these concepts. A white [affinity space] also puts the onus on white people to teach each other about these ideas, rather than constantly relying on People of Color to teach them. For People of Color, a [affinity space] is [an intentional] place to [gather] with their peers on their experiences of internalized racism, for healing and to work on liberation. ***

*Michael and Conger explain that mixed-race dialogues [about race and racism] are often inappropriate for white people, given that placing white folks in interracial dialogue is like "placing pre-algebra students in a calculus class. White people have so little experience discussing race, relative to their Colleagues of Color, that white people need something akin to a remedial course."** For white people, identifying whiteness and white dominant culture can be a great first step, and a white affinity space can be a great environment for this first step.*

Whether there are a small or large number of People of Color in your community, race-based affinity spaces signal a proactive space of safety and belonging for people of a shared marginalized identity.

We also encourage you to read [Affinity Groups: A Space for Strength, Belonging, and Empowerment](#) by Anabelle Keimach.

Things to Keep in Mind

- **Affinity spaces should be led by a person/people who share the identity of the affinity space.** (e.g., a Person of Color should be leading a POC affinity space, a Trans person should be leading a Trans affinity space, etc.)
  - Note: Leaders in a community who do not share the identity of the affinity space can, however, provide logistical/operational support. Ex. A white person can assist Leaders of Color with setting up zoom logistics/a physical space prior to the affinity space meetings but should *not* be present in the actual gatherings.

- **When creating affinity spaces for teens, caution against guardians or adults who do not share the marginalized identity the group was created for, to lead or participate in the space.** For example, a white guardian of a Teen of Color should not lead a Teens of Color affinity space. A cisgender guardian of a trans teen, should not be leading a trans affinity space. A Youth professional who lives without a disability should not be leading an affinity space for teens with disabilities. Consider contracting a Youth Leader (either within or outside your community) with the identity of the group to lead.
  - Please note that guardians of children/teens with marginalized identities can have their own affinity spaces with other guardians.

- **Leaders of groups should consider the structure.**
  - Will it be open to new members every meeting or will there be established cohorts for a series of meetings? Will it be ongoing? What will the frequency of the meetings be? Will there be a different host each meeting, or a set host for all meetings?

* https://www.racialequitytools3sms1.org/resources/act/strategies/caucus-and-affinity-groups
** http://www.justinccohen.com/blog/2016/10/28/white-affinity-groups

- **Keep accessibility at top of mind.**
  - Choose an accessible location and possibly one that offers discreteness/privacy if desired (keep in mind that not all members of the LGBTQIA+ community are able to be out safely about their gender and/or sexual orientation.)
  - Additional accommodations could include closed captioning/ASL, meeting times/days that work best for participants, and/or any other accommodations that the group may specify.

- **Language is Powerful.** Ensure you are utilizing inclusive language. (i.e., use of pronouns in introductions, utilizing language that does not assume [see chart at the end of this resource], etc.)
  - Ensure when creating spaces for people within your community you use language that includes both Jewish and Jewish-Adjacent people (people who are not Jewish but are in families or relationships with Jewish people). (e.g., This affinity space is for Jewish and Jewish-Adjacent people with disabilities).

- **Affinity spaces can both be ongoing as well as reactive.** Having ongoing, regular affinity spaces can be powerful for those participating. In addition, when something happens in your community/in the world that specifically targets a certain identity, space can be offered for that specific group. (E.g., if an event occurs that specifically targets the Black community, a space for Black Community members to come together can be offered.)

- **Regularly provide space for different groups to meet.** A group of people may not be interested in an affinity space at a certain point in time, however, always note that needs and identities change, therefore consistently gauge interest in affinity spaces. (E.g., If you gauge interest in an LGBTQ+ affinity space, and none of your LGTBQ+ community members are interested right now, be sure to revisit at a later time. New members will likely join, and the identities and needs of your current community members can change with time.)

- **When asking people from non-dominant backgrounds to teach/facilitate, compensation should be offered.** (e.g., if a white anti-racist affinity space would like to contract with a Person of Color in their community to come teach or share their lived experience for one of the white antiracist affinity space meetings, compensation should be discussed.) This avoids asking marginalized people to do extra emotional unpaid labor, for the sake of a non-marginalized group to advance their knowledge and understanding.

Shared Agreements: For All Affinity Spaces

The resource below provides some sample shared agreements that all affinity spaces could benefit from utilizing. These agreements/norms provide some shared understandings from the start and help to support a productive and meaningful conversation for all participants. It is also important to note that though this is being shared for affinity spaces, setting shared agreements/norms can be a great practice for all groups that meet regularly, including but not limit to congregational boards, task forces/ committees, etc., and can also ensure that voices that are often missing (or talked over) are incorporated. Download a sample set of Shared Agreements here.

Resources for Affinity Spaces for People of Color

Affinity spaces for People of Color will take on a different structure and focus than Anti-Racist White Affinity Spaces.

Race-based affinity spaces for People of Color can begin largely as reflective and relational; as the meetings progress, the leader and members of the group can make a decision about the group's intention, changing needs, and direction. Affinity spaces can be a place for groups to come together to reflect upon and determine what is needed in order for them to experience a sense of belonging and equity in the community at large, a place to gather strength, or whatever the group members decide.

Ideas for kicking-off a POC affinity space include:

- Reviewing a shared resource (piece of text, poem, media clip, etc.) to allow people to reflect and discuss

- One could start with a relational question, such as – name/pronouns
  - What is one thing I'm hoping to get out of being in this group?
  - Three words to describe how I'm feeling coming into this group.
  - What is going well for me right now? What is hard?

- For online affinity spaces (and possibly in-person) – chavruta-style check-ins, where people are paired with one other person may be useful with a guided prompt

Resources for Anti-Racist White Affinity Space Leaders

Relationship Building: It is important to always include a relationship builder into the first part of your meetings. Relationship building should take up approximately 25% of every meeting, and you can name that this will be an integral component to your group. By prioritizing relationship over task, you are building trust and fostering connections within your group, which will ultimately allow for people to continue to bring more and more of themselves into each meeting. In addition, as you continue to delve deeper into white affinity work, it is much easier to *call someone in* when you have a relationship with them. (Liken it to when your best friend tells you that you have food in your teeth vs. a complete stranger informing you of this.)

In addition, in the spirit of fostering relationship building and trust, we recommend that you do not record affinity space meetings, to allow for a brave space where people can be open and vulnerable.

Below are a list of some relationship building questions that you may want to consider for the beginning of each of your meetings. Note: as a facilitator, we suggest you model this relationship builder first, offering to share, vulnerable and possibly marginalized aspects of your own identity with respect to Jewish community.

- Name/Pronouns/three words to describe how you're feeling coming into this group/process

- Share your top three identities that inform how you show up to this group (i.e., parent, partner, LGBTQIA+ identifying, person with disabilities, working class, divorced, single, artist, caretaker, person with a marginalized body-type, etc.…)

- A space that I'm uncomfortable in and why. (ex. weddings, because I am single/my sexuality/my partner recently died; airplanes, because of my body size/physical disability; locker rooms, because of my gender identity/sexuality)

- One thing you cannot tell just by looking at me is [person's response…] This is important for me because [person's response…]

- Each person answers to the degree they are comfortable (afterwards, process what this was like for everyone to answer these questions):
  - What I think about me …
  - What others think about me …
  - What might be misunderstood about me …
  - What I need from this group…

Framing for Conversations/Resources: Once shared agreements are set, your group can begin delving into different DEI resources. Below is a framing that you can use for these discussions. Further down in this resource, you will find a list of some articles/videos/podcasts/books that you can consider discussing in your group. Consider asking group members to read/watch/listen beforehand or dedicate some time in the meeting to read/watch/listen during your meeting.

- Start with asking everyone to state one word to summarize their feelings about the article/resource. This will give you a "temperature check" to gauge concerns, understanding, vulnerability, how the resource "landed" for everyone, etc. and help you prepare for the rest of the conversation. Be firm and only allow one-word responses. (You can remind people there will also be time to share more than one word in a moment).
  - Ask, "how is this relevant to our group?"
- Encourage vulnerability:
  - Take time to process and ask: what part of this resource was tough to read/watch?
  - Remind the group that they will face challenging feelings throughout this process and encourage them to spend time outside of this meeting processing.
- If lack of understanding/newness of concepts is coming up:
  - Invite people to bring up specific passages/parts they have questions about and invite the group to discuss. Address what you can in the meeting, but also ask people to note what they might want more clarification on and commit to seeking out additional learning using additional resources.
- If people don't like the tone of the article/resource, ask why? (Be mindful that criticizing the "tone" of a DEI resource is often used as a way of distancing ourselves from the content).
- Other questions to consider asking the group:
  - Which of the resource's concepts seem "easy" to keep in mind? Which seem more challenging?
  - How can we ensure we are incorporating these concepts?

Suggested Resources to discuss in anti-racist white affinity spaces:
- [Tool for White People Navigating Conversations About Race](#)
- [What is White Privilege Really](#) by Cory Collins
- [What Does it Mean to "Code Switch" in Jewish Spaces?](#) by Chris Harrison
- [Video Messages from Deitra Reiser, Yolanda Savage-Narva and Evan Traylor](#) & accompanying [discussion guide](#)
- [How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly towards them.](#) TED Talk by Vernā Myers
- [White Dominant Culture & Something Different](#)
- [Wholly Jewish Podcast, season 1:](#) featuring URJ's Audacious Hospitality JewV'Nation fellows from the Jews of Color Cohort
- Some additional resources (including articles, books, video clips, etc.) to consider can be found on the [Audacious Hospitality Racial Justice Resources Handout](#)

Language that Assumes	Language that doesn't Assume
Men and women	People, congregants, participants, members, supporters
Boys and girls	Children, young people, students, campers
Men, women and children	Adults and youth
Brothers and sisters	Siblings (use on its own) or list "sisters, brothers and siblings" (be sure to alternate the order)
Son and daughter	Child, adult child, my oldest/youngest/middle, offspring
Mothers and fathers	Parents, guardians
Women who are pregnant or nursing	Those who are pregnant or nursing
Husband and wife	Spouse, partner, co-parent
Aunts and uncles	My parent's sibling
Sir, ma'am, miss, and ms.	Use the person's name. Say "excuse me" or "hello" to get someone's attention.
Ladies and gentlemen	All, everyone
Grandmother and grandfather	Grandparents
You guys	Everyone, y'all, folks
S/He	They, the individual
Bar and/or Bat Mitzvah	B mitzvah, B'nai mitzvah
Dear Sir or Madam	Dear Guests, Dear Members, Dear (Person's names)