

A SACRED SPACE FOR INTERSECTIONAL HEALING PRAXIS

# Racial Affinity Groups

## Program Charter





# A Sacred Space for Intersectional Healing

The healing and soul care we engage in, for me, is a form of collective liberation, from survival to evolution for educators of color, and an opportunity to explore so many other aspects of our identities that we embody. Just rooting ourselves back into our bodies beyond race and seeing our power; rethinking and realizing that we can be visible and that we can exist in our power in any setting -no matter what. I think we do that through our radical vulnerability, through truthy, and through the courage to become more than a testimony. In these groups we center our healing and in turn, center the healing our great great grandchildren. Our healing is not only our right - it's our responsibility.

- Dr. Bre

# Background

**A VISION FOR WELLNESS-CENTERED SOCIAL CHANGE**

The vision of Interagency Academy is to create a school learning and development ethos that centers the physical, psychological and socioemotional wellbeing of its' students, staff and community. Our mission is to teach, educate and promote the development of the whole student, in all aspects of identity, no matter what.

This includes offering a culturally affirming instruction and professional development that promotes individual wellness by expanding the scope of Trauma-Informed Restorative Practices to embrace Healing-Centered Social Change modalities in racial affinity groups for Interagency staff.





# Wellness as a Critical Approach to Professional Development

Several approaches to supporting educators of color have included pipeline programs support mechanisms and strategies to mitigate difficulties Black, Indigenous and people of color face within educational settings.

Much of the research supporting educators of color draw on centering their racial identities and experiences through autobiographical assignments, critical race reflections and dialogue, participatory action projects, and community/trust-building orientations to their development.

Professional development should also facilitate opportunities for critical intellectual and pedagogical practitioner support among multiracial educators. To demonstrate its critical response to urgent social topics, racial affinity groups focus may also include developing anti-colonial pedagogies, interrupting Islamophobia, creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth, supporting undocumented students, and more.

# Organizational Wellness Structure

To oversee, mobilize and sustain racial equity strategy commitments and resources through leadership, governance and accountability.

IA Administration

To drive school, department and community focused racial equity outcomes.

Racial Equity Team

To build and support continuous development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that foster positive interpersonal and intergroup relations, a culture of respect and inclusion, and a climate where all members of the community experience dignity and belonging.

Racial Affinity Groups

Unity Learning Community

IA Wellness Groups

**Racial  
Equity  
Team**



**Racial  
Affinity  
Groups**



**Sacred  
Spaces for  
Intersectional  
Healing**



**Working  
Wellness  
Groups**

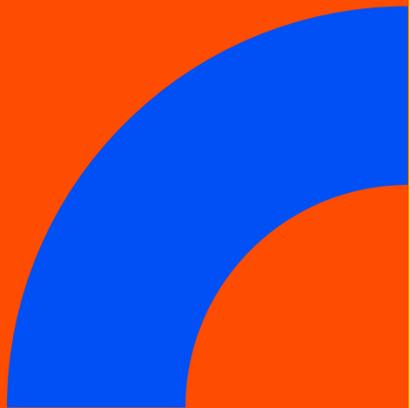


# What is a Racial Affinity Group?

## HISTORY AND RATIONALE

A racial affinity group is a group of people sharing a common race who gather with the intention of finding connection, support, and inspiration. Racial affinity groups (also known as ERG's or Employee Resource Groups) can happen within any profession or organization, including education. These resources are specifically targeted to the development of racial affinity groups for educators of color where such groups can provide participants support to survive the racial isolation that exists in many schools and institutions. ("Educators," refers to all staff people who work in the Interagency school setting, in any role).

For decades, the U.S. has failed to provide an educator workforce that truly reflects the diversity of the country. Today, over half of the nation's public school students are children of color, but educators of color, who represent about 20% of the educator workforce, are grossly under-represented in teaching and administrative roles. Much like segregated schools, a homogeneous educator workforce is detrimental to society and directly contributes to perpetuating racial bias, stereotypes, and inequitable systems.





INTERAGENCY SCHOOLS RACIAL AFFINITY GROUPS

# Overview

The purpose of this resource guide is to define the overarching mission, provide relevant theoretical framework and establish operational objectives for racial affinity groups that align with and advance the mission and vision of Interagency Schools.



# Our Goal

## RACIAL AFFINITY GROUPS



In order to prevent the cyclical nature of social toxicity perpetuated within and outside of schools, all educators – spanning all levels of experience and politicization – must tend to unhealed trauma caused by White supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression. Educators of color need critical approaches to professional development that afford access to ongoing critical and healing praxes to support their intellectual, pedagogical, emotional, and intersectional professional development.

The logo for King County, featuring a small icon of a person's head and shoulders next to the text "King County".

King County

Best Starts for  
**KIDS**



# Our Purpose

## RACIAL AFFINITY GROUPS

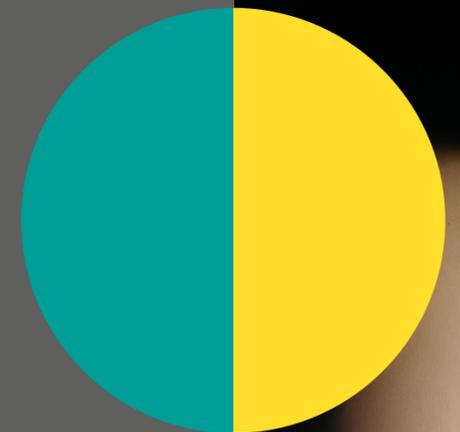
The purpose of Interagency Schools racial affinity groups is to bring educational staff together to create sacred and brave spaces through professional development opportunities where educational staff can explore the nuances of individual and collective identity beyond socially constructed and performative racialized identity and white educators can practice privilege as responsibility by learning and developing their activism to support educational equity for all.



# Our Focus

## HEALING INFORMED ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE

With a focus on healing informed and 21st Century anti-racist practices, racial affinity groups offer a critical approach to professional development that allows all staff to unlearn the systems of institutionalized education, white supremacy, racism, anti-blackness and to deploy strategies such as self-sovereignty, emotional regulation, cultural literacy, non-violent communication, mediation and de-escalation to support a thriving school culture that centers healing and wellbeing for all.





# Supporting Our Vision

Racial affinity groups support the overarching vision, mission and goals of Interagency Schools by:

1

Supporting educator wellness in the education process to engage with students in intergenerational collaboration and practice of freedom, healing and self-sovereignty.

2

Educating educators to on how white supremacy culture shows up in schools and more specifically in their own practices.

3

Interrupting white supremacy culture in our white teachers practices and provide opportunities to learn and apply trauma-informed and antiracist teaching and instruction practices

4

Strengthening trauma-informed practice as equity-intuitive skills that support students facing compounding traumas in their lives and grow stronger educator-student relationships.

5

Increasing attendance and engagement of students across all campuses.

6

Serving as a retention tool specifically designed to provide support for educators of color and help them sustain personal wellbeing and actively engaged in the profession.

# Racial Affinity Group Charter



The purpose of gathering in racial affinity groups is not to force segregation, but rather to create safe and brave space where people can express their fears, pain and hopes without bystanders, so when they re-enter mixed identity spaces it will be with greater empowerment and affirmations of self-awareness, self compassion, and stronger confidence.

## **Identity space can be used to:**

- Support processing and learning when people in cross-cultural community respond differently to workshops, trainings and current social issues.
- Express strong emotions when groups respond differently to shared experiences because of specific identity diversity within the group.
- Deepen personal wellness and growth around themes of history, ancestry, or cultural identity.
- Connect with a work community that shares common experiences and history based on identity in Interagency Schools.

## **For Black/ Brown Educators**

The aim is to center wellness by educators of color in celebration of identity as positive affirmation of culture, family, ancestry, ethnicity, legacy and hope.

## **For White Educators**

The aim is to ground white educators in accepting their own whiteness without shame or defensiveness, with curiosity around how whiteness has played out in their personal and professional lives to build healthy, anti-racist white ally identities.

# Rationale



Everyone benefits from having a racially diverse educator workforce. Increased teacher diversity will lead to more culturally relevant teaching techniques and curriculum, higher expectations of children of color, and the reduction of the racial achievement gap. It will also encourage students of color to enter the teaching profession.

Unfortunately, these aspirations will not be realized without combatting the challenges of recruiting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

**Educational staff of color are subject to the the following challenges in all kinds of schools:**



# What are some of the challenges faced by educators of color who join mostly white faculties?

- Feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Lack of support from colleagues, administrators, and parents or caregivers
- Being subject to school policies and practices that are clearly biased
- Being expected to teach and discipline all students of color
- Carrying the emotional weight of seeing how students of color are affected by racially biased school policies and practices.
- Fear of speaking up for students of color
- Being viewed as less competent than their peers
- Experiencing low expectations from others
- Being treated as invisible unless its about students of color
- Being asked to be the voice for all students of color
- Frequently not seeing anyone like themselves in the school leadership or administration
- Working for administrators who show racial animus
- Racial animus from colleagues
- Tone policing, or having to moderate tone in order to not be perceived as angry or threatening microaggressions of colleagues
- Experiencing hostile school environments

# Theoretical Framework

A SACRED SPACE FOR INTERSECTIONAL HEALING PRAXIS



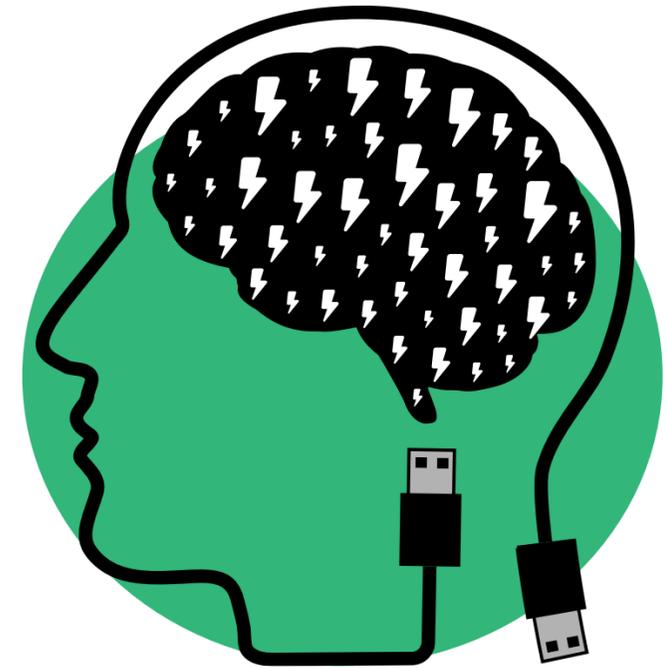
**Targeted  
Universalism**

*Our Focus*



**Trauma-Informed  
Practice**

*Our Approach*



**Equity-Intuitive  
Leadership**

*Our Goal*

# Targeted Universalism



By centering the interests and needs of those furthest away from positive outcomes, we create opportunities for universal positive outcomes.



As such, racial affinity groups are designed to center the professional development needs of educators of color, whose interest and needs are historically underrepresented in professional development opportunities.



Racial affinity groups also extend community learning and growth opportunities to white-identified social change allies to develop anti-racist and non-performative advocacy skills that advance racial equity in education and address educator trauma.

# Addressing Educator Trauma

Educators have been called to enact relational and trauma-informed pedagogies and approaches to support historically marginalized youth in schools. However, considering how racial trauma is often shaped by structural violence, racism and oppression, both youth and adults of color alike are impacted.

Research posits that trauma-informed approaches often limit practitioners' view of individuals through their trauma, whereas moving toward healing-centered engagement offers more holistic lenses and approaches with which to view and support people navigating trauma.

Applying this radical healing framework highlights how educators and organizers can center their collective healing by reclaiming and reframing their pedagogies and activism.

# Trauma-Informed Education



Trauma-informed (TI) teaching starts with an understanding of how trauma can impact learning and behavior. With this approach, educators think about what student behavior may be telling them. And they reflect on their teaching practices to find ways to better support students who may be experiencing trauma.

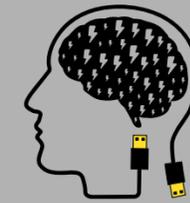


TI racial affinity groups acknowledge and provide refuge from the prolonged personal and professional racialized trauma experienced by staff of color. This approach focuses on using healing modalities to create a sacred healing space that extends beyond the notion of safety, which is often not a reality for racial minority staff in education. This approach focuses on healing, learning, empowering and evolving individual and collective identity.

# Equity- Intuitive Leadership

The EI approach combines the theoretical frames of Targeted Universalism and Trauma-Informed Principles as inherently Equity-Intuitive. We use the term "equity" as it implies the fundamental ideals of both diversity and inclusion.

**EI leadership is intentional -but not exclusive- regarding the focus on topics that are current and at the forefront of our social discourse.**

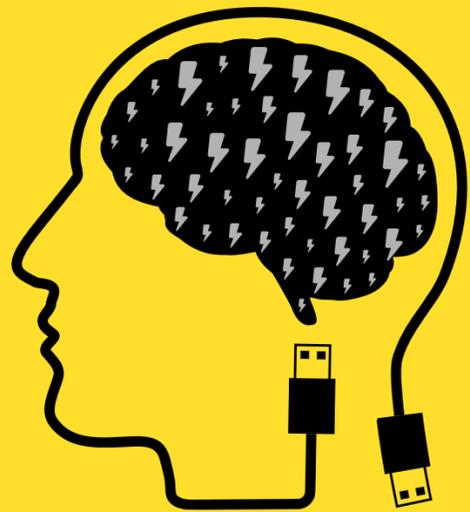


Using EI leadership dispositions, educators are able to deepen the application of awareness, knowledge and skills to competently and compassionately address:

- The historic and current social determinants of health and social inequities (e.g. racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, xenophobia, etc.);
- How Interagency contributes to, and can deconstruct these inequities through the application of healing-centered social justice principles and trauma-informed practice; and
- Allyship, advocacy and partnership with the communities we serve to improve educational outcomes.

# Equity-Intuitive Leadership

Equity-Intuitive (EI) leaders apply an equity-impact analysis intuitively to every level of decision-making, policy, instruction, programming, and engagement. The goal of EI dispositions is to establish educator's and group facilitators ability to bypass implicit brain bias to employ thoughtful and science-savvy racial impact analysis and harm-mitigation strategy to their work with ease and accuracy. These dispositions are used for identifying racial affinity group leaders and include:



- EI Communication
- EI Cultural Literacy
- EI Coalition & Capacity Sustaining Competence
- EI Diplomacy & Negotiation
- EI Interpersonal Disposition & Commitment



## EI COMMUNICATION

- Ability to impart and exchange information, experiences, and ideas with cultural humility, to effectively apply equity-intuitive cultural literacy.
- Ability to engage in informal and structured conversations with various racial/ethnic groups where they listen, contribute, develop understanding and relationships, learn to integrate diverse perspectives, and build consensus.
- Understands diverse client needs and offers useful and timely interventions in cases where progress is impeded due to a diversity-related issue.
- Engages in informal and structured conversations with community to listen, contribute, develop understanding and relationships, learn to consider diverse perspectives and build shared understanding.





## EI CULTURAL LITERACY

- Professional ability to effectively integrate teaching and learning with the lived experience of social identity and relationships, and the world in which they interact.
- Understands subtle and complex diversity and inclusion issues as they relate specifically to marginalized groups (while these vary by region, they often include women, people with disabilities, older people, and racial, ethnic and/or religious minorities, etc.)
- Utilizes multiple communication vehicles such as virtual, web-based, print, culturally-responsive talking points, etc.
- Demonstrate current knowledge of contemporary and modern topics in racial equity and inclusion in education.



## EI CULTURAL COMPETENCY

- Understands the history, context, geography, religions, and languages of the community in which the school serves.
- Demonstrates an ability to flex style when faced with myriad dimensions of culture in order to be effective across cultural contexts.
- Understands multiple cultural frameworks, values, and norms.
- Demonstrates an ability to flex style when faced with myriad dimensions of culture in order to be effective.
- Understands the dynamics of diversity of thought and inclusion related conflicts, tensions, misunderstandings, or opportunities in alternative school settings.





## EI COALITION AND CAPACITY SUSTAINING

- Understands the history, context, geography, religions, and languages of the community in which the school serves.
- Demonstrates an ability to flex style when faced with myriad dimensions of culture in order to be effective across cultural contexts.
- Understands multiple cultural frameworks, values, and norms.
- Demonstrates an ability to flex style when faced with myriad dimensions of culture in order to be effective.
- Understands the dynamics of diversity of thought and inclusion related conflicts, tensions, misunderstandings, or opportunities in alternative school settings.





## EI DIPLOMACY AND NEGOTIATION

- Negotiates and facilitates through cultural differences, conflicts, tensions, or misunderstandings.
- Understands and effectively manages complex group dynamics and ambiguity.
- Is able to discern when to inquire, advocate, drive, or resolve more decisively.





## EI INTERPERSONAL COMMITMENT

- Recognizes and addresses one's filters, privileges, biases, and cultural preferences with awareness, knowledge and skill emphasis.
- Commits to continuous learning / improvement in diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence.
- Seeks and utilizes feedback from diverse sources to increase interpersonal capacity and professional development.
- Participates in organization-wide equity initiatives to reinforce departmental outreach and effectiveness.
- Demonstrates dispositions that promote to wellness through emotional intelligence, respecting their own rights and the rights of others, managing stress, and persevering in difficult situations.
- Demonstrated commitment to personal wellness to sustain meaningful engagement in racial equity praxis.



# Setting Up Racial Affinity Groups

What do schools need in order to make racial affinity groups accessible and successful?



- **Clear Purpose**

All staff should receive clear and consistent messages regarding the purpose of a racial affinity group

- **Financial Resources**

In order to support racial affinity groups and make them effective, leaders should budget for the printing of articles for discussion, funds for accessing movies, podcasts, or other materials, and possibly funds for an offsite location or refreshments.

- **Personnel Resources**

The person who is picked to facilitate and coordinate the group will have access to school principal, and must be in a position where they feel comfortable raising concerns from the group. Group facilitators should be compensated with a stipend.

- **Time Resources**

If the racial affinity group takes place during the school day, competing priorities should be minimized so the educators of color are not forced to decide whether to attend their racial affinity group or a professional development in their content area.

# Guidelines for Administrators

- Engage in consultative discussion and professional development with community partners prior to forming a racial affinity group.
- Do not make the racial affinity group mandatory.
- Racial affinity groups are intended to be places where people can share openly, so supervisors or evaluators should not be in a group with people whom they supervise or evaluate.
- Racial affinity groups should be open to all school or district staff.
- Care for and nurture the success of the group by providing a public show of support to the entire school community. District and school leaders should demonstrate their commitment to both the recruitment and retention of a racially diverse workforce by explaining how racial affinity groups fit within the district's plan and the schools vision.



HOW CAN  
ADMINISTRATORS  
DEMONSTRATE  
SUPPORT?



# Affinity Group Member Expectations



## Feel

- Opportunities for feeling, dealing, and healing **IN** community.

## Know

- Opportunities for learning and growing **WITH** community.

## Do

- Opportunities for strategy and action **FOR** community.



# Facilitating Racial Affinity Groups

## Expectations of Group Facilitators

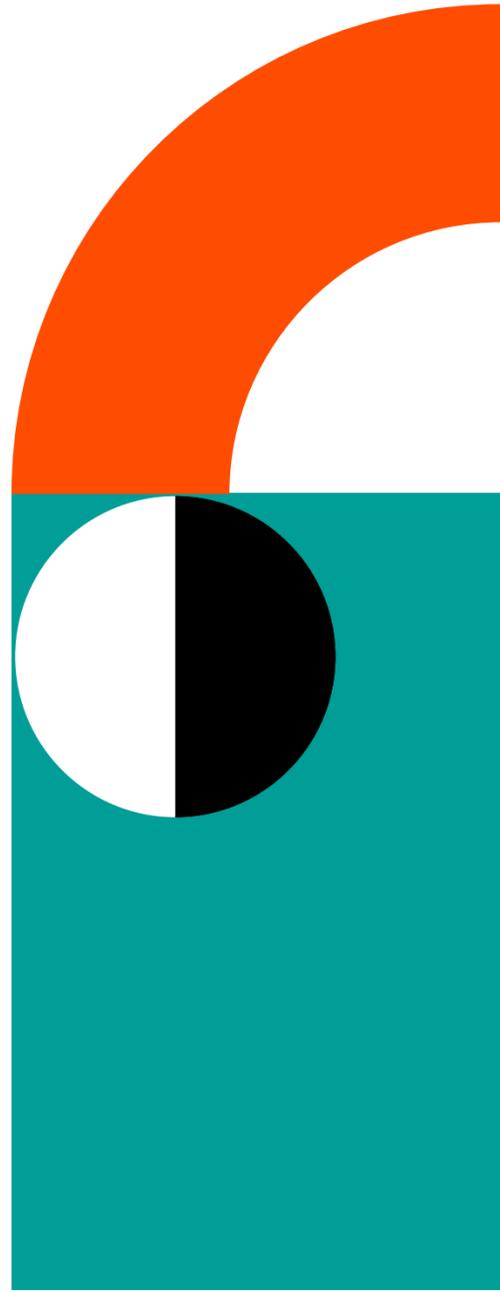
Group members may most benefit when the group includes organizers who are knowledgeable about the relevant identity and social justice discussion. Without this type of support, the group is vulnerable to arriving at harmful ideas or reinforcing trauma bonds among participants. They should also be familiar with how other racial affinity groups have been conducted.

A racial affinity group is a group that is organized and designed to support educators of color, to help them find connection, support, and inspiration. As such, group facilitators need to be skilled in creating safe, structured spaces that center sociocultural wellness, professional connection and critical discourse by using trauma-informed skills.

The goal of the facilitator is to provide enough structure that members feel safe and the conversation is generative and meaningful, while also keeping things fun and, insightful, authentic and welcoming for all.

# Guidelines for Facilitators

- All items discussed in the racial affinity groups are confidential, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- Invest time and energy in building personal connections between participants.
- Facilitators should secure meeting spaces which are warm, welcoming, and private (virtually or in-person).
- Administrators should not require educational staff to be a group facilitator.
- Facilitators should have some experience with teaching or leading wellness, trauma-informed groups.
- Racial affinity groups should not keep minutes or take notes. However, facilitators may want to note action plans that need to be taken to share resources or provide needed support.
- Facilitators should check in regularly to see if the group is meeting the needs of its members. This can be accomplished by reviewing the feedback together, and by making space for all members to help set the meeting agendas within the affinity group framework.
- Racial affinity groups are intended to be places where people can share openly, so supervisors or evaluators should not be in a group with people whom they supervise or evaluate.





# Facilitators Dispositions

## Personal Work

- Have the courage to sit with knowledge, to learn and not immediately “do”.
- Work to enhance my own self-awareness; ask “Where am I on this topic?”
- Be vulnerable in my growth process
- Self-development and ongoing learning

## Group Work

- Help and support others in finding their “why”
- Be open about my own experience and journey
- Help others gain exposure to information and frameworks to practice inclusive behavior
- Provide context and tangible explanations for others
- Value my individual perspective (developed through my knowledge and expertise) and bring it to conversations
- Add inclusion components to meetings I lead and when possible, those I participate in. (including use of appropriate —pronouns, check- ins, and other behaviors that foster inclusion)
- Elevate others’ voices by making it safer and easier for others to speak up. Create safe spaces for honest conversations.
- Be available to process through thoughts, issues, questions, etc. with others.

## Systems Work

- Bring my perspective to organizational conversations and decisions.
- Bring DEI lens to spaces outside of your team and small group discussion and into your collaborations.
- Notice and help to address situations and areas where inclusion and equity could be increased, as well as those that could serve as models for inclusion and equity in other parts of the organization
- Bring your experiences and observations forward to help identify gaps.



# Racial Affinity Group Process

## Shaping Meeting Agendas

It is best for racial affinity group facilitators to craft a simple or loose agenda for each meeting that is consistent across all groups, with at least one or two activities identified. A typical agenda should include:

- **Welcome and Introduction**
- **Sacred Space Ritual & Agreements** (In-Person or Virtual Netiquette)
- **Overview of Wellness Topic**
- **Community Reflection Question / IceBreaker** (reflect on topic)
- **Sacred Space Share** (inspiring piece of work shared to stimulate insight, reflection, discussion and discovery)
- **Awakened Minds Discussion** (Partner, Small Group, Large Group to share what is learned and discovered)
- **Closing** (Offering of Gratitude and Affirmations for Wellness & Wellbeing)



# Racial Affinity Group Facilitators MEETING SCHEDULE

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Main activity 1

Main activity 2

Main activity 3

Main activity 4

Main activity 5



**SCHEDULE**



# Racial Affinity Group - Staff FAQ's

## HOW DO I KNOW IF THE RACIAL AFFINITY GROUP IS THE RIGHT FIT FOR ME?

As a member of a racial affinity group, you will engage in conversations on issues pertaining to race and racism. If you are unable to openly and honestly use the pronouns "I" or "we" within the group you join, chances are the group is not the right group for you.

## CAN I JUST GO AND LISTEN IN ORDER TO LEARN AND BE SUPPORTIVE?

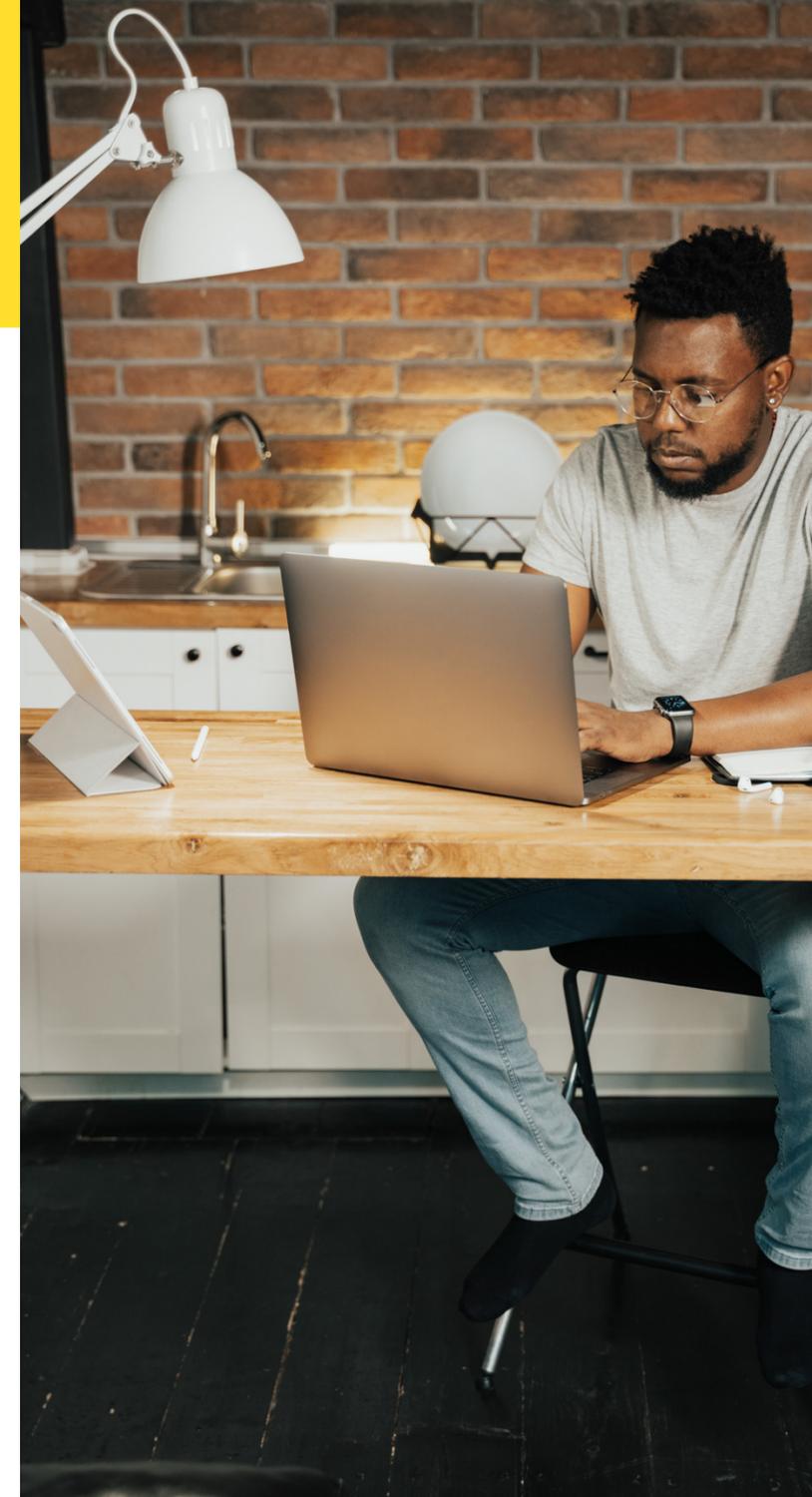
The racial affinity group should decide, in advance, if they want to allow outside guests and in doing so they should decide what the purpose and guidelines are for each visit.

## WILL RACIAL AFFINITY GROUPS PROMOTE SEGREGATION?

One of the most common misconceptions about racial affinity groups is that they promote racial segregation. This is not the case. Racial affinity groups provide a targeted and necessary kind of support to educators who experience unique challenges because of their race. White educators can also find a lot of meaning in their own groups to discuss how to be effective allies or how to understand white privilege and systemic racism.

## WHAT IF A PERSON OF COLOR DOES NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

A racial affinity group is an optional form of support to IA staff. Educators of color are not a monolithic group. Some educators of color may choose not to participate... and that's an important choice for each individual to make.





**DELDRIDGE**  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION



INTERAGENCY SCHOOLS RACIAL AFFINITY GROUPS

# OUR SACRED SPACE FOR INTERSECTIONAL HEALING



 King County

Best Starts for  
**KIDS**



**City of Seattle**

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# Our Community Partners

Interagency Academy | Race-Based Wellness Affinity Groups



**Dr. Bre Coaching & Consulting, LLC**

[www.drbre.com](http://www.drbre.com)

[connect@drbre.com](mailto:connect@drbre.com)