
STARTING A DIVERSITY COMMITTEE OR AFFINITY GROUPS: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

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ABOUT TRUCKING HR CANADA

As a national, non-profit organization, Trucking HR Canada advances modern HR solutions for the trucking and logistics workforce.

One of our strategic priorities is to make a company's job easier by delivering a comprehensive collection of up-to-date guides, reports, templates and more to support effective human resources management and recruitment and retention efforts.

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WANT MORE

To help fleet employers with their diversity, equity and inclusion work, Trucking HR Canada created *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Guide for Change*. This online resource can help employers take a first step or refine systems already in place, it includes:

- Information on why diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices are needed in the Trucking and Logistics Industry
- Details on how your company can implement robust DEI practices
- Key considerations for on-going success

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INTRODUCTION

A great way to promote your company's commitment to Diversity Equity and Inclusion is to involve your team by creating a Diversity Committee and / or Affinity Groups. This tool provides information to help get you started, including:

- What the difference between Diversity Committees and Affinity Groups are;
- Key considerations when forming a Diversity Committee or Affinity Group;
- Guidelines for establishing a Diversity Committee;
- How to promote participation in Affinity Groups;
- Examples of types of Affinity Groups; and
- Creating a Terms of Reference

DIVERSITY COMMITTEE OR AFFINITY GROUP – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

While both focus on intentionally bettering the DEI efforts within an organization, Diversity Committees and Affinity Groups are quite different. Diversity Committees are typically more formal in structure and are company sponsored. Affinity Groups on the other hand are company sponsored but they are unstructured, and employee led.

Diversity Committees – are established by an employer to:

- Support policy reviews and revisions;
- Initiate employee training and education;
- Discuss strategies on how the company can create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace; and
- Help communicate key messages and DEI mandates.

Affinity Groups – are established by employees to:

- Celebrate cultural backgrounds and common interests of diverse groups of employees;
- Provide forums and offer a safe space for open discussion on topics of shared interest;
- Engage in informal mentorship relationships; and
- Reinforce the company's commitment to creating a diverse and accepting work environment.

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IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Here are some tips to ensure your approach is successful, and you reap the benefits:

- Be careful not to over promise on DEI commitments.
- Re-assess the *Diversity Committee* and *Affinity Groups* frequently to ensure they continue to be value-add and that they are achieving desired outcomes. Both may end up becoming social gatherings rather than meaningful DEI contributors.
- Don't mistake the objectives of the *Diversity Committee* or *Affinity Groups* with other much needed DEI requirements in other areas of the company – for example, Human Resources, management practices, etc.
- It might take on-going communication and careful management to help committee members and *Affinity Group* participants understand that change isn't always instantaneous. There may be business consequences or challenges that they don't see.
- While *Affinity Groups* are intended to promote inclusion and equity, some members of your team may end up feeling like they are excluded from participating. Consider vetting the process of how people are welcomed into *Affinity Groups* to help minimize those feelings.
- Outline expectations for respectful discussion and adherence to the company values in all *Diversity Committee* and *Affinity Group* activities.

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ESTABLISHING A DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

A Diversity Committee is employer led, and it worth the investment on time to ensure that it is set up for success right from the beginning. It's also recommended that participants of the Diversity Committee meet certain criteria and understand the company's objectives.

Below are some best practices to consider when establishing your Diversity Committee:

- Committee expectations should be clearly defined by the senior leadership team.
- Membership should be voluntary.
- Every employee should be given equal access to “apply” and participate.
- Establish a process for employees to volunteer for participation in the committee.
- Member intentions should be vetted – do their intentions align with the goals of the company?
- Define member commitment– hours of work, length of time on the committee, etc.
- Outline when and how frequent changes are made to the committee members.
- Appoint an executive sponsor or champion for the committee from the senior leadership team.
- Include employees from various roles and functions within the company.
- Decide how decisions will be made within the group – is it consensus based or is there a decision-making hierarchy.
- Allow committee members time to perform committee tasks and participate in meetings during regular working hours.
- Establish meeting frequency and define the desired intention and outcome of each meeting.
- Provide a budget or inform how any spending requirements will be approved.
- Set goals and measurable targets and create action plans to ensure the committee is results oriented vs. discussion focused.
- Committee goals and expectations should be shared with the participants.
- Track committee progress.
- Share deliverables and committee successes with the larger employee base.

HOW DO I PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN AN AFFINITY GROUP?

Affinity Groups may be easier to foster in larger companies than in smaller ones, as there are more people, making it easier to find others with similar interests or backgrounds. An Affinity Group is typically employee driven.

Here are some ways that you can benefit from an Affinity Group:

- In small companies, you can create a Diversity “Club” as opposed to a committee with the intention being aligned with an Affinity Group – people who are interested in diversity in general;
- Start by facilitating discussions on special interest topics, suggest Affinity Groups as a way to keep the discussion going;
- Role model Affinity Groups by having senior leaders start and champion one in an area that is important to them;

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- Encourage involvement by providing meeting spaces or platforms for interested employees to gather;
- Provide guidelines for how to run an effective Affinity Group meeting;
- Recognize and celebrate Affinity Group activities; and
- Consider promoting an educational spin on Affinity Groups by providing budgets for speakers, lunch and learns, book discussions. This can be low cost and high impact.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF AFFINITY GROUPS?

There are numerous possibilities for the types of Affinity Groups you can have within your company. The more you have, the greater the chance that people will identify with a group that is meaningful and important to them. Some examples include:

- Women's network
- Women leaders
- Network of BIPOC employees
- LGBTQ2S+ network
- Working parents support group
- Network for persons with non-visible disabilities
- Mental health advocacy group
- Young professionals' network
- Future leaders' mentorship group

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CREATING TERMS OF REFERENCE

Whether employee led or company sponsored, having clear guidelines on the desired outcomes and expectations of any new team is a recommended best practice. Below are some suggestions on how to formalize the Terms of Reference for your Diversity Committee or Affinity Group.

STEP ONE: Ensure the right people are included in the process – This can include participants in the committee and group, along with other individuals with a vested interest – such as HR or a member of the senior leadership team.

STEP TWO: Determine the objective – What are you attempting to do with this group or committee? Are there defined outcomes and deliverables? Can they be measured and who should results and successes be shared with?

STEP THREE: Agree to commitment expectations – Is participation open or is there a selection process? Does each participant have an assigned role (e.g., secretary, chair)? What are the specific requirements of committee or group members? What is in scope and what is out of scope?

STEP FOUR: Logistics – Where and how often will you meet? Will meetings be informal, or will there be defined agendas?

STEP FIVE: Communicate – Who should you communicate updates to? How, and how often, will they be communicated?

STEP SIX: Document – Ensure you document the points above so that you have a formal Terms of Reference that can be accessed by participants and other vested parties within the organization. This will also ensure longevity of the initiative, beyond initial member participation.

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