

USAC Affinity Groups Evaluation

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This ad hoc committee was charged with evaluating the University's affinity groups. The committee used meetings, interviews, and research to evaluate the affinity groups' programs, operations, and budgets.

Staff, faculty, university retirees, and university dependents are eligible to participate in the affinity groups. Affinity groups strive to fill support and social gaps on campus with the purpose of fostering a more cohesive and connected community among University employees. Each affinity group is led by a current USAC member, as well as a non-USAC staff member from across campus. The four affinity groups are UR Involved, Parenting, Caregiving, and LGBTQ.

The University of Richmond affinity groups were designed much like employee resource groups (ERGs). An ERG is a dynamic group of passionate employees. Their engagement and collaboration is intended to improve their experience but also help increase the value of the organization. Most organizations use ERGs to stimulate employee engagement and develop talent. Consequentially, ERGs improve workplace environment and organizational reputations. ERGs are used to attract, develop, and retain top talent while encouraging the employee to perform their best.

The University of Richmond affinity groups provide pertinent and meaningful programming for participants. Co-chairs work extensively to create a welcoming setting and to offer genuine support. Unfortunately, low participant attendance is common. Leadership transitions, busy schedules, and competitive campus programming contributes to low event attendance. How can we model affinity groups in the image of employee resource groups?

One Critical Question

Does the University care to sponsor employee groups?

Five Potential Outcomes

1. Disband: Cease the existence of the affinity groups at Richmond.
2. Status quo: Make limited changes to the operating structure of the groups.
3. Lead coordinator: Designate a figurehead to coordinate the programming.
4. Assign new hosts: Redistribute each group into established "homes" on campus.
5. URWell Employee: Take advantage of the synergy between Human Resources and Recreation & Wellness.

Three Necessary Growth Steps

1. Articulate and align each mission towards the President's evolving vision.
2. Rebrand, relaunch, and recruit.
3. Create Coordinator position.

Five Potential Outcomes

- Disband – Poor attendance could mean low employee interest. The small USAC budget is returned to the university; likewise, the university receives labor hours from those organizing events.
- Status quo – USAC continues to manage the USAC budget and organizing events. New chairs will be assigned each year to keep programming consistent.
- Lead coordinator – Designate an employee to serve as a permanent figurehead for all programming and communication. This coordinator removes the inconsistent messaging from different chairs and smooths USAC related leadership changes. These duties can be an added to a current university position.
- Assign new hosts – Assign all elements of each affinity group to appropriate offices on campus. For example, Common Ground would lead and operate the LGBTQ affinity group.
- UR Well Employee – Assign all elements of all affinity groups to the UR Well Employee program and staff.

Three Growth Steps

- Draft new mission statements for each affinity group reflective of President Crutcher's working vision.
- Rebrand and relaunch affinity groups. Use this relaunch as an opportunity to promote missions and recruit new participants.
- Assign a coordinator position. This centralized person will be the recognizable face and name of affinity groups, and this person will store historical knowledge of the groups.

Recommendation:

We recommend to continue the affinity groups at Richmond under the successful and identifiable URWell Employee (URWE) program. This partnership between Human Resources and Rec & Wellness seeks to “build an environment that supports the health and well-being of faculty and staff.” The eight pillars (emotional, environmental, financial, occupational, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual) of the Well Employee program are clear and powerful. URWE has a physical home on campus as well as a strong and recognizable channel of communication. Wide participation in URWE will help to create a healthier work force and add value to the university. Transition of affinity groups to this location would be seamless and without interruption. We would recommend the university to correctly staff this program to best attend to the employee's wellness needs.