



Affinity Group Policy

Contents

1. Purpose	1
2. Applicability	1
3. Policy	1
4. Policy Non-Compliance	3
5. Audit	3
6. Definitions	3
7. Approval and Revision History	3
8. Background	3

1. Purpose

Buncombe County is committed to supporting the growth and development of workplace and workforce equity by fostering the development of Buncombe County employees who are historically disadvantaged with the formation of Employee Affinity Groups (AG). An AG is an employee-led group formed around interests, issues and backgrounds to promote equity and human rights, foster employee engagement, strengthen workplace effectiveness, improve leadership abilities, enhance personal and professional growth, and uphold the mission, vision, and values of within Buncombe County Government. Buncombe County Affinity Groups should form to eliminate disparities for historically disadvantaged employees. This policy establishes the requirements for the creation and administration of recognized AGs in Buncombe County Government, to solidify the County's support of these groups, and promote an inclusive environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

2. Applicability

This policy applies to all Buncombe County departments and employees unless there is a conflict with GS 153A-103 related to hiring, discharging, and supervising employees. Such exclusion is noted at the end of this policy. Otherwise, departments may adopt and enforce policies that are more restrictive than County Policy.

3. Policy

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Employees interested in establishing an AG will be assigned an Executive Sponsor and submit an application to County Manager's Office (or Designated Department). An AG Executive Sponsor must be a Buncombe County Director or member of County Senior Leadership. The Buncombe County Equity and Inclusion Workgroup will be involved in reviewing applications for appropriateness and feasibility prior to sending to the County Manager's Office (or Designated Department) for final approval.

Approved AGs will be required to create a formal charter explaining member roles, goals, and group agreements. Charters should lay out guidelines to help ensure that all AGs promote workplace and workforce equity.

AG charters will be reviewed annually.

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3.2 Membership

All employees of Buncombe County are eligible to participate in an Affinity Group. AG participation is completely voluntary, and any County employee may participate in an AG, provided they are committed to the AG's mission as well as continue to uphold the mission, vision, and values of Buncombe County. Participation is only considered for those employees that are in good standing and not on a performance improvement plan.

Affinity Groups are inclusive of all eligible employees and may not limit participation to any particular employees. Affinity Groups must operate within Buncombe County's non-discrimination ordinance, and may not discriminate membership or participation in activities on the basis of any status or classification protected by applicable laws. To embrace diversity and foster cohesiveness, employees are encouraged to consider joining groups that are not necessarily reflective of their personal backgrounds.

3.3 Operating Standards

Given the social element necessary to build interpersonal bonds of trust and support, it is expected that AG meetings and activities will be scheduled during non-work time (lunch, breaks, and after hours). At times it may be necessary to utilize working hours for AG activities. When it is necessary to utilize working hours to participate in AG activities, employees must receive advanced approval from their supervisor and ensure that their workload is not compromised. The allotted hours include travel time for in-person meetings and cannot directly or indirectly cause overtime or comp time pay to be earned by any employee.

Affinity Groups are not authorized to make decisions on behalf of Buncombe County, but the hope is they will provide recommendations to improve the procedures, policies, and practices within Buncombe County Government to the County's Equity and Inclusion Workgroup for review and consideration for County leadership. Affinity Group members are County employees and the expectation is that members will conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times.

3.4 Affinity Group Leadership

Each AG should form a leadership committee comprised of full-time, regular employees. The leadership committee functions as an organizing body for the AG and assists in ensuring that at least five (5) members are active in the group at all times. AG representatives are expected to act on behalf of the group. This includes, but is not limited to:

3.4.1 serving as the group contact for employees who are interested in joining, and

3.4.2 Serving as a liaison to the Equity and Inclusion Workgroup.

The leadership committee is responsible for providing recurring updates to the Executive Sponsor on activities, goal accomplishment, and membership for use in confirming that the AG maintains adherence to this policy as well as the group charter.

Affinity Groups should advertise, and publish meetings and activities including frequency, location, purpose, and content in an effort to include as many interested employees as possible.

3.5 Resources Available to Affinity Groups

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The Office of Equity and Human Rights will work with approved and established Affinity Groups to allocate meeting space and budget dollars as available. Affinity Groups will also receive leadership support within the parameters of this and all other County policies and County leadership will work with group members to provide the necessary resources to ensure they are successful.

3.6 Discontinuation of an Affinity Group or Individual Participation

If an AG violates any components of the Personnel Ordinance, Buncombe County Policy/Practice, or Buncombe County's Core Values, it will be cause for discontinuation of the group. Additionally, inactive groups or groups with less than five (5) active members may be discontinued.

If individual members of an established AG fail to comply with the requirements of this policy, they may be asked to discontinue their participation. There may be other reasons for discontinuation of an AG or individual membership. Any recommendation of discontinuation will be communicated by the Executive Sponsor to the Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer, in consultation with the Human Resources Director, who will provide a written request and justification to the County Manager. If a decision is made to discontinue, an explanation will be provided in writing, to the impacted AG leadership. Reinstatement of an AG requires consultation with the County Manager's Office or its designee.

4. Policy Non-Compliance

Employees willfully violating the terms and conditions of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

5. Audit

All policies for Buncombe County may be subject to audit or review as outlined in the [Internal Auditor's Statement](#).

6. Definitions

- 6.1 Affinity Group (AG): An employee-led group formed around common interests, issues, and backgrounds.
- 6.3 Leadership Committee: The organizing body for an Affinity Group. This role is limited to a maximum of four (4) employees per AG.
- 6.4 Historically Disadvantaged: means a person who is socially and economically disadvantaged; Black/African-American; Hispanic; Asian American; Female; Native Americans; LGBTQIA+; or Disabled.

7. Approval and Revision History

Policy Origination Date:	September 6, 2022
Requires Board Approval:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Board Approval Date:	Click for Date
Policy Exclusions:	None
Revision History	Click for Date:

8. Background

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