

Planning Events for Affinity Groups



About AMC Affinity Groups

The purpose of this document is to affirm AMC’s commitment to creating affinity spaces as part of our effort to become a more equitable and inclusive organization. For many years, AMC has created space for Affinity Groups—groups of people who share a specific historically marginalized and/or underrepresented identity—to experience our programming together. Affinity Spaces provide an opportunity for individuals to participate in an experience without the fear of judgement from others who do not share an understanding of their lived experience, i.e., what it can feel like to be “the only” of a specific (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, etc.) in a space. While the concept of Affinity Groups may at first seem counterintuitive to AMC’s focus on inclusion, it is vital to constructing equitable safe spaces for those who are underrepresented in the larger AMC community and/or are part of historically marginalized groups and thus face barriers in engaging with AMC and the outdoors.

Creating affinity spaces demonstrates that AMC is listening to all voices in an aim to deliver safe, supportive programming for everyone. Affinity spaces can help break through problematic traditions or norms when those traditions can lead to assumptions about a person’s ability or experience. Affinity spaces provide a group with a supportive space to develop new skills without having to push against the dominant culture.

Sample Descriptions of AMC Affinity Groups

We provide these descriptions to support volunteers and staff efforts to invite people to affinity groups. Please contact Volunteer Relations at volunteerrelations@outdoors.org if you have questions, suggestions, or would like to see additional descriptions.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

Experiences specifically designed for and led by people who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color).

Women’s+ (and Gender Expansive)

These experiences are led by women, gender-nonconforming, trans, and non-binary folks for members of these groups. See below for a description of gender expansive. AMC encourages women’s trips to include the + to signal a safe space for people with more diverse gender expressions.

Gender Expansive

This includes those whose gender identity and/or gender expression expands beyond, actively resists, and/or does not conform to the current cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to binary male or female (source: <https://itgetsbetter.org/glossary>). This can include anyone who identifies as a woman, trans, femme, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, etc. In contrast to acronyms such as “FTW-NB,” the term “gender expansive” is more transparent to public audiences and allows us to leave space for new and evolving gender identities.

LGBTQIA+ (or Queer)

Experiences led by and for people who identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and/or Questioning (LGBTQ+) community.

People with Disabilities

There is a broad spectrum of physical, cognitive, and psychological disabilities that are also underrepresented in dominant outdoor culture. AMC is actively working to better understand and promote leadership within this community to include experiences for people with disabilities.

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Essential Eligibility Criteria

Please note that the AMC has Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC) that apply to all participants in AMC-sponsored activities. These criteria were created to help potential participants identify and understand the fundamental cognitive and physical requirements of participating in AMC activities. The EEC are a resource for anyone considering participating in an AMC-sponsored activity; please speak with the program manager with any questions or requests for accommodation regarding the EEC.

20's and 30's Program

AMC 20's and 30's program is dedicated to getting people between the **ages of 20-39** who enjoy the outdoors involved with AMC. With an average member age of 62, AMC's community trends older, and young members often find themselves underrepresented in activities. [Here](#) is more information on the discounted AMC membership for individuals under 30.

FAQ's

How do staff and volunteers promote Affinity Groups at AMC?

Volunteers and staff in leadership positions for these groups and experiences should be a member of the Affinity Group they are looking to lead. **Volunteers and staff are the protectors of the spaces they create and have the authority to redirect anyone who does not share the same identity of the Affinity Group.** This may happen during the participant screening process, at the trailhead, or at a social event. This vetting ensures that participants have a positive experience. AMC offers thousands of trips each year, and people can be encouraged to seek an alternate trip to participate in.

But promoting Affinity Groups doesn't sound very Inclusive?

You are right! Affinity Groups provide space exclusively for individuals that have been historically marginalized and/or underrepresented, especially in outdoor spaces. By creating exclusive spaces for Affinity Groups, AMC is focusing on equity, which is just as important as inclusion and diversity. In a 2018 demographic survey of AMC, we discovered that our membership is overwhelmingly white and comprised mainly of heterosexual men over the age of 55 with high levels of education. That means that if you are a woman, at AMC you are underrepresented. If you are LGBTQ+, at AMC you are underrepresented. If you are between the ages of 20-39, at AMC you are underrepresented. If you are Black, Indigenous, or a person of color, you are underrepresented, even when BIPOC people make up the largest number of people in the global population. If you are a wheelchair user or have other mobility needs, at AMC you are a minority. Exclusivity is not synonymous with being bad, corrupt, or unethical; rather, the exclusivity of Affinity Group programs protects those with a shared identity and makes a space to connect with others who share that same identity without fear or shame of their background or differences.

If you're allowed to host a women's trip, then why can't I host a men's only trip?

Affinity groups are only appropriate and effective when they support groups that are underrepresented and/or groups that have historically been marginalized (e.g. people of color, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, etc.). A trip specific to a historically dominant and non-marginalized group would support hurtful discrimination and reinforce the power dynamic of exclusion and oppression AMC is trying to change.

I want to organize an event for an Affinity Group I identify with. What wording can I use?

In the event title, make sure to list the Affinity Group audience you are targeting and the keyword "Affinity." This will help members find your trip. Here are some examples (multiple affinities in one listing is great!):

- [Affinity] 20's and 30's Canoe and Camping Trip- Saco River, ME
- [Affinity] Women's 70+ Mt. Auburn Cemetery Local Walk
- [Affinity] BIPOC Women's Weekend (Black Indigenous People of Color) at Fire Island Cabin

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- [Affinity] 5 mile Biking/Cycling for Wheelchair Users & others w/Mobility Needs
- [Affinity] LGBTQ+ over 60 Hike Mt. Washington

In the description of your event, you should also include the following language:

This event is designated specifically for [Women+, 20's and 30's, etc.] only. If you do not identify with that group, you will be unable to register for and participate in this event in order to maintain the safety and integrity of the experience. If you have questions, please contact [leader's name and email address] for more information.

For more about DEI and AMC, we recommend the free online [DEI Resource Guide: Learning and Self-Assessment](#).

If you have questions about why AMC is working to increase access to and engagement with the outdoors for all people take a look at Whose Nature is it? AMC and the Troubled History of Inclusion in American Outdoor Spaces. Steve Holt. [Outdoors Bulletin](#), April 2021.