



Faculty-Led Affinity Group Guidelines

Office of Faculty Affairs | Provost's Office

These guidelines are current as of Fall 2025 and will be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure continued alignment with UMBC policies and practices.

Overview

These guidelines outline the structure, expectations, and support available for UMBC faculty-led affinity groups. They aim to foster clarity, consistency, and sustainability across groups that support connection, advancement, identity affirmation, and advocacy for faculty across campus. These guidelines are designed to make things easier for faculty leaders – to reduce delays, clarify expectations, and allow your time to focus on connection and community-building rather than administrative tasks.

I. PURPOSE

Faculty-led affinity groups at UMBC foster connection, professional advancement, identity affirmation, and advocacy among faculty (and, where appropriate, staff).

Each group is shaped by its members and may focus on:

- Community building
- Faculty advancement
- Visibility and retention
- Social engagement
- Advocacy
- Cross-campus collaboration

These groups support UMBC's broader inclusive excellence goals by offering networks and spaces where faculty can build community and thrive.

UMBC Affinity Groups are open for full participation by all individuals regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or any other protected category under applicable federal law, state law, and the University's [nondiscrimination policy](#).

II. GROUP STRUCTURE & PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS

a. Core Criteria for Active Groups: To be recognized and considered active:

- i. A group must maintain at least five interested faculty members, with active participation expected.
- ii. If fewer than five active members are sustained, Faculty Affairs may explore whether interest remains and recommend reevaluation or consolidation.

b. Leadership Structure

- i. Each group must have at least two and no more than six co-leads.
- ii. To maintain alignment with Faculty Affairs oversight, faculty should represent the greater share of leadership,

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1. *Where there are two co-leads, one should be a full-time faculty member*
 - iii. Staff co-leads are welcome and encouraged, especially in groups that support shared identities and or institutional goals across faculty and staff.
 - iv. Groups are strongly encouraged to maintain a leadership succession plan to ensure continuity.
- c. Group Composition**
- i. Groups should be majority faculty in both membership and mission.
 1. If staff participation clearly exceeds 50%, a joint decision between Faculty Affairs and Institutional Equity will be made about whether group oversight, funding, and ongoing support should shift or be shared between administrative units.

III. STARTING A NEW FACULTY-LED AFFINITY GROUP

Faculty interested in forming a new group should contact:

- Walter Parrish, Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs - walterp1@umbc.edu
- Amy Heffler, Executive Administrative Assistant - aheffler@umbc.edu

To initiate the process, please prepare a short proposal that includes:

1. Group Name and Focus: A brief description of the community the group serves and its primary purpose.
2. Leadership Structure: Groups must have at least two and no more than six co-leads. To maintain alignment with Faculty Affairs oversight, faculty should represent the greater share of leadership, except in cases where there are two co-leads, one of whom is faculty.
3. Minimum Membership: A list of at least five interested and committed participants.
4. Mission and/or Goals: A brief mission or vision statement and 1-3 initial goals aligned with the group's purpose.
5. Programming Vision: Examples of activities or events the group might host during its first year.

All new group proposals must reflect UMBC's values of inclusion and nondiscrimination, as outlined in university policy.

Once submitted, proposals will be reviewed by the Office of Faculty Affairs. Approved groups will receive a welcome message, onboarding meeting, and access to resources.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROUP LEADERS

Group leaders help share the direction and success of their affinity group. To support that work, leaders are encouraged to partner with Faculty Affairs in the following ways:

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- a. Serve as liaisons with the Office of Faculty Affairs
- b. Each Fall semester, Faculty Affairs will invite group leaders to share a short programming and budget overview. This helps us to plan together for the academic year ahead, anticipate needs early, and provide timely support when you're ready to launch your activities.
- c. Coordinate activities that align with the group's mission and ensure planning is timely.
- d. Track the group's annual activity budget and submit receipts or forms timely to Faculty Affairs.
- e. Submit notice of any changes in leadership, structure, or membership to Faculty Affairs.

V. FINANCIAL SUPPORT & BUDGET MANAGEMENT

a. Annual Activity Budget

- i. Each active group receives **\$3,000 annually** to support events, initiatives, co-sponsored programs, catering, and purchases (e.g., book, printed literature, branded and University materials).
 1. Gift cards may not be purchased using university funds.
- ii. Funds must be spent by **June 1** (or the closest business day) each fiscal year to allow for reconciliation and fiscal year closeout.
- iii. To prevent delays or reimbursement issues, please check in with the Assistant Vice Provost before making purchases or financial commitments. This step ensures all expenses are processed smoothly.
- iv. Groups are encouraged to maintain a simple tracking spreadsheet and coordinate expenses with Faculty Affairs.
 1. Groups may request a brief 15-minute budget review with Amy each semester (typically mid-semester) to ensure alignment of records.

b. Leadership Service Funds

- i. Each group receives **\$5,000 per academic year** to be divided equitably amongst the collective leadership of each group.
- ii. For audit compliance and equity purposes, beginning the 2026-27 academic year, **all leaders must be compensated using the same payment method** (e.g., salary supplement or professional development funds). Faculty Affairs will coordinate with group leaders annually to confirm the preferred method before fund transfers begin.
 1. **For the 2025-26 academic year only**, group leaders may choose their preferred payment method until we transition to a single method for everyone next year.
- iii. Funds are issued in **two installments—half in the Fall semester and half in the Spring semester**.
 1. Departments are encouraged to complete fall disbursements by **Dec 15** (or before the winter break payroll deadline) and

spring disbursements by **May 15** (or the closest business day) to ensure timely payment processing.

- iv. Faculty Affairs will coordinate with departments to ensure these funds are processed in **alignment with university fiscal policies and their intended purpose of supporting group leadership**. Departments will retain fiscal authority for their accounts and **confirm completion of disbursements each semester**.
- v. **Disbursement Process**: Faculty Affairs will initiate fund transfers in coordination with departments based on the approved disbursement method:
 - 1. **Professional development funds** will be transferred to departments via a journal entry
 - 2. **Salary supplements** will be processed through the appropriate payroll channels.
 - 3. **Group leaders will be copied compensation related communications** for their records.

VI. RESOURCES & SUPPORT FROM FACULTY AFFAIRS

The Office of Faculty Affairs offers affinity groups the following:

- a. Onboarding and planning guidance for new groups
- b. Templates for budgets and examples reimbursement submissions
- c. Optional advising meetings with the Assistant Vice Provost
- d. Event coordination support, including:
 - i. Space reservations
 - ii. Catering guidance and ordering
 - iii. Budget troubleshooting

Groups are also encouraged to collaborate with other faculty, staff, or student groups and other divisions/units when appropriate.

VII. EVENT & PROGRAM GUIDELINES

To ensure alignment with UMBC policies and the goals of faculty-led affinity groups, the following guidelines apply to all funded events and programs:

- a. Event framing and language
 - i. Events should align with the group's mission and focus on community-building, visibility, advancement, or advocacy.
 - ii. Please avoid labeling events with informal or personal terms. Per [University policy \(VIII-11.10.01\)](#), "*University funds cannot be utilized for any social functions or activities such as holiday parties, retirement parties, birthday parties, showers, welcome or farewell parties, office parties, etc.*"
 - 1. *Business or working meals, working meals listed [here](#) page*
- b. Agenda requirement:

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- i. To simplify review and documentation, please include a short agenda when requesting event support. Faculty Affairs provides a simple [template](#) to make this easy and consistent across groups.
 - ii. Agendas are required for all events/programs/activities, whether fully funded, co-sponsored, or paid in advance and later reimbursed.
- c. Purchasing, Food, and Reimbursements
- i. To avoid processing delays or reimbursement issues, please contact the Assistant Vice Provost before making purchases or financial commitments. This step ensures all expenses are processed smoothly.
 - ii. Meal pre-approval and catering requests should be submitted to Amy Heffler at least **two (2) weeks in advance** of the event.
 1. Food purchases must comply with the State of Maryland per diem limits and guidelines.
 2. Please see this [link](#) for UMBC's *Policy on Reimbursement for Business Meals and Purchase of Food Services*
 - iii. Use UMBC's [tax-exempt certificate](#) for all accepted purchases; sales tax cannot be reimbursed.
 - iv. Attendance sheets are required for all events that use institutional funds or when seeking a reimbursement.

d. Campus Leadership Engagement (President and Provost)

Affinity groups occasionally wish to invite senior leadership, especially the President and Provost, to participate in events when appropriate. These engagements help strengthen connection and visibility across UMBC.

To ensure fair access and adequate planning time:

1. Groups should share their event plans with the Office of Faculty Affairs **as early as possible—ideally at the start of the semester or the semester before the event.**
2. At a minimum, requests for President or Provost participation must be submitted **at least 10 weeks in advance.**
3. Faculty Affairs will coordinate with the President's and Provost's Office to confirm availability and scheduling. **Attendance is based on leaders' availability and institutional priorities.**
4. Groups are encouraged to consider **joint or campus-wide events** to create broader opportunities for leadership engagement.

VIII. COORDINATION WITH DIVISION OF INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY (DOIE)

- a. Faculty Affairs oversees faculty-led groups; DOIE oversees staff-led Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
- b. For mixed or evolving groups, both units coordinate to determine oversight, funding, and support needs.
- c. This collaboration ensures equity in support and avoids duplication across UMBC's affinity group ecosystem.

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IX. SUGGESTED PLANNING TIMELINE FOR AFFINITY GROUP LEADERS

- a. **Summer (July - August):** Optional check-in with Faculty Affairs to discuss leadership transitions or brainstorm activities
- b. **Early Fall (September):** Reconfirm leadership; submit programming and budget plan; coordinate catering requests at least 2 weeks in advance
 - i. If inviting senior leadership, notify Faculty Affairs 8-10 weeks in advance; must provide event details
- c. **Mid-Fall (October - November):** Host events; track attendance; monitor budget
- d. **Late Fall (November - December):** Begin Spring semester planning; notify Faculty Affairs of needs early on
- e. **Spring Semester (January - May):** Finalize programming; spend activity funds by June 1; share leadership plans for next year; submit outstanding reimbursements.
- f. **Late Spring (Late April - May):** Reflect on group impact; identify new leaders (if needed) and onboard them; begin brainstorming for the next academic year.

X. APPENDIX - RESOURCES, TEMPLATES, and FORMS

- a. **New Affinity Group Proposal Checklist.** Use when starting a new group and send an email to the Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs with the following:
 - i. Group Name
 - ii. Mission and/or Goals
 - iii. Group Description (who it's for, focus areas)
 - iv. Initial Membership List (min. 5 members)
 - v. Leadership Info (names, titles, role, contact)
 - vi. Membership Composition Plan
 - vii. Example Programming Ideas for Year 1
- b. **Annual Programming & Budget Planning Template.** Used each Fall semester to outline planned activities and expenses.
 - i. Event/Program/Activity Name
 - ii. Date (or tentative timing)
 - iii. Description / Goals
 - iv. Estimated Cost
 - v. Funding Source (activity vs. co-sponsorship)
 - vi. Lead Contact for the event/program/activity
 - vii. Notes
- c. **Event Planning and Reimbursement Checklist**
 - i. Event name, date, and agenda submitted
 - ii. AVP Faculty Affairs approval received
 - iii. Catering requests submitted 2+ weeks in advance
 - iv. Tax-exempt used (no sales tax on reimbursement)
 - v. Attendance sheet created or RSVP list saved
 - vi. All receipts submitted within reimbursement window
 - vii. Final budget tracking updated

d. Frequently Asked Questions

i. Leadership & Structure

1. **Can a staff member be the only group leader?** No. There must be at least one faculty co-lead, and faculty must outnumber or equal staff in leadership.
2. **Can someone lead more than one group?** Strongly discouraged, to prevent burnout and promote broad leadership opportunities.
3. **Can leadership be rotated during the year?** Yes. Please notify the Office of Faculty Affairs.

ii. Starting a Group

1. **What's required to start a group?** At least 5 interested members, a mission or purpose, one faculty lead, and a proposed focus.
2. **What if our proposed group overlaps with another?** Faculty Affairs will assess alignment and may recommend collaboration.
3. **Can we start a group if we're still recruiting?** Yes, but groups must meet the minimum member requirement to receive funding.

iii. Events & Programming

1. **Can we host social gatherings?** Yes, but events must have a clear mission-aligned purpose and not be framed as personal celebrations.
2. **How far in advance should we request support?** At least 2 weeks for catering or purchases; ideally 4–6 weeks in advance.
3. **Can we co-sponsor events?** Yes, with other groups, departments, or student orgs; just get approval first.

iv. Funding & Reimbursements

1. **Can we split leadership funds however we want?** Yes, however those with the same title and/or scope of work

should be paid the same amount (e.g., two co-chairs vs president and communications lead).

2. **Can we use funds for gifts or personal items?** No. Funds must be used for mission-aligned programming and expenses only. However, you can provide awards and other options for recognition.
3. **Do activity funds roll over?** No. All funds must be spent by June 1.

v. Membership & Participation

1. **Can we limit events to identity-specific participants?** No, all events must be open to anyone would like to join the group.
2. **What happens if staff participation becomes the majority?**
The group will enter a review process to determine appropriate oversight and funding.
3. **What if we fall below five members?** If a group falls below five active members, Faculty Affairs will connect with the co-leads to review next steps and determine how to best support continued engagement.