



Photograph of El Morro fort by Luis A. Muñoz

NALP 2010 Annual Education Conference

April 28 - May 1, 2010, San Juan, Puerto Rico

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Case for Affinity Groups

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What Are They?

- **Affinity Groups** are formal or informal workplace employee resource groups.
- They are vehicles used by employers and employees to promote employee satisfaction, productivity, retention, and improve business success.
- The groups provide a forum in which members share a common interest, issue, concern or purpose.
- In the law firm diversity context, affinity groups generally have been formed around racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, parental and veteran status.

Purposes of Affinity Groups

- Enhance an inclusive work environment that fosters opportunities for success and advancement
- Improve the recruitment and retention of women, minority, GLBT law students and lateral attorneys
- Improve the firm's cultural competency and appreciation for differences
- Increase the firm's outreach to and successful relationships with potential clients and communities
- Raise awareness of diversity issues within the firm

Benefits to Group Members

- Facilitate the mentoring of members to enhance both professional and personal growth
- Provide information on norms, unwritten rules and skills for succeeding in a law firm
- Communicate with one another about issues of importance
- Facilitate business and professional development

Benefits to Group Members

cont'd

- Establish and cultivate ties with other group members in the cities in which the firm's offices are located
- Networking opportunity – source of support and community
- Foster and promote members' leadership skills

Issues to Consider Upon Formation

- Purpose / Mission of the group
- Group members – will it include partners? Non-lawyers?
- Group leadership
- Membership criteria, if any; process for setting up and joining groups
- Relationship between affinity group and firm's diversity committee
- Budget – how is the group funded?
- Administrative support and coordination

Making It Work!
Best Practices in Formation and Operation

- Groups articulate goals in connection with firm goals (mission statement)
- People to self-select and govern (open membership)
- Establish clear objectives – set expectations
- Firm should invite and support the formation of groups, rather than establish and administer groups (solicit input regarding needs before assuming)
- Assist the firm with recruitment and marketing

Making It Work!
Best Practices in Formation and Operation

cont'd

- Assign partner or person of influence to oversee group and be responsible for supporting its success
- Meet regularly (monthly or quarterly)
- Encourage and promote group accountability
- Account for time spent on group matters (billing account)



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