



# Affinity Group Leader Handbook

## 2014-2015





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## What is an Affinity Group?

Affinity Groups (AGs) are small groups of iZone folks who meet to share, refine and/or prototype innovative school and system practices. Groups are generally wrestling with educational innovations and are usually facilitated to illuminate promising practices. Group formats range from general practice shares to problem solving sessions to protocol-based critical friends group, just to name a few! Each group has its own focus, process and mission, and the format of the group is designed to honor the interests of its participants and the topic at hand.

The three main goals of Affinity Groups are:

**Goal 1:** *AGs will generate new opportunities for **collaboration**.* Being an innovative educator can feel isolating! iZone wants to create safe spaces for educator to come together around passions and area of interest to share and problem solve.

**Goal 2:** *AGs will provide participants with **inspiration** to try new things in their workplaces.* We hope that these “meetings of the minds” will inspire and energize participants, as well as connect them to new people doing similar work across the city.

**Goal 3:** *AGs will **diffuse** innovative ideas, tools, mindsets, and processes across iZone schools.* Affinity Groups create learning environments from the bottom up fostering the radical collaboration that shares practice and builds community

## About This Handbook

System-created professional development is vital. However, we all know that some of the best conversations and connections we make at those events generally happen in the margins – at the lunch table or in the hall during a break. iZone aims to foster professional connections by providing structured opportunities for those marginal conversations and connections.

We think Affinity Groups are the coolest, most democratic, and most grass-roots form of radical collaboration available to DOE educators and staff. We know that many of you have done this kind of work before, and are well aware of how to get your group rolling and paid. We do NOT want to intrude on those plans and processes. However, we also know that there will be some of you who haven't done this kind of work before. We've compiled this handbook as a way of helping new and veteran AG co-leaders flourish in their leadership positions. This is **NOT** a strict set of instructions to follow. Instead, think of this as a group of resources that could help in your running of your group and help you create really awesome professional learning experiences for participants. We've tried to gather all of the pertinent responsibilities of AG co-leaders. We've provided information and suggestions below to help you out. But these groups **REALLY** are community groups, facilitated by members of the iZone community. The structure and running of them is up to you!

## Why Co-leaders?

1. We all work or have worked in schools. We recognize the importance of the day-to-day operations of a real learning environment. We also recognize that the unpredictable often occurs and committed group-leaders will need to appropriately attend to unforeseen situations. Affinity Groups are co-led so that, in the event of difficulty, there are at least 2 people responsible for the group's process



2. Another reason for the co-leadership is diversity of process and expertise. Successful groups tend to work best when disparate voices plan and create them. Plurality of experience helps create more dynamic groups and tends to lead to fuller learning and connecting experiences.

## Dividing up the responsibilities.

Co-leading is fun and a great way of developing a new working relationship with someone you may not have worked with before. You might want to plan very carefully who is responsible for what. We suggest co-leaders divide up the responsibilities and work together as much as possible

## Planning your Affinity Group

This section identifies and defines the responsibilities of the Affinity Group Co-Leaders. We'll also offer some suggestions for accomplishing those responsibilities, although ultimately, the decisions are up to you.

## Recruiting Participants

We will advertise your Affinity Group to the greater iZone and DOE community. However, we'd appreciate your help recruiting participants. Use your own professional network, or those of your school to reach out to other iZone practitioners who are doing work. If you need specific help recruiting, please don't hesitate to reach out to Allison Lavey ([alavey@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:alavey@schools.nyc.gov)). She will help connect you to other folks in other iZone schools who are doing similar work.

## Choosing a Meeting Format

One of your first tasks while planning your group will be to decide on a meeting format. Please bear in mind the mission of your group and who your ideal participants are. Be thoughtful and careful; choose a format that best suits the impact you are looking for your group to have. Here are a few examples of meeting formats you might choose:

- [A Critical Friends Group \(using protocols to share, tune and examine work\)](#)
- A Blender (each meeting has a featured former speaker with time to informally connect and interact with participants after the presentation)
- A Working Group (a self-directed project group looking to accomplish a particular project)
- [A Hack \(using design thinking activities to attack specific problems\)](#)

As a reminder, you may choose any meeting format and venue type you wish. You are **NOT** limited to these choices. These are just a few ideas.

## Choosing a Meeting Venue (or Venues)

Along with choosing a meeting format, choosing a meeting place is one of the first things you'll want to get done. Here are some questions you might want to keep in mind when choosing a venue:

- Is the place you're thinking of **centrally located** for the participants of your group?
- Does the space offer the kind of **ambiance and energy** that will help your group?
- Are there **technical requirements** that your group has that need attending to (i.e. wifi, projectors, etc.)
- Is it **free**? If not, will it fit your operating budget? (see Operational Funding below)



## Building your schedule

Please be prepared to launch the first meeting of your Affinity Group in November 2014. Ideally, groups meet monthly from November-May. Please share your first meeting information (time and location) and year-long schedule with Allison at iZone ([alavey@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:alavey@schools.nyc.gov)) as soon as possible.

## Modifying your schedule

Of course, your group's meeting schedule may change. That's the nature of working in education! We ask that when you do, you access the communication protocols you establish in the first meeting to make sure everyone knows of any changes (including Allison at iZone).

## Operational Funding

Each Affinity Group Co-Leader will have *some* operational funding placed in their school's budget. (Exact budget projections are currently being determined. We'll supply amounts shortly). This money will supply operational funding for the running of the group. Once the amount has been determined, it will be placed into *one* co-leader's school budget. How to use these funds must be worked out with the business manager of the co-leader's school. In the past, AG leaders have used these funds to purchase reading materials, supplies, obtain other resources pertinent to the topic of the group, or to take group excursions. How you use these funds is up to you. Our only requirement is that you supply food/snacks/refreshments at each AG meeting. (Please do not exceed \$8/person per meeting). Other than that, you may use these funds as best suits your group.

## Building your agendas

Please try to stay true to the type of meetings that you advertised in your initial application. Of course, if your group finds another path or another process that the majority of members want to follow, feel free to change it up! It bears repeating: these really are grass-roots groups with the freedom (and the charge) to engage in radical collaboration!

## Publishing your agendas

We've found that sending a quick meeting reminder tends to have a positive effect on attendance. We suggest that you use the communication protocols that you established in the first meeting to give people a few days' notice of an upcoming meeting. Attaching an agenda to that communication is a great way of enticing folks to the meeting.

## Communicating With Participants

During the first meeting, please plan for future group communication. Groups may use any method they choose to stay connected (email list, Twitter hashtag, Facebook group, etc.). However, once a communication protocol has been established, the co-leaders must make sure that all group members are subscribed appropriately and that all group members are receiving group communication.

## Running the Meetings

As we've said, creating and facilitating these meetings will be up to you. Please accomplish that as best suits your group's goals and needs. There are two small actions that we require: paying and feeding your group members. Besides that, there are a few suggestions we have for your practice that we've found to be successful in the past.

## Feeding Group Members

One of the few requirements that we ask of co-leaders is the providing of food/snacks to participants. In our experience, groups function much better with fuel and energy. Please use the operational funds and provide food and

beverages for your group. Work with your organization's procurement person to work out your system for purchasing and delivering food. If you are not sure how to go about getting this done, please reach out Allison Lavey. We'll help you figure out whom to work with as best we can.

## Some Suggestions for Facilitating

As we've said, these groups are created to be grass-roots gatherings of practitioners. As such, we do NOT impose the meeting structure or format to be followed. There are, however, two practices that we've noticed help create positive experiences for practitioners.

### Creating and Revisiting Norms

Successful AGs tend to agree on a set of norms and practices that align to the group's mission. Leaders created or used specific exercises ([like the one found here](#)) to help the group agree to particular ground rules that everyone would adhere to. This "norming" allows for groups to securely and safely express themselves, share, create and fulfill their group's mission. Leaders begin each meeting with a revisiting of the norms, usually with an opportunity to alter or amend them for current group practice.

### Creating/Choosing Facilitation Structures and Sticking To Them

Successful AGs also tend to have a particular, advertised and agreed upon meeting structure and facilitation norms. Sticking to those structures tends to ground the group in consistent practice and allows for comfort and collegiality to prosper. So whether your group is a protocol-based Critical Friends Group or a Working Group developing promising practices for implementing Project Based Learning (PBL), accomplishing familiar meeting structure allows for best practice to grow.

## Paying Group Members (or "managing the paperwork")

AG participants who are employees of the DoE and have a title and/or collective bargaining agreement that allows for per session may be paid for attending AG meetings provided that the meetings are scheduled outside their normal working hours. There are four steps to getting your participants paid:

1. Collecting [OP-175's](#) and Participant Resumes (they need to provide this)
2. Filling out [Per Session Timesheets](#)
3. Filling out Agendas and Sign In sheets (we recommend creating these on the same page to minimize paperwork; having the agenda outlined on top and room for signatures on the bottom works well! See template on our [website](#))
4. Submitting Timesheets, Agendas and Sign-In Sheets for each meeting to **Al Sylvia** ([asylvia@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:asylvia@schools.nyc.gov))

### 1. OP175s and Resumes

As per [Chancellor's Regulation C-175](#), in order to be eligible for this per session work, participants must apply and show that they are qualified for this work. The [OP-175 form](#) is the application and the resume acts as their proof of qualification. **The filling out of these forms must be done during the first meeting for any participant who is to be paid.** The forms must be submitted to iZone with the timesheets following the first meeting. During following meetings, only Agenda/Sign-In sheets and [Per Session Timesheets](#) need to be submitted for payment.

### 2. Filling Out Per Session Time Sheets

Per session time sheets must be COMPLETELY filled out. Each field must be filled in and a co-leader must sign the "Leader/Supervisor." Please be sure the participant **signs and dates** the sheet.



### 3. Filling out Agendas and Sign in Sheets

In order to pay participants, a record of the meeting as well as a record of the participants' attendance must be supplied. A completed agenda and a filled in sign-in sheet serve both of these purposes. Please make sure your Agenda is printed (not hand written – preferably on your organization/school letterhead, if possible) and details the times of the planned activities. Please make sure the sign in sheet contains the date, a field for printed names, and a field for signatures.

### 4. Submitting Timesheets, Agendas and Sign-in Sheets

After each meeting, iZone needs to receive the following paperwork to pay participants:

1. A fully fleshed-out, printed agenda (preferably on letterhead, if possible)
2. A fully legible sign-in sheet with the meeting date, printed names and signatures of attendees
3. A fully filled in timesheet (where the times match the agenda)

Paperwork may be **submitted by hand, faxed to iZone (718-935-3285) or scanned and sent to Al Sylvia ([asylvia@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:asylvia@schools.nyc.gov)) by email.**

## All things Per Session

### Paying Participants

Affinity Group Participants who are employees of the DoE and have a title and/or collective bargaining agreement that allows for per session may be paid for attending AG meetings (provided that the meetings are must manage the per session paperwork during the first session).

Below are small explanations of how AP, Teacher, and Guidance Counselor Per Session works (Principal Per Session is different) with an emphasis on how the iZone handles it. Per session is, of course, much more complicated than these simple explanations. However, this info might make dealing with your AGs per session a bit easier.

### How per session works

For those of you unfamiliar with the process, here's how per session works across the system: APs, Teachers and Guidance Counselors can apply to any per session posting. (iZone has created per session postings specifically for iZone work). Once an employee applies for specific per session work, they are eligible for compensation for work outside their scheduled work hours. Here are the steps involved:

- The employee fills out an OP-175 and submits a resume to apply to a posting. The employee is notified of their acceptance.
- The employee records his/her time worked on a per session time sheet.
- The employee submits the timesheet (along with supporting documentation) to an operations person (either school- or central-based) at the end of each payroll period.
- Operations inputs any time worked into ATS before the payroll-period closing for each employee.
- Central DoE Payroll combines all per session hours worked (either centrally OR at a school) for each employee (who have had hours inputted in ATS) and mails per session checks.

### Our central per session processing system

For AGs, co-leaders are responsible for getting OP175s and resumes filled out during the first session (or during any session that a new, eligible member joins). Subsequently, each co-leader is responsible for distributing and collecting per session timesheets to eligible members during each meeting and collecting them, once they've been completely filled out. Co-leaders will then submit those timesheets to Allison Lavey, along with a copy of the meeting agenda and sign in sheet.

Once received, timesheets will be examined for quality (i.e. have they been filled out completely). Using iZone operations folk, forms will be inputted before the close of the current pay period. The paperwork for each Affinity Group will then be archived.

### When will participants and leaders be paid?

For per session timesheets that are submitted in a timely manner (i.e. before the end of the pay period) participants (and leaders) will be paid according to the [2014-15 per session schedule found here](#).

## Sharing the Work of Your Affinity Group

Part of your charge as co-leader is to help [diffuse ideas and implementations across the iZone](#). There are three ways that we're hoping you can do that:

- 1) Generating some artifacts of your group,
- 2) Publishing some of those artifacts and
- 3) Participating in iZone Share events.

Some helpful tips and ideas for documenting your process and sharing your group's work [are available here](#). Stay tuned for more information about upcoming iZone Share events. You can read more about [past iZone Share](#) events on our website and [iZone blog](#).

Please know that someone from iZone will come to at least one of your meetings and record some video for use on our site.

*That's all, folks!*

*Thanks so much for your dedication to spreading innovation and inspiration across NYC!*



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