

# AFFINITY GROUP PROGRAM

AFFINITY GROUP PROGRAM CHARTER	
Project Name	Affinity Group Program
Department/Department	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Program Champion	Nicole Cropper, Deputy Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

## I. Introduction

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) recognizes that meeting our mission requires a highly skilled, diverse, and inclusive workforce which also creates a high performing and inclusive workplace. Senior leaders and managers have direct involvement in cultivating a workplace that attracts, develops, and retains diverse, qualified employees to effectively manage the state’s fish, wildlife, plant resources, and the habitats on which they rely. The Affinity Group Program (AGP) is implemented primarily to support staff across the department including those from underrepresented identities by providing inclusionary program activities. The AGP will promote and foster diversity in the workplace through education, cross training, mentorship, and inclusive events.

## II. Purpose of the Affinity Groups Program

The purpose of the AGP is to serve as the operating framework for all CDFWs Affinity Groups (AGs) to facilitate the participation of all employees in affinity groups. AGs are employer-recognized groups of employees, including but not limited to, those with common interests, backgrounds, and/or cultures and/or a willingness to learn more about different backgrounds and/or cultures. They provide a space for employees to connect, share common experiences, network, and contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) education and events. The AGP also improves our workforce’s diversity and culture of inclusion by:

- ensuring that CDFW cultivates a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment for all employees;
- Enhancing leadership development by fostering an environment of continuing education and professional development;
- Offering socializing, mentoring, and networking opportunities;
- improving communication channels through intersectional collaborative opportunities; and
- promoting awareness and appreciation for the differences we all offer.

## III. Affinity Groups

AGs are voluntary, employee-driven groups that promote a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with CDFW’s missions, values, goals, and objectives. Such groups are typically created around and focused on issues affecting persons from traditionally underrepresented groups. They include groups of employees having a common interest in mentoring each other and assisting CDFW with

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community support. The AGP will allow employees who desire to work together to formally seek recognition as an AG. This will help ensure that persons from underrepresented groups feel welcomed, valued, and supported at CDFW. Membership in the recognized AGs is open to all current employees at CDFW interested in supporting the respective AGs missions and objectives.

# Affinity Group Program Charter

This Charter serves as the governing document for the AGP. This Charter also serves as a resource for AGs and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of department staff and management relating to CDFW's AGs. This Charter will empower CDFW to fully utilize AGs to effectively advance CDFW's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Charter will be updated for requisite addendums.

### A. Recognition and Application Process

CDFW's recognition of an AG means that the AG has been approved by the AGP Champion or the AGP Champion's designee for AG membership, meetings, and resource usage (including but not limited to reasonable use of CDFW meeting rooms, email, intranet web pages, and telephones), and use of time during work hours for official AG business, subject to management approval and as set forth in this Charter.

The following criteria are required for all recognized AGs:

- All members must be employees of CDFW, this includes, but is not limited to full and part-time employees, student interns, seasonal aids, and retired annuitants.
- Participation in AGs and any activities is completely voluntary and must not disrupt the participant's job responsibilities.
- Any employee of CDFW who is in good standing and supports the AG's mission is welcome to join. Membership may not be granted or denied based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other protected characteristic.
- The AG must have at least one [AGP manger \(AGPM\)](#).
- The AG and its members must always comply with all applicable [CDFW policies and procedures](#).

#### [Application Process](#)

An AG requesting recognition must complete and submit a [New AG Application](#) electronically to the AGP Champion. The New AG Application should include, but is not limited to, an outline of the following information:

- Purpose of the AG. A permissible purpose is one that will support CDFW's core mission and interests such as:
  - providing mentorship, career support, networking, or continuing education; and

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- providing cultural awareness and diversity education;
- making recommendations about how to improve and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion at CDFW.
- AG's mission. The AG's mission must be aligned with CDFW's values and core mission, such as staff and/or community outreach, education, peer support, diversity, or cultural awareness.
- AGPM Contact Information. AGPM's name, branch and/or region, and email address.

The following types of AGs and activities will NOT be approved for recognition by CDFW as part of the AGP.

- AGs solely based on a common interest or activity, such as recreational activities or hobbies.
- AGs that have a purpose of opposing other groups or engage in activities that result in such opposition.
- AGs whose agendas and activities promote or result in division, violence, exclusion, intolerance, discrimination, disrespect, hate, harassment, abusive conduct, or unlawful activity.
- AGs that attempt to negotiate terms and conditions of employment for their members or to represent other employees in connection with such matters.
- AGs that engage in commercial or revenue-generating activities, including raffles, or other activities inconsistent with [CDFW policies and procedures](#).
- AGs that share the same theme as another recognized AG.

While the AGP may provide employees with a forum to discuss employment matters amongst themselves and to provide input and raise issues of concern to CDFW, out of respect for and in deference to the collective bargaining process, CDFW will not be able to meet and confer with AGs on issues affecting terms and conditions of employment. Instead, CDFW will, when applicable, direct employee concerns to the appropriate channels.

The purpose of this AGP and of AGs is not to provide a forum for employees to negotiate terms and conditions of employment or otherwise engage with management regarding such matters.

Employees who have complaints related to their employment (e.g., problems with a supervisor, complaints about hours or compensation, allegations of discrimination or harassment, etc.) are encouraged to raise such issues through [Human Resources](#) and/or the [Office of Equal Employment Opportunity](#) for addressing such matters.

### **B. Meetings and Special Events, Resources, and Use of State Time**

Meetings: AGs may hold meetings during work hours up to the allotted time of eight (8) hours per pay period for AGPMs and four (4) hours per pay period for AG Members per pay period. Individual AG Member participation requires compliance with [Section IV](#) of this Charter.

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Special Events: Upon AGP Champion or the AGP Champion's designee approval, AGs may schedule Special Events. Upon supervisor approval and consistent with Section IV of this Charter, AGPMs and Members may spend work hours planning, organizing, and facilitating Special Events.

Resources and Use of State Time: CDFW recognized AGs may reasonably use state resources and use of state time during work hours for official AG pursuant to [Section IV](#) of this Charter.

Any activities among CDFW personnel outside of regular work hours or place of work is entirely at the discretion of the individual employee and not sanctioned by CDFW. Participation in any AG shall not result in overtime for any CDFW employee.

CDFW's executive management personnel retains the discretion and reserves the right to immediately modify, revoke, cancel, or terminate any approval to participate in AGP activities at any time and in its sole discretion. All efforts will be made to continue participation in the AG when feasible. Justification will be documented in writing and shared with the employee at the time of termination.

### **C. Field and/or Regional Offices**

Employees in field and/or regional offices are encouraged to participate in the AGP by establishing AGs or local chapters of a recognized AG if unable to participate in the main chapter. Regional AGs (those NOT associated with an established AG) and local chapters (those AG associated with an established AG) must conduct themselves in conformance with this Charter and any applicable requirements regarding use of regional office facilities. Additional requirements below:

#### Regional AGs

- required to submit a [New AG application](#).
- AGPMs of Regional AGs are required to submit an [AGPM application](#).
- Responsible for maintaining their CDFW intranet pages up to date. The AGs intranet pages are required to identify at a minimum, contact information for the AGPM and meeting and event dates and locations. Any changes to AG leadership should also be immediately reported to the Program Champion.

#### Local chapters

- AGPMs of local chapters are required to submit an [AGPM application](#).
- Responsible for maintaining their CDFW intranet pages up to date. The AGs intranet pages are required to identify at a minimum, contact information for the AGPM and meeting and event dates and locations. Any changes to AG leadership should also be immediately reported to the Program Champion.

### **D. Responsibilities**

Although AGs must be reviewed and approved by the Program Champion and/or the Program Champion's designee to obtain recognition, recognized AGs are expected to be employee driven.

AGs shall also establish their own organizational structure and administrative procedures including

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but not limited to:

- leadership structure,
- leadership selection process,
- meeting frequency,
- locations, and
- agendas.

Regular Reporting: AGs are responsible for providing up-to-date information to CDFW on at least an annual basis, which should include but is not limited to:

- membership numbers,
- AGPMs, or

Annual reports should be sent to the Program Champion at [Affinity.Groups@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Affinity.Groups@wildlife.ca.gov).

Communication: AGs will also be responsible for maintaining their CDFW intranet pages up to date. The AGs intranet pages are required to identify contact information for the AGPM and meeting and event dates and locations. Any changes to AG leadership should also be immediately reported to the Program Champion.

CDFW maintains the ownership, control and authority to suspend, remove, or deny access to, intranet pages should the group violate any CDFW mission, policies, statutes, or non-approved activities listed in Section A above.

### **E. AGP Roles**

#### Champion or designee

AGP Champions are the Director, Chief Deputy Director, and Deputy Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion or their designee who perform the following duties:

- support and advise an AG;
- participate in activities;
- raise awareness of AG events and activities, and
- receive information regarding issues identified by the AG.
- serve as the final decision-maker regarding AGPM applications.
- Issue newly selected AGPMs resources on affinity group best practices upon appointment and coordinate AGP orientation and/or training within the first 60 calendar days of their appointment.

The AGP Champion and/or the AGP Champion's designee is responsible for:

- Administration of the AGP on a day-to-day basis;
- acting as the final decision-maker on AGPM, and AG applications, including annual reviews,

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- renewals, and extensions, as needed;
- reviewing and approving special events;
- day-to-day administration of the Program, including but not limited to:
  - interpreting and updating the AGP Charter, as needed;
  - coordinating and working AGPMs, as needed, including answering questions and issuing and coordinating training and resources;
  - maintaining the AGP intranet page and the Affinity.Groups@wildlife.ca.gov email inbox, and
  - answering and/or directing questions, as appropriate, regarding the AGP.

### Program Manager

AGPMs shall act as a liaison to the AGP's Champions on behalf of their assigned AG. This includes, but is not limited to, serving as the AG contact for employees who are interested in joining. Multiple individuals may serve as AGPMs simultaneously per AG and may divide the amount of time worked on AG activities provided that each individual AGPM is identified on the AGP SharePoint page.

Selection: Once an AG has been approved, interested applicants should submit an application to the AGP Champion at [affinitygroups@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:affinitygroups@wildlife.ca.gov) and should include the applicant's supervisor's approval to serve as a volunteer AGPM, and any such approval may be revoked at any time.

Qualities or Characteristics: The role of an AGPM is a professional development opportunity and contributes to the department by demonstrating:

1. A commitment to the principles of EEO, civil rights, and DEI, and environmental justice;
2. Strong leadership and team building skills;
3. Strong written and oral communication skills;
4. Ability to work with diverse groups and collaborate on controversial issues with results-driven focus;
5. Willingness and ability to assist in identifying and resolving issues that affect specific AGP membership;
6. General understanding of the causes and impacts of discrimination and bias;
7. Ability to foster and maintain relationships with internal and external stakeholders; and
8. Strong work ethic such that additional volunteer duties in connection with the AGP will not interfere with the employee's performance of their ordinary job duties.

Supervisors are encouraged to provide opportunities for their staff to participate in AGs to the extent that such participation does not significantly interfere with the employee's job duties.

Term: The AGPM serves in a volunteer role for a one (1)-year term. AGPMs should not be selected to administer more than two (2) AGs simultaneously. The AGP Champion and/or the AGP

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Champion's designee has the discretion to determine how many consecutive terms an individual may serve. A term longer than one (1) year may be approved based on several factors, including the employee's performance, productivity, and ability to work well with others. Extensions must be approved by the AGP Champion and/or the AGP Champion's designee, either of which may be revoked at any time.

Any questions or concerns about the AGP should be directed to the AGP Champion at [Affinity.Groups@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Affinity.Groups@wildlife.ca.gov)

### Immediate "Supervisor of Record"

Supervisors must ensure that AGPMs and/or AG Member volunteer activities for an AG will not compromise their normal job duties. Management is encouraged to work with AG participants to allow a reasonable, specified, limited amount of time during regular work hours that may be used for official AG business. However, membership within a recognized AG does not mandate an employee to be allowed to attend an activity during work hours. Management should not approve participation if approval would result in the employee incurring overtime.

To the extent possible, managers and/or supervisors shall work with employees to identify ways to participate in AG activities, while continuing to meet their employment obligations. When using work hours to participate in official AG business, employees are required to coordinate with their supervisor, as they would for any other activity or event during work hours, to allow supervisors time to ensure adequate staff coverage.

## **IV. Adherence to CDFW Policies and Procedures**

### Allowable Time During Work Hours

Reasonable, specified, limited amount of time during regular work hours that may be used for official AG business, as mentioned in the foregoing, is defined as follows:

- AGPMs may spend no more than eight (8) hours per pay period on AGP activities.
- AG Members may spend no more than four (4) hours per pay period on AGP activities.

Supervisors shall not grant hours in excess of these times indicated, except in unusual circumstances.

### Additional Rights and Policies

CDFW reserves the right to modify or terminate this AGP at any time, and to cancel the recognition and support of any AG at any time in its sole discretion. All reasonable efforts will be made to inform the AGPM and AG members of the reasoning for such modification and/or termination.

This Charter does not create or supersede any CDFW policy. Recognized AGs are deemed by CDFW to further its core mission and interests. Therefore, AGs and their members are required to adhere to all applicable policies, rules, standards, practices, and procedures of CDFW at all times.

Any AG or AGP participant determined to have violated a CDFW policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure may be subject to discipline. Additionally, CDFW retains the discretion to immediately terminate an AG's recognition and/or AGP participant's participation for violation of any CDFW

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policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure.

**X** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chuck Bonham**

**Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife**



## APPENDIX A: AFFINITY GROUPS PROGRAM MANAGER APPLICATION

Instructions: Complete the Affinity Groups Program Manager (AGPM) Application if you wish to serve as an AGPM for an Affinity Group. All applications are subject to final approval by the AGP Champion or the AGP Champion's designee. Applications must be completed and submitted electronically to the AGP Champion.

<b>I. APPLICANT INFORMATION</b>	
First Name:	Last Name:
Pronouns (optional):	Branch/ Region:
Job Title:	
Civil Service Classification:	Supervisor:
Email Address:	Supervisor's Email Address:
<b>II. STATEMENT OF INTEREST AND QUALIFICATIONS</b>	
Please describe a situation in which you have exercised leadership or team building skills.	
Please provide at least one goal you would like to achieve as an AGPM.	
Please describe a situation in which you have exercised leadership or team building skills.	
Do you currently serve as an AGPM for any other Affinity Group?	
If yes, please identify each:	

Please include any additional information the AGP Champion or the AGP Champion's designee should consider in the approval process. (optional)

**III. EMPLOYEE VERIFICATION**

**I have read CDFW's Affinity Groups Program Charter, and I am requesting approval to become an Affinity Groups Program Manager.**

Employee Signature:

Date:

*The following sections will be returned to the employee with a copy provided to the employee's supervisor.*

**IV. AGP CHAMPION APPROVAL**

Do you approve this employee's application to become an AGPM? YES NO

If yes, please read the approval below and sign.

**I hereby understand and acknowledge that the employee is applying for a role in the CDFW Affinity Groups Program. I approve this application.**

This appointment may be terminated upon the request of the employee or the employee's supervisor or at the discretion of the AGP Champion and/or the AGP Champion's designee.

Any Affinity Group Member determined to have violated a CDFW policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure may be subject to discipline. Additionally, CDFW retains the discretion to immediately terminate an Affinity Group's recognition for violation of any CDFW policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure.

CDFW reserves the right to modify or terminate this AGP at any time, and to cancel the recognition and support of any particular Affinity Group at any time in its sole discretion.

AGP Champion Name (print):

AGP Champion Signature:

Date:

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## APPENDIX B: NEW AFFINITY GROUP APPLICATION

Instructions: Complete the New Affinity Group Application if you would like to form a new Affinity Group. All applications are subject to final approval by the AGP Champion or the AGP Champion's designee. Submit completed application materials electronically to the AGP- Champion.

I. APPLICANT INFORMATION	
First Name:	Last Name:
Pronouns (optional):	Branch/ Region:
Job Title:	
Civil Service Classification:	Supervisor:
Email Address:	Supervisor's Email Address:
I. AFFINITY GROUP INFORMATION (Please respond to all)	
Please provide the proposed title and description of the Affinity Group you would like to create and describe your interest in forming this new Affinity Group.	
What is the mission and purpose of this new proposed Affinity Group, and how will they support CDFW's core mission and interests?	
Who is applying to serve as the Affinity Group Program Manager (AGPM)? (If you are interested in being the AGPM for the proposed Affinity Group, please complete the Affinity Groups Program Manager Application in addition to this application.)	
Please include any additional information the Program Champion and/or the Program Champion's designee should consider in the approval process. (optional)	
II. EMPLOYEE VERIFICATION	

<b>I have read CDFW's Affinity Groups Program Charter, and I am requesting approval to establish a New Affinity Group:</b>	
Employee Signature:	
Date:	
<i>The following sections will be returned to the employee with a copy provided to the employee's supervisor.</i>	
<b>III. AGP CHAMPION APPROVAL</b>	
Do you approve this application to establish the proposed new Affinity Group? YES      NO	
If yes, please read the approval below and sign.	
<p><b>I hereby understand and acknowledge that the affinity group representative is to establish a new Affinity Group Program in accordance with the Affinity Group Program Charter. I approve this application.</b></p> <p><b>Any Affinity Group determined to have violated a CDFW policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure may be subject to discipline. Additionally, CDFW retains the sole discretion to immediately terminate an Affinity Group's recognition for violation of any CDFW policy, rule, standard, practice, or procedure.</b></p>	
AGP Champion Name (print):	
AGP Champion Signature:	
Date:	