

HOW AFFINITY GROUPS CAN HELP WITH BIPOC TEACHER SUPPORT, RETENTION,
AND GROWTH

by

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Research Question

The question that guided my research was: *How do affinity groups support BIPOC staff and how can an affinity group resource support future groups?*

Project Summary

Our classrooms have become increasingly diverse. Teachers of Color (TOC) make up about 20% of U.S. public school teachers while Students of Color represent about 52% of public school students (Carter, Andrews, et al. 2018, p.7). In Minnesota, only 4% of teachers are Teachers of Color (TOCAI MN, 2021). It becomes difficult to model affirmative acknowledgement of diversity in the classroom when most of the adults fit into the demographics of white, cisgender, middle class, and female. To help all students, but especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) students, we must first address the importance of Teachers of Color and the crucial need to support and retain them through having BIPOC affinity groups.

The website designed for this project serves as a resource guide that provides the topics, context, and set up for BIPOC affinity groups for school districts to utilize for their BIPOC staff, particularly Teachers of Color (TOC). While there has been a recent push to hire more TOC to diversify the teaching field, these efforts are rarely accompanied by shifts needed in schools to train and support TOC's specific needs. Affinity groups meet these needs and serve as a powerful tool to retain TOC. The reason why affinity groups have been proven to be so successful is because they create a space for Teachers of Color to collectively access support, healing, and coping with racial trauma and working in a White-centric system (Kulkarni, Bland, Gaeata, 2022, p. 46). Affinity groups provide an opportunity to directly confront the realities of systemic racism and to draw on shared community and culture as strengths (Mosely, 2018, p. 270). This means that affinity groups must be set up mindfully and with multiple entry points so that the

group can serve its maximum purpose. However, there is not much research yet about how to set up affinity groups. A resource guide was chosen because it was the best way to address this gap between schools knowing the benefits of affinity groups for TOC and having the tools to implement and facilitate an affinity group to provide meaningful support for TOC. This project gives new purpose to the research available about TOC by synthesizing the factors of raising awareness of the issues TOC face and retaining TOC into one goal: to support Teachers of Color. A website provides an accessible platform for schools to use that is easy to share and utilize that does not involve sharing a physical or electronic guidebook or PDF.

Administrators and Teachers of Color are the project audience. The purpose of this project is to support TOC by providing them a designated, safe space within school systems in affinity groups. Administrators can use this resource guide to realize the significance of having affinity groups and by working with TOC to create time in TOC's schedules to have an affinity group. TOC can then use this guide to learn about the context of TOC in the education system, to guide their discussions in the affinity group, and to share the responsibility of setting up a safe space for each other that serves a purpose rather than just a space to vent.

The resource guide website also contains suggestions for how to implement the group. This includes showing examples of affinity groups, the benefits of affinity groups, and suggestions for how to implement an affinity group based off of the group I facilitated. For example, the H.E.L.L.A. affinity group mentioned in Chapter Two used *testimonios*, or a methodological, pedagogical, and political form of storytelling to honor affinity group members' experiences (Pour-Khorshid, 2018, p. 324). This and other methods of creating shared spaces are put in the resource guide. The affinity group I facilitated met biweekly for 30 minutes a session. This proved to be a doable amount of time to fit into teachers' busy schedules while still

maintaining a community of support. I suggest in the resource guide that groups meet with similar timeframes.

The website also includes an overall compilation of resources for Teachers of Color. Pedagogical resources will address anti-racist, anti-bias teaching and tips on how to decenter curriculum from whiteness. If affinity groups are only able to meet during professional development days or less frequently throughout the school year then the guide can be adjusted to be used as such. There are also resources that address Teacher of Color wellness and self-care. This is to directly combat racial battle fatigue (one of the main issues that TOC face). Lastly, there will be resources to connect TOC to groups in Minnesota and nationally. This includes providing the information about the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota (TOCAI MN) and their affinity group, Education Minnesota's various affinity groups for teachers who are in the union, and the Institute for Teachers of Color (ITOC). If there is only one Teacher of Color in a building, then these resources can offer additional opportunities to connect and reduce isolation.

The Project

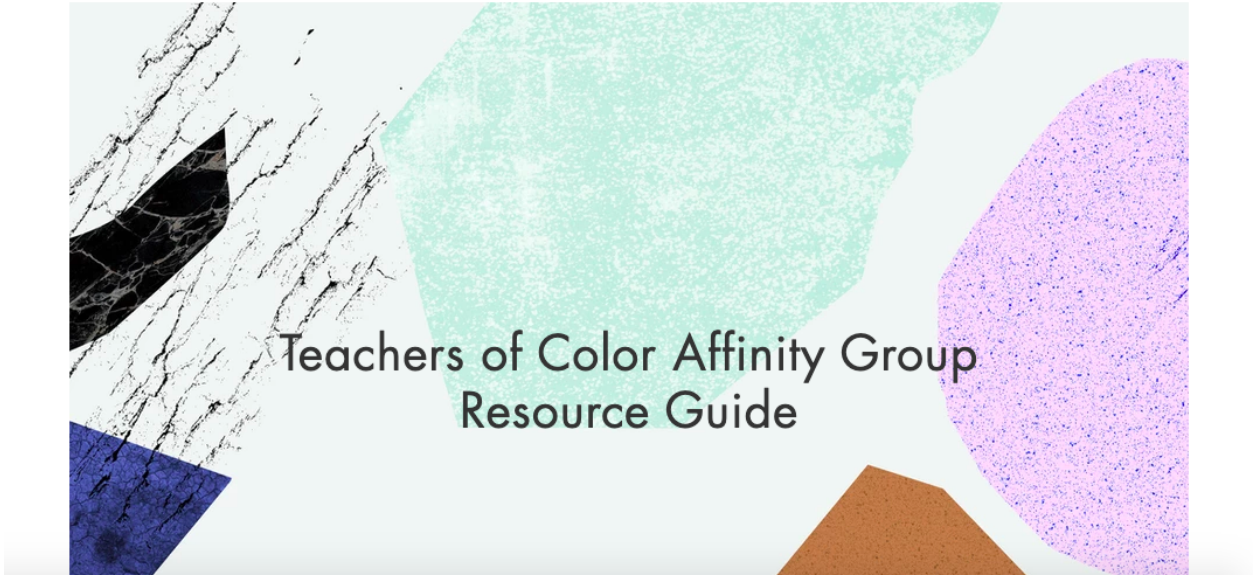
TOC Affinity Group
Resource Guide

[Home](#)

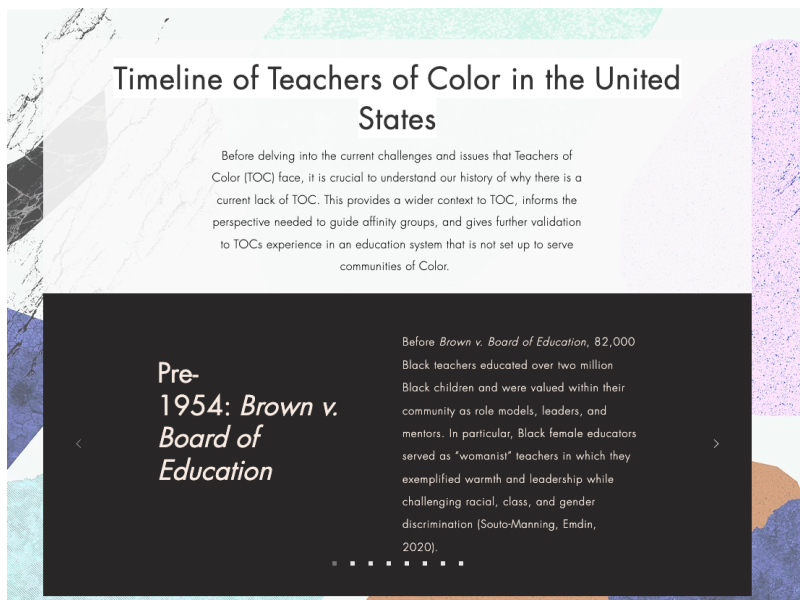
[About](#)

[Timeline of Teachers of Color \(TOC\)](#)

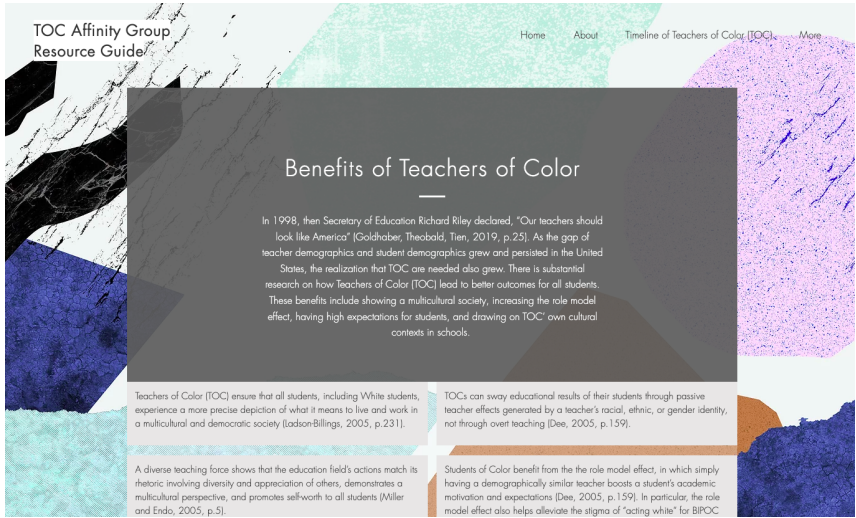
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The website can be found at: <https://tocaaffinitygroup.wixsite.com/resourceguide1>. The pages for the website include an About page, a Timeline of Teachers of Color, Why TOC Matter, Challenges TOC Face, Affinity Groups, Resources for TOC, and a TOC forum.



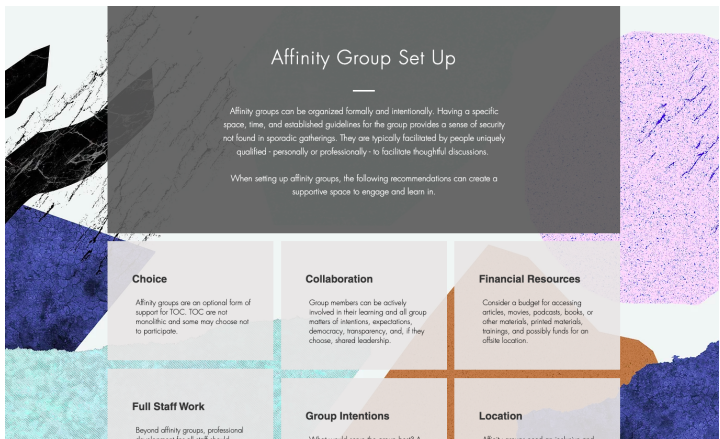
The timeline provides a history of why there is a current lack of TOC in the United States. This provides a wider context to TOC and further validates TOC's experience in our education system.



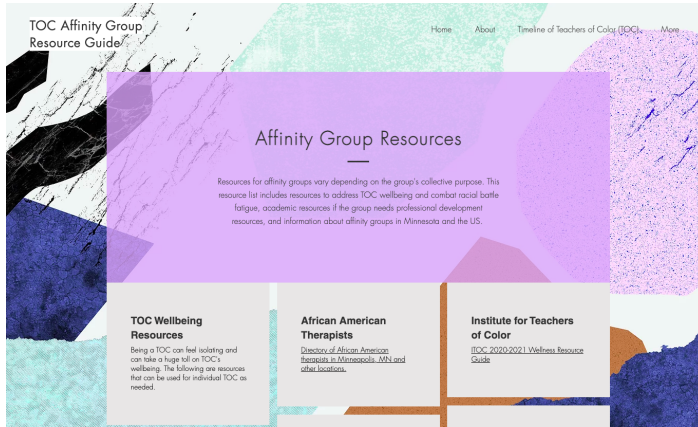
The benefits page describes the research behind why TOC lead to better outcomes for all students.



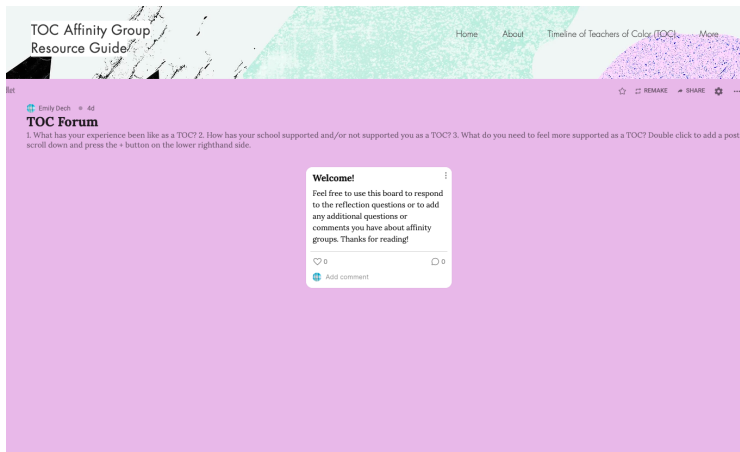
The challenges page examines challenges that TOC face including racial battle fatigue, the overall racism that TOC face, isolation and toxicity, and how this impacts TOC leaving the field. These challenges highlight the need for affinity groups.



The affinity groups page shows the research behind affinity groups and examples of affinity groups in the U.S. It also provides recommendations and considerations for setting up affinity groups in schools.



The resources page provides resources to address TOC wellbeing and combat racial battle fatigue, academic resources if the group needs professional development resources, and information about affinity groups in Minnesota and the US.



The final page for the website includes a forum for TOC to connect and reflect together. Padlet is used as a forum tool in which anyone on the website can leave a comment and interact with comments already written. There is also a contact form

at the bottom of the page if anyone has a specific question for me about affinity groups.

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