



ATHEOPAGAN AFFINITY GROUP GUIDEBOOK



Introduction: What is an Affinity Group?

So you want to create an Atheopagan affinity group—that's great!

Affinity groups are self-managed groups of Atheopagans who have come together around areas of mutual interest. That could mean that you all live in a particular area, or that you all like to do or discuss a particular kind of topic, art or craft, or that you share a particular identity. Affinity groups convene online, in person, or both, depending on what is most convenient and feasible. The groups are meant to foster community, relationships, local traditions and events among Atheopagans.

As a part of the Atheopagan community, affinity groups are asked to endorse the Atheopagan Community Conduct Standards and to uphold the Atheopagan Principles. By signing the Affinity Group Charter, organizers of affinity groups commit to uphold these standards. This is for the protection of both the affinity group and the broader Atheopagan

community from bigoted or divisive behavior contrary to the inclusive, progressive values of Atheopaganism.

This guidebook will provide advice on how to recruit members to your affinity group, copies of the Charter and Conduct Standards, recommendations for operational procedures and rituals, and basic instructions for running meetings, making decisions, and how to deal with conflicts.

Organizing Your Affinity Group

The first decisions you need to make about your affinity group are **what it is about** and **what platform(s) it will operate within**.

You probably already have the purpose of your affinity group in mind: is it an LGBTQI+ group, or a group centered on a particular geographical area, for example? Knowing this will inform decisions about how it will be organized. But check first to see whether there is already an affinity group for the population you're seeking to engage. Check [here](#) to see whether a group has already been organized with the same concept as yours.

If your group is for a local area, you will want to organize members through an **online forum** like its own **Facebook group** or **Discord server**, but may also want to organize **in-person meetups** so members can get to know one another better, establish friendships and do in-person rituals.

It would be great if this guidebook could walk you through setting up a Facebook group or Discord server, but the truth is that these platforms are evolving, and change all the time. There are other platforms, too, that you may prefer to use. Probably the best way to learn how to set up your forum is to search on YouTube for a tutorial for “how to create a Facebook group” or “how to set up a Discord server” with the current year in the title.

Both Facebook and Discord offer the opportunity to create **membership questions** that prospective members must answer the first time they log in, in order to be admitted. You should do this! It ensures that any people who join from outside the Atheopagan Facebook or Discord communities nonetheless agree to abide by our conduct standards and values.

The current membership questions for the main Facebook and Discord communities are:

- 1) Why do you want to join the Atheopagan community (full sentence answer, please)
- 2) This is an anti-bigotry, LGBTQI+-affirmative, pro-feminist, pro-environment, pro-science, anti-racist, anti-ableist (including fatphobia) and anti-fascist space. Do you agree to uphold these values?

3) Are you over 17? (You don't have to be, but it helps us to know so we can provide additional support if necessary)

Require all prospective members to answer all questions. This is important to reduce the incidence of trolls and those whose values conflict with those of Atheopaganism.

Once you have created the forum for your affinity group and prepared it to screen prospective members, it's time to recruit some!

Finding Members

Post to the main AP Facebook group and Discord server to advertise that you are starting a new affinity group, including what the group is about and how to join. This is the best way to recruit new members because all such members have already been screened and have agreed to uphold Atheopagan values. You can advertise your group weekly on each platform.

You can also list your group on the **Atheopagan Affinity Group Directory**, which can be viewed from the Atheopagan Society website on the Community page. The Directory is a Google Sheet and accessed by clicking [here](#).

Members from outside the Atheopagan community may gravitate to your group after you start it. These may be friends or relations of members or others who hear about it. Make sure that each new member has read the **charter** (see below), and agrees to it. This may sound awkward, but it can save you a lot of grief later on if someone with values contrary to those advanced by Atheopaganism want to join. You don't want your group infiltrated or taken over by neo-Nazis or people hostile to LGBTQ folks, to give a couple of examples.

Getting Started: The Charter

The Affinity Group Charter (see final page) is a statement that the group intends to abide by the values and worldview of Atheopaganism. It's important both to set a value vision for the group and because if a conflict arises over a member's behavior, the Charter and Conduct Standards becomes touchstones you can point to, to show that the behavior violated community standards.

Conduct Standards and Grievance Procedure

The Atheopagan Community Conduct Standards and Grievance Procedure (appended to the back of this guidebook) were developed to ensure clarity about what constitutes acceptable behavior in our community spaces. This is for the safety of all.

Naming Your Group

This can be the very first thing your group does together—choosing a group name. While a descriptive name may be useful for recruiting members, your group may also want to have a “Pagan name” or “Ritual name” for itself. For example, the Northern California affinity group named itself the “Live Oak Circle”.

General Tips for Running Meetups

- Open by reading a short poem or other meaningful reading that is pertinent to Atheopagans—this is a reminder of what you all have in common and will set a tone for the meeting.
- Then, hold a round of introductions, if it is a first meeting or there are any new attendees. Introductions typically involve stating your name and the answer to some kind of “icebreaker question”, like “where do you live?” (if a geographically distributed group), or “what brought you to Atheopaganism?”, or perhaps one of these:
 - Favorite weird (but brilliant) food combo?
 - What is your favorite quotation of all time?
 - Which fictional place would you most like to visit?
 - What is the best gift ever you ever received?
 - How would your best friend describe you?
 - What’s your favorite book, and why?
 - Have you seen any good movies or shows lately?
 - Where was the last place you went for the first time?
 - If you could travel anywhere in the world today, where would you go?
- Then, proceed to the business of the meeting. This can be as simple as just having a social mixer (perhaps with a few conversation topics suggested), or perhaps planning a future ritual or excursion.
- If there is a meal, do a brief meal gratitude blessing. There is one in the [Atheopagan Hymnal](#).
- Other activities for meetups can include walks, hikes, or camping trips; discussions relating to the subject matter of the group if it is an identity-based group; informational workshops; crafting sessions; book discussions; visits to museums or other attractions; “show and tell” sessions—anything you can think of that the group might enjoy and find pertinent to their Atheopagan paths.

In-Person Meetups

In-person gatherings are really the gold standard of Atheopagan meetings. Over time, the friendship, comradery, and intimacy that can grow between those who share in-person community and rituals can add real love and joy to our lives.

Here are some tips for in-person group meetings:

- Meet in a public place at first: reserve a room at a library, or meet at a café or restaurant. Be sure to make it a place where people who don't drink alcohol will be comfortable. This is a safety measure until you have established trust in your members.
- In-person rituals:

There is extensive material on creating in-person rituals at atheopaganism.org. The [Atheopagan Ritual Primer](#) and [Ritual Planning Workbook](#) are available for download there, and there are many entries about rituals and their creation.

Online Video Conferencing Meetups

Online video conferencing on platforms like Zoom are great ways to get to know people without being able to meet them in person. Since the pandemic, nearly everyone knows how to use Zoom, the most popular application. These connections can grow very fond and deep over time, so don't discount the impact or importance of holding video conferencing meetups if in-person meetings are impractical.-

Here are some tips for conducting online events:

- Use the hand-raising function so people don't talk over one another. The meeting host can call on people in turn.
- You can take notes in the chat (which you can save) for future reference if you wish.
- Use the waiting room function to screen attendees if you know the names of everyone who was invited. This way you can reduce the chance of trolls invading your online space.

- Give attendees the option of whether or not to turn their cameras on. It's fine if they want not to; in fact, they can communicate by typing in the chat window if they are more comfortable that way.

- Online rituals: Preparation

Because video conferenced rituals require interaction with technology, it can be helpful to have participants prepare for a ritual in advance to help them be in the right mind space. Suggestions include fasting, bathing, grounding, meditation on a theme, and/or preparation of materials for the ritual.

- Online rituals: Focus window

One of the great things you can do with a Zoom call is to log into it multiple times. When leading a Zoom ritual, if possible log in twice, and point one camera at a Focus (altar) constructed for the ritual. This creates a participant window of the Focus which you can spotlight to create a central point of attention for participants while participating in the ritual.

- Online rituals: Share physical activities

The “action” of the ritual works best if it involves activities that participants can do at home: lighting a candle to start the ritual or evoke a particular meaning, for example, or pouring water into a chalice, or tying knots in a cord: something physical that makes the ritual more than just information mediated through a screen. I highly encourage inclusion of some kind of physical activity for all participants in your online ritual

- Online rituals: Incorporate screen sharing

Screen sharing is great, and it can enable you to present media that will augment your ritual. At Yule, for instance, you could use a fireplace Youtube video, or a guided meditation, or anything else that inspires emotion and atmosphere. There is a lot of powerful imagery available on the web.

- Online rituals: Use performances

Recitations, readings, solo musical performances and invocations work great over Zoom. Just have everyone else muted and let the performer do their thing. What will not work well is trying to have participants sing, drum or make music together—the varying lag times of varying Internet speeds prevent them from meshing together properly.

- Online rituals: Cakes and ale

Sharing food and drink is a fundamental human way of making common cause and creating community. It is warming and pleasurable to have a time of sharing food and drink at the end of a virtual ritual—a time to experience the joys of wine or pomegranate juice and chocolate, say, and have a bit of a social chat.

- Online rituals: Social time

After the ritual, incorporate time just for visiting and socializing and spending unstructured time together. This is not extraneous: we need our social interactions with others and the opportunity to visit and converse is an essential component of an online ritual gathering.

Making Decisions

Groups sometimes have to make a decision when there is a difference of opinion or a range of options. It helps if there is a prior understanding about how such decisions will be made: by a majority vote? By consensus? Sometime, early in your group's life, have a conversation about how best to make such decisions.

Conflict Resolution

Sometimes, groups have conflicts. This isn't necessarily a bad thing; sometimes people can grow closer after they work out a point of friction. Here are some recommendations for "ground rules" while working out a conflict:

- Use "I" statements. "I feel disappointed because I like a clean kitchen" is preferable to a "you" statement ("You're a lazy slob.")
- Assume good faith and intention on the part of all participants.
- Really listen. Do you have a blind spot? Do you really understand the other side's position?
- When listening, avoid proposing solutions. Just listen.
- Take turns. Don't speak over one another. If necessary, timed windows for speech may be applied.
- Be aware of neurodivergence. Some people can't just come up with exactly what they mean in an instant. Give them a chance to collect and organize their thoughts.
- Resist the urge to attack, and try to avoid hearing others' statements as attacks.
- Rather than seeking to "win", look for opportunities to meet the needs of all in the conflict.
- If you are making things worse, stop.

- See emotions as signals. Feelings indicate how important an issue or topic is to a person. Being emotional isn't a sign of weakness or failure.
- Look for ways forward, rather than to assign blame for something in the past. Being saddled with blame is humiliating and unproductive. Find agreements on how things can be going forward that will resolve the conflict.
- Specify agreements and write them down. Make sure there will be no vagueness about what your agreement means in the future.

Getting Help

There are several ways to seek help if you are having a problem in your group.

First, as the founder of your group it is a good idea to join the Atheopagan Affinity Group Admin Support Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/632888007946317>). This group is a place where you can air issues, ask for advice from other admins, and seek support. If your issue is grave enough, it will probably be brought to the attention of Atheopagan Discord and Facebook Moderators' Team, and they may be able to help you through it.

Also, you can reach out to the Atheopagan Society Council directly if you feel your issue is sufficiently important. Email APgrievance@comcast.net to reach the Secretary of the Council.

ATHEOPAGAN COMMUNITY CONDUCT STANDARDS and GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Conduct

As Atheopagans, we endeavor to create an environment which is safe, responsible, and egalitarian. We celebrate inclusion, diversity, love, kindness and mutual respect. Atheopagan events, online spaces, and gatherings should be guided by the 13 Atheopagan Principles, including most specifically Inclusiveness, Social Responsibility, and Kindness and Compassion.

We embrace as an ethic that we treat one another well, that we respect and embrace difference, and that assume good intentions on the part of our fellow humans. We welcome people of all races, all colors, all ethnicities, all gender identifications, all ages and sexual orientations and those differences of life situation, background, and physical or mental ability, shape or condition that increase our diversity.

In any Atheopagan gathering, either online or in-person, we do not accept:

- Physical or verbal threats, or violence of any kind
- Harassment, bullying, coercion in any way or unwelcome sexual or physical attention
- Hostile and disrespectful speech or actions

When confronted with unkindness--or, worse, with discrimination--we call this out but at first with an eye to the education of the person who expressed it. Maybe they didn't understand that what they said or did was discriminatory, and they can learn, bettering themselves and our community; or, conversely, maybe they double down, in which case they may need to be removed from the community for the safety of other members.

This is not to say that oppressed peoples are responsible for educating those who oppress them. There is room for anger in such cases and it is a part of the work of people of the dominant culture to sit with this anger, to seek to understand and learn from it.

Consent

Atheopaganism supports consent culture. Affirmative consent to any physical contact or sexually intimate communication (includes hugging--ask first!) must be secured prior to such contact.

Affirmative consent is a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision among all participants to engage in physical contact or sexual activity (which can include online sexual activity). Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the activity. Silence or lack of resistance, in and of itself, does not demonstrate consent. The definition of consent does not vary based upon a participant's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

- Consent to any act or prior consensual activity between or with any party does not necessarily constitute consent to any other act.
- Consent given once does not necessarily constitute consent to perform the same act again.
- Consent is required regardless of whether the person initiating the act is under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Consent may be initially given but withdrawn at any time.
- Consent cannot be given when a person is incapacitated, which occurs when an individual lacks the ability to knowingly choose to participate in activity. Incapacitation may be caused by the lack of consciousness or being asleep, being involuntarily restrained, or if an individual otherwise cannot consent. Depending on the degree of intoxication, someone who is under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or other intoxicants may be incapacitated and therefore unable to consent.
- Consent cannot be given as a result of coercion, intimidation, force, or threat of harm.
- When consent is withdrawn or can no longer be given, activity must stop.

Consent policies apply to online communications as well. Unwelcome and uninvited sexual advances constitute harassment. Harassment can include:

- Attempts to initiate or solicit unwelcome sexually explicit conversation or personal details
- Sending unsolicited explicit images, or soliciting such images
- Abusive language, insults, slurs, threats or attempts at coercion

If Harassed

If you are feeling harassed, ask the harasser to stop, if you are willing. If you are unwilling or unable to ask or the harassment does not stop, approach a group or event organizer and ask for help. Organizers will investigate and intervene in what they see as an appropriate manner. If you wish, organizers will contact authorities, nonprofit resources such as a sexual assault crisis center, and/or the Atheopagan Society Council for you.

If you are asked to stop any harassing behavior, you are expected to stop immediately. If a participant engages in harassing behavior, Atheopagan events and groups retain the right to take any action to keep our spaces a welcoming environment for all participants. These actions can include warning the participant(s) or expulsion from the group, event or future events. Any admission fee to the group or event will not necessarily be refunded if this occurs.

Atheopagan event and group organizers are not, however, arbiters of interpersonal conflict. We expect participants in all Atheopagan events and activities to maintain the standards of conduct outlined above at all times and to resolve their differences in a civil manner if no harassment has taken place.

Minors

At both online and in-person Atheopagan events, children under 16 must be under the supervision of a guardian (or other arranged adult supervision with the consent of a guardian) at all times. Children aged 16 and 17 may participate independently in the activities of the group or event with permission of their guardian, so long as the activity is not explicitly defined as adults-only.

Media Policy

There is no photography or recording during rituals. Outside of ritual, photography is only allowed with the advance permission of the subject(s). Please be considerate that not all Atheopagans are “out” in their communities, and they may wish not to be photographed.

What transpires within Atheopagan spaces is meant to stay there. Recording, communicating, screenshotting or otherwise disclosing content from Atheopagan online and in-person spaces is expressly disallowed.

Leadership

Atheopagan groups are intended to be flat in power structure. We are anti-authoritarian and choose to lift one another up together rather than to have people who are “in charge”. Our path encourages egalitarian participation in decision making and group dynamics. This doesn’t mean that temporary leaders aren’t sometimes chosen (say, to coordinate a ritual, lead a meeting or take on a task assignment), but these should indeed be temporary. As we suggest with the lower-case spelling of Atheopagan cleric, leadership roles in Atheopaganism are **service roles** to the broader community, not power-over positions of authority.

Ritual Etiquette

The ritual container provides a space for creative exploration. It is an open space where we come together to empower one another.

In ritual, you have an opportunity to explore creatively, test your boundaries, and challenge your limitations. We all have a role in making this circle safe. Making a personal commitment to your own safety is a powerful way to support your creative process. You are empowered to be the guardian of your own experience. You choose when and how you wish to interact with other members of the circle. If you are uncomfortable, challenged, or overwhelmed, ask yourself how you can respond constructively to the situation. Do you need transformational support? To talk directly with someone? To set an explicit boundary with someone? To take a break from the circle? To stick with your process? Do what you need to do, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

If you feel drawn to interact with someone in the circle, please be conscious of whether that person is inviting you in. Don't take it personally if someone declines to interact with you. Respect that request. They are doing their own work. If someone approaches you looking

for help, please take the time to listen and take his or her concerns seriously. If you are not in a place to help, find someone who can. We support each other with our attention and understanding.

Being part of this community carries an agreement to treat each other with respect and to honor each other's boundaries.

Atheopagan events are intended to be places where we can bring our whole selves – not just what's wonderful but also the imperfections, the parts that feel broken, the parts we may be ashamed of. We may not agree with everything that each person does or says, but we hold space for each other to come together in our imperfection and our humanity and to be transformed.

Grievance Procedure

If you have a complaint that is very serious or you do not feel safe going to event or group organizers to notify them of abuse or harassment, you may contact the Secretary of the Atheopagan Society Council at APGrievance@comcast.net. Please specify the events as you experienced them, with details. The Council will investigate and take appropriate action. *This can take a few days. If you are in immediate danger, get to a safe place and/or contact police immediately.*

Getting Help

If there are problems in your group and you really aren't able to resolve them yourselves, assistance may be available from the Atheopagan Society. Send a request from the contact form at <https://theapsocietyorg.wordpress.com/contact/> and someone will reply to you shortly.



In the name of the Sacred Earth and Cosmos, this Charter of the Atheopagan group

(INSERT GROUP NAME HERE)

is hereby adopted on this _____ day of _____, 20__.

WE THE UNDERSIGNED FOUNDERS AFFIRM:

- Our group convenes to celebrate and investigate the joy and wonder of this precious life, and embraces the cosmological principle of **NATURALISM**, understanding all of the Universe as Nature operating subject to physical laws; and
- We hold as Sacred these **Four Pillars: LIFE, LOVE, TRUTH and BEAUTY**; and
- We embrace as our shared values these **Thirteen Principles of Atheopaganism:**

SKEPTICISM and CRITICAL THINKING

REVERENCE for the Sacred Earth

GRATITUDE

HUMILITY

PERSPECTIVE and HUMOR

PRAXIS

INCLUSIVENESS

LEGACY

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

PLEASURE POSITIVITY

CURIOSITY

INTEGRITY

KINDNESS and COMPASSION

- We commit to uphold the **Atheopagan Standards of Conduct** (see Affinity Group Guidebook) for the well-being of our members, to comply with the **Atheopagan Grievance Process** if necessary; and
- Our group's **purpose** is: _____

Signed by our Founding Members: