



Ayanda Hand in Hand: FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Hello and welcome. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. So you're interested in the Ayanda Hand in Hand program. We're so glad you're here. We hope that we can provide some insight about the program and can answer some questions along the way.

So, what is Ayanda Hand in Hand?

Ayanda Hand in Hand (Ayanda for short) aims to provide a safe space, physically and online, for maintaining solidarity, creativity, cultural identity, and education through personal interaction.

What's the story? How did Ayanda come to be?

In January 2016, we had our first ever, first-of-its-kind Undocumented and Black Convening. This convening was an intentional safe space for Black undocumented people to heal, organize, connect, and be empowered by each other.

During a healing experience at a convening creative writing workshop, the attendees were reminded of the importance of staying connected through digital media in a way that is healing, productive, affirming, and supplemental to growth.

As a result, the program was created by a member of the UndocuBlack Network (UBN) to build and maintain that level of connection, cultural exchange, constructive healing, and interpersonal communication.

Originally named The UndocuBlack Umoja Circle program, Ayanda is being relaunched after time taken to give and receive feedback and implement needed improvements.

Where did the name come from?

Of course we wanted to keep the spirit of our original name, Umoja, which is Swahili for *unity*. In keeping with our vision to see this program grow and flourish, we relaunched as Ayanda Hand in Hand. Ayanda, South African in origin and found in Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele, is a unisex word to indicate *augmenting the family* or *a family which grows*. It is our sincere vision that our network family and our lives will be augmented by the experience of bonding and connection through this program, and that we can do so together, hand in hand.

The UndocuBlack Network is a multigenerational network of undocumented Black people that fosters connections, facilitates access to resources, and contributes to transforming the realities of our people, so we are thriving and living our fullest lives.

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Okay, so what is the hope behind Ayanda Hand in Hand?

It is our sincerest hope that our community members will have the opportunity to create long-lasting, resourceful relationships, and to develop, engage, and collaborate with a chosen family.

We would like to also preface that this program is meant as a way for our members to develop connection, build support systems, and commit to social wellness between each other. The program is not intended for sales or romantic match-making/dating purposes, nor is it meant to reproduce or replace a relationship with a licensed mental health professional.

Who is coordinating this program?

Ayanda Hand in Hand is a creation of the members of the UndocuBlack Network. Initially, a program all on its own, it is currently included in our [Mental Wellness Initiative](#), as the program's priorities highlight the focus on the health and wellness of our community. Therefore, Ayanda is coordinated through the Mental Wellness Committee, a committee made up of UndocuBlack Network members, committed to conducting research, coordinating events and programming, and providing support to the UndocuBlack Network's Mental Wellness Initiative.

Who can participate in the Ayanda program?

Ayanda Hand in Hand is an intimate space for **currently and/or formerly undocumented Black people** to connect and feel supported and safe. Participants should all be aged 18 and above. If you are a youth or aware of a youth who is interested in a program like this, please let us know! Email us at Ayanda@UndocuBlack.org.

How does the Ayanda program work?

Those who are interested in Ayanda can sign-up by completing the sign-up form. Upon filling out the form, community members will be paired up with a cousin who they will be expected to engage with for the upcoming 3 months. Throughout this time, cousin pairs are encouraged to use telephone conversations, mail, electronic email, text, social media, and other options to communicate.

Cousins?

The experience of being Black and undocumented, not to mention the multiple other experiences we have, can be lonely. In Ayanda, we want to create a collective family where undocumented Black people feel connected to each other on a personal level. And honestly, in this broader diaspora of Blackness, we are all related - whether by blood or spiritual connection. The person you are matched with is therefore referred to as your cousin.

What are some of the activities people have done in the past?

In the past, cousins have communicated through telephone calls, Signal app/text messages, emails, physical mail, and Skype or Google Hangout to develop a one-on-one connection and get to know each other.

Additionally, some of our members shared that they engaged in book club discussions, in-person meet-ups for a lunch, outdoor activities, or community events, among other bonding activities.

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How do you match cousins?

We prioritize matches by location, interests and other important considerations. The information you provide in the sign-up form assists us with this process. However, given that we are a nationwide network and we have many members who are in regions where they may be the only person around, it is possible that cousins will be matched with someone in a different region or state.

So, you mentioned signing up... what kind of information do you ask about?

The sign-up form asks things like: how you identify yourself, the area or region where you reside, contact information, your interests, anything you are looking forward to, and any additional information you personally would like to share. The form also asks you to indicate your interest, understanding, and commitment to communicating with your cousin and with the team (so that the team is aware if you have any additional needs, concerns, questions, or if you are no longer able to participate in the program). This information will remain confidential and will not be shared outside of the coordinating team.

Why is the Ayanda Hand in Hand program quarterly?

Initially, the program was monthly. Through research and through feedback from community members, we have found that creating and introducing a 3 month time period offers people enough time and opportunity to connect and get to know each other on a personal level.

Hmm. I'm more interested in month-to-month. Is that available?

As we shared, after thorough research and feedback, we've made our focus on one-on-one matches on a quarterly basis. Therefore, at this time, month-to-month pairing is not available. We hope you will still join us.

Okay. Well, how do I know who I will be matched with?

The team will introduce you via email. Additionally, the team is available to facilitate contact through a call, if necessary.

Once I sign up, how long do I have to participate in Ayanda?

This program is completely voluntary. Sign-ups are quarterly (every 3 months). You can opt out at any time. We only ask that you communicate your decision to us via email at Ayanda@undocublack.org.

I enjoyed getting to know my cousin, and the quarter is ending. Does that mean I have to stop communicating with them?

Not at all! The quarter ending does not mean you have to stop communicating. In fact, we are so happy to hear you say that and it would be great for you to continue developing that relationship. If you are interested in getting to know another cousin, you may sign-up during the next round of the program.

I'm having trouble getting in touch with the cousin I was matched with. What should I do?

Unfortunately, even though someone signed up for Ayanda, sometimes members are not able or willing to move forward with the program for a variety of reasons. If you find you are having difficulty getting in touch, let us know. We are here to help. The Ayanda team can be reached at Ayanda@undocublack.org.

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I was matched, but it is someone with whom I have had interactions with that would not lend to a harmonious cousin relationship. What should I do?

It is unfortunate to hear that you and your cousin are not quite getting along. However, as in life, relationships all flourish in different ways. We cannot stress enough how important it is to communicate with us as the coordinating team so that we can be of the utmost support and reinforce the environment we are trying to create for each and every member. Please touch base with us at Ayanda@undocublack.org to discuss your concerns further.

Are there any requirements for maintaining membership in the program?

Yes. Ayanda Hand in Hand is open to UndocuBlack Network members only. The coordinating team prioritizes maintaining a safe and respectful environment. If a member of the program intentionally creates an atmosphere that does not foster a safe environment, they will be removed from the program. Additionally, as we shared before, we ask that you maintain an open line of communication. Without your input or feedback, this program would not be where it is today.

How do I give feedback on my experience?

We appreciate feedback from our members; it allows for growth and improvement to support our members. You can email (Ayanda@undocublack.org). Additionally, periodically, you will receive communication from the team to participate in a survey that allows you to provide the feedback.

So, what's next?

We are so excited about the relaunch of this program; it is our hope and intention that our first matches and introductions occur in the month of May 2018. Reviewing the document is one of the first steps and allows you to consider your interest in participating. We also intend on hosting a short Q&A session to encourage sign-ups and to answer any additional questions.



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