9 Basic Facilitation Tools:

Take your group

from “Ho-Hum” to “Get ‘R’ Done”!

Vitalize 2011

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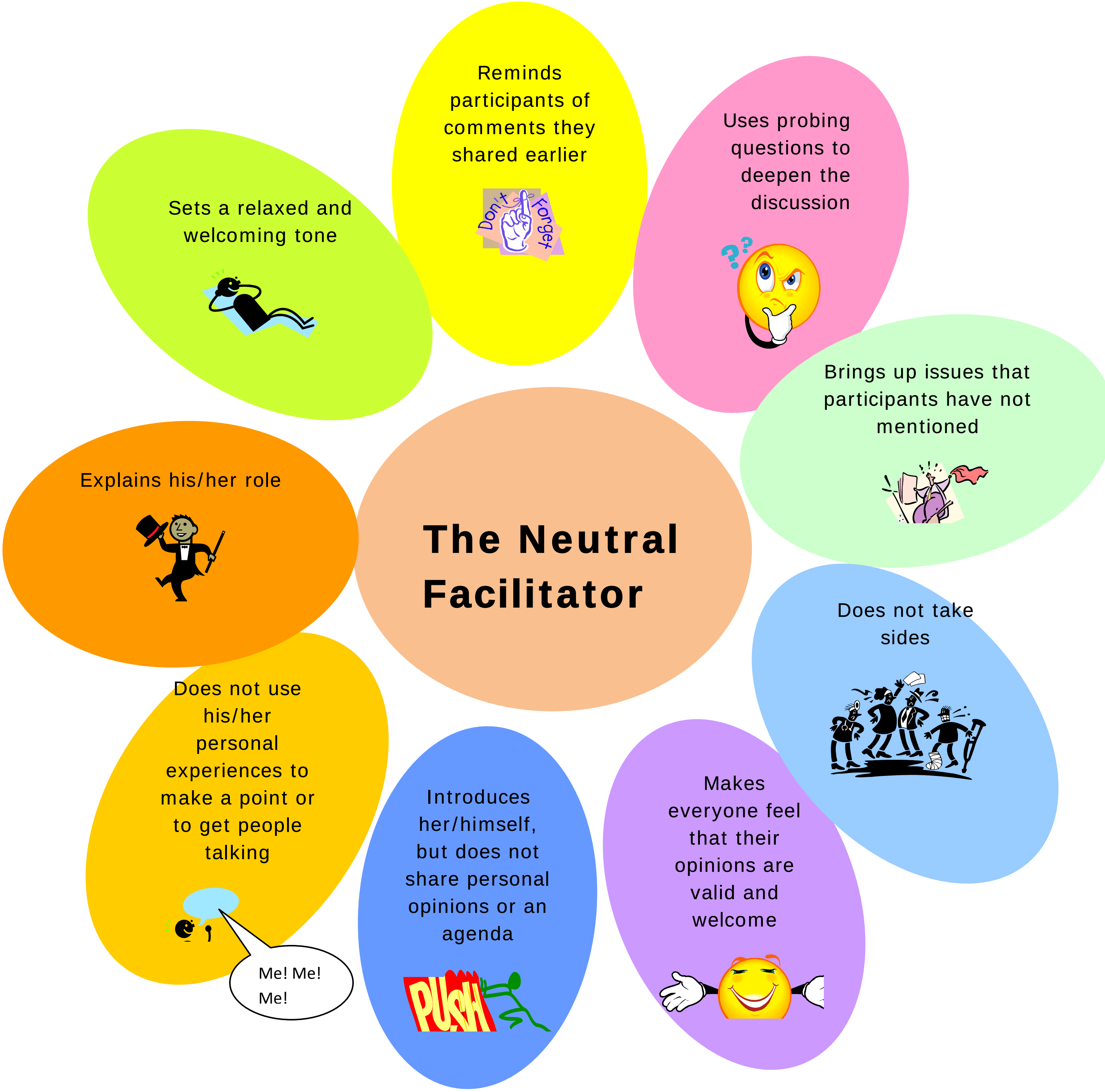
http://www.culture.alberta.ca/voluntarysector/default.aspx


The Neutral Facilitator
Reminds participants of comments they shared earlier
Don't Forget
Uses probing questions to deepen the discussion
Brings up issues that participants have not mentioned
Does not take sides
Makes everyone feel that their opinions are valid and welcome
Introduces her/himself, but does not share personal opinions or an agenda
PUSH
Does not use his/her personal experiences to make a point or to get people talking
Me! Me! Me!
Explains his/her role
Sets a relaxed and welcoming tone

Process vs. Content

A basic facilitation principle: **Facilitators are process guides, not content experts.**

Process	Content
• The way the group arrives at their objective. • How the issue is dealt with • How members of a group work together.	• What the meeting or organization is about. • What the issue at hand is. • i.e. decisions to make, actions required

Group Guidelines

What is it?

Group guidelines or working principles are the parameters that participants agree to honor and follow. Group guidelines identify how the members will interact and communicate with each other. These basic "rules" ensure the group is responsible, accountable and respectful to each other as they work to accomplish their goals.

Successful groups use some form of group guidelines.

Use this process:	Do not use this process:
• At the beginning of every session. "Before we begin here are a couple of working principles we need to review. This will ensure we can accomplish our goals today. Can we agree to use principles to guide our conversations today? Are there any others we need to add?" • To bring participants back to the topic or task • With a group that is struggling with behavior issues.	• When the group cannot agree on the working principles 

Group Understandings or Working Principles

Choose from these examples or create your own:

- **Everyone has wisdom** - we believe this is true of any group
- **We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result** - that is why we have group discussions
- **Everyone will hear and be heard** – allowing people fair "air time"
- **There is no absolute right or wrong answers** – **only good ideas! -** we want to hear all ideas – there may be opposing viewpoints and that's good – we need to explore those areas too
- **You can change your mind** – everyone comes to the table with their own perspectives and it is through discussion with others that we can shift our thinking
- **Everyone takes responsibility for their own participation** - facilitation and process can only go so far in getting your voice heard – you need to participate at the level you feel comfortable with
- **Silence = Agreement -** speak up if you are uncomfortable even if you're not sure why
- **If you hear something good, write it down** - too often we let good thinking and discussion go without recording it
- **Temporarily unhinge from your distractions** - turn off the cell phone, try postponing the thoughts of outside distractions

CREATING THE RIGHT QUESTION FOR GROUP PROCESS

What is it?

The right question can be just the tool the facilitator needs to create the perfect atmosphere for idea generation. The perfect question is clear, concise and thoughtful.

Use this process:	Do not use this process:
• When you are required to take a group through a process that needs to generate ideas. • When there is an issue that needs to be addressed by a group • When a concise, clear question is required for brainstorming	• When there is no need for focus questions.

STEP 1

- Identify what the desired outcome of the session is. What is needed as a final product?
- Begin thinking of the questions needed to get the group to this point.

STEP 2

- Begin by drafting some questions. Remember:
  - Concise
  - Clear
  - Appropriate terminology
  - Avoid jargon
  - Prevent misinterpretation

Open-ended or closed-ended?

- Facilitators use open-ended or closed-ended questions.
  - Open-ended questions allow the respondent to come up with their own answer and stimulate much richer discussion than closed ended questions.
  - Closed-ended questions are answered with a yes or a no.

STEP 3

- Try asking another person you know for feedback on the clarity of the questions you wrote. You want to ensure they are crystal clear.

BRAINSTORMING

What is it?

Brainstorming is a tool that allows participants to generate a large number of extremely creative ideas in a relatively short amount of time. These ideas are recorded and visible to all participants throughout the session. Brainstorming takes place in a positive environment that is free of criticism.

When to use this process:	When not to use this process:
• When you require a group to generate a large number of ideas • When you want people to be creative and spontaneous • When you feel your team needs to bond with a fun exercise	• When you don't need ideas generated

STEP 1

- Define the issue that needs to be resolved clearly and concisely; a focus question works quite well here.
- Have a flipchart(s) or some other VISIBLE method of recording all the generated ideas prepared. Participants must be able to see their ideas.

STEP 2

- Explain to the group that you want a large volume of ideas generated here, therefore, some ground rules:
  - Think of ideas and write them down first
  - No criticism of any ideas
  - No discussion/debate at this point, we want ideas!
  - Creativity is key!
  - There are no poor ideas
  - All ideas will be recorded

STEP 3

- Begin brainstorming by unveiling the focus question or issue to be discussed
- Keep encouraging the group to continue working, until all ideas have been exhausted
- Encourage participants to generate new ideas based on ideas from others
- Make sure all ideas are recorded as they are brainstormed

Variation:

- At the end of the session, ideas can be prioritized
- Have participants record their ideas onto post it notes.

T-Charting

What is it?

A t-chart is simple tool used to list and compare ideas. It helps to focus the group on two dimensions of a topic. It is commonly used to identify;

- pro vs. con or advantages vs. disadvantages
- facts vs. opinions,
- strengths vs. weaknesses,
- change vs. no change.

A t-shaped chart is drawn, with room for two headings at the top and material is sorted side by side under the headers. For example:

a	b
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-

Use this process:	When not to use this process:
• To compare and contrast ideas, options or decisions • To enable participants to focus on another dimension of an issue. I.e. when people are bogged down with negatives ask them to also come up with positives. • When your group is smaller in size (less than 14)	• When the discussion is complex • When your group is larger in size

Step One:

- Decide on the two categories.
- Write the two categories or headers at the top of the flipchart paper. The two categories are usually opposite to each other. I.e. Pro's / Con's

Step Two:

- Frame the question to your group. i.e. What are the benefits of ____? What are the consequences ____?
- Give participants about 5 minutes to organize their thoughts.   Participants may write down their ideas.

Step Three:

- Re-ask the question to initiate process.
- Facilitator records the participants' responses into the appropriate column.   Ensure everyone has a chance to contribute.

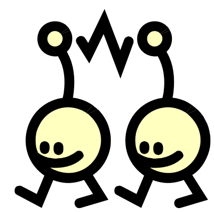
Variations:

- Participants record their responses onto post it notes and post their ideas in the appropriate column.
- Use a t-chart to list the differences in duties or responsibilities between two people / groups / functions
- Use a t-chart to organize and list information by categories: use the left column to show the category and the right column to list supporting details. I.e. Strategies (in left column) Actions to Achieve Strategy (in right column)
- Record participant's ideas or responses as they think of them. You do not have to work through one column then the other.
- Adjust the number of columns to suit your discussion needs. i.e. 3 column t-chart.

Affinity Process

What is it?

The Affinity process is a tool that promotes thoughtful generation of ideas that are then grouped based on natural relationships between the items. Ideas are captured by writing them on Post-It notes. This process helps avoid lengthy discussion and rationalization of ideas among participants.

When to use this process:	When not to use this process:
• This process is most helpful for collecting ideas, opinions, thoughts, etc and organizing them into groupings based on natural relationships between each item. • Its strength is that it does not require lengthy discussion, and it encourages the creative identification of many points or issues. • This process is useful in bringing issues or thoughts together in sets or patterns that the group identifies. • It is useful for helping get large amounts of generated data grouped.	• There have not been enough items identified for the tool to be useful – basically less than 14 items or so. 

Step 1

- Each participant is given a number of post-it notes. The 7.5 cm X 7.5 cm (3"X3") size work very well for this exercise.
- The facilitator identifies the question at hand, by reading it, distributing it on a handout or posting it on a flipchart page that is visible to all participants.
- The facilitator provides instructions/guidelines. You can use post-it notes to demonstrate the desired result – one guideline per note:
    - **Silently and** individually brainstorm. Then record your responses.
    - One idea / thought per post-it note (we will be sorting them)
    - Print large and legibly (they need to be read from 4-5 ft away)
    - Be concise and clear (to avoid misinterpretation)
    - Use 5 to 7 words
    - Feel free to use as many post-it notes as you need

Step 2

- Each participant will briefly share one of their ideas and then stick it on the board. The issue does not get criticized, debated or discussed other than for clarification at this point.
- The process continues until all of the ideas are on the board
- As a result of hearing ideas from other members, participants should have the opportunity to add any further ones.

Step 3

- Arrange notes into related groupings (finding the affinity). This sorting is done by the entire group silently and simultaneously so no one person influences the groupings.
- First, the facilitator asks the group to look for two notes that seem to be similar or related in some way and place them to one side. Look for others that are either related to each other or to the other existing groupings.
- It's best if groupings are done on an instinctual level, rather than over-thinking the groupings.
- The goal is to have the notes placed into 6 to 10 groupings.
- Do not try to force single notes into groupings where they don't belong.
- Notes may be continually moved from grouping to grouping, that is OK! If you don't like where the note is… Move it!

Step 4

- Look for a note in each grouping that captures the central idea that ties all the notes together. This is referred to as the "header". Create header titles on larger sticky notes for each grouping.
- Gather each grouping together with its header at the top of the column.
- The issues can now be captured, organized into related groupings, prioritized or used as the foundation for additional work that the group will continue working on.

VARIATION:

- Private – Authors are anonymous
- As participants are creating post-it notes at their place, the facilitator collects them quietly and randomly as various ones are completed. Many cycles through the room may be necessary
- Facilitator posts all issues randomly on a board avoiding any sense of order or identifiers

SWOT Analysis

What is it?

The SWOT Analysis tool can be used in identifying an organization's **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**, and examining the **Opportunities** and **Threats** it is facing. SWOT enables organizations to focus on its strengths, minimize the weaknesses, address threats, and take advantage of opportunities.

Internal Strengths	Internal Weaknesses
- - - -	- - - -
External Opportunities	**External Threats**
- - - -	- - - -

Use this process:	Do not use this process:
• To initiate conversation • To begin strategic planning processes • As a preliminary evaluation of an event • Assist in decision making • Initiate proactive thinking • To enable a group to refocus their efforts	• When you suggest SWOT and everyone collectively groans! • If you don't have a plan to use - or a use for the information generated! • When you need to prioritize the ideas or issues. • If you need factual data. This process is subjective.

Step One:

- Using flipchart papers write and post the 4 headers. Ensure the headers can be seen by all participants.
  a. Internal Strengths – What do we do well?
  b. Internal Weaknesses - What could we do better?
  c. External Opportunities - What opportunities do we know about, but have not been able to address?
  d. External Threats - What is out there that could hurt or hinder our organization?

Step Two:

- Pose the strengths question to the group. Have participants individually answer the question by printing clearly on their post it notes. Remember to use one response per post it note!
- Ensure all participants understand the question. If participants need assistance getting started, ask these questions:
  - Strengths – What are our internal strengths? What advantages do we have? What assets and resources do we have? What do others (outside our group) say are our strengths?
- Once participants are ready, have them post responses (using post it notes) under the strengths header.

Step Three:

- Pose the weaknesses question to the group. Have participants individually answer the question by printing clearly on their post it notes. Remember to use one response per post it note!
- Ensure all participants understand the question. If participants need assistance getting started, ask these questions:
  - Weaknesses – What are we not so "hot" at? What are we criticized for or receive complaints about? Where are we challenged?
- Once participants are ready, have them post their responses under the weaknesses header.

Step Four:

- Pose the opportunities question to the group. Have participants individually answer the question by printing clearly on their post it notes. Remember to use one response per post it note!
- Ensure all participants understand the question. If participants need assistance getting started, ask these questions:
  - Opportunities - Are there emerging trends on which we can capitalize?
- Once participants are ready, have them post their responses under the weaknesses header.

Step Five:

- Pose the opportunities question to the group. Have participants individually answer the question by printing clearly on their post it notes. Remember to use one response per post it note!
- Ensure all participants understand the question. If participants need assistance getting started, ask these questions:
    - Threats – Are any of our weaknesses likely to make us critically vulnerable? What external roadblocks exist that block our progress? What changes are coming?
- Have participants individually answer the question. It is helpful to use post it notes here.
- Once participants are ready, have them post responses under the appropriate header.

Step Six:

- As a large group, review all ideas.
- If you wish, discuss the results with your group. You may ask:
    - How do we leverage our strengths and mitigate the weaknesses?
    - What do we need to do before investigating the opportunities?
    - How can the organization respond to the threats?
    - What patterns or themes do we see? What is this exercise saying? What are the lessons learned? What do we need to keep in mind as we move forward?

Variations:

- Set up flipcharts in four separate corners of the room. Have participants start at different flipcharts and rotate around the room. Participants armed with markers can add new thoughts or expand on previous comments directly on the flipchart.
- Post it notes enables participants to work individually at their own speed. Let the participants post their own post it notes where they feel they fit. Review each section as a large group. Let participants ask questions of clarity.
- Post it note that are color coded enable facilitators to quickly replace any post it notes that have fallen off.
- Change the terminology if needed: Weaknesses may be changed into challenges. Threats can be changed into areas to grow.

DOTMOCRACY TOOL

What is it?

Dotmocracy is a tool that allows a number of participants to prioritize ideas / suggestions in a short amount of time. The process is fun and quick to do! The process is visual and involves everyone's participation.

When to use this process:	When not to use this process:
• This tool is useful for prioritizing items in a large list of items. • It can be used to identify where the group has consensus on what they feel is important. • It is quick, and effective.	• When you do not have enough items, it is probably not necessary. • When you have too many choices! (It is better to group similar ideas together first.) 

STEP 1

- Use the results of a previous brainstorming process. Ensure the ideas to be "voted" on are clearly separated or spaced.

STEP 2

- Have dots prepared beforehand, by cutting them into strips with the rough number of dots per strip you want each person to have for voting. 8 mm – 13 mm dots work well, as these sizes are clearly seen, and leave room for others to vote too.

- Pre-plan how many dots you are handing out per person. It works most effectively when the total number of dots handed out to everyone equals about the number of items there are to vote on. (e.g.) 8 flipchart pages of 8 ideas per page = 64 items, so 64 dots total. If you have 9 participants, then each gets 7 dots to use.

- Useful tips: minimum number of dots per person is about 3 -4 for process to work. Maximum is about 10. Adjust your dot handouts accordingly.

STEP 3

- Briefly outline the ground rules for Dotmocracy:

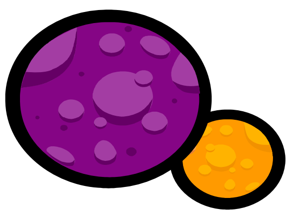
- Everyone must vote simultaneously for it to work most effectively. No one is allowed to sit back and observe voting patterns before they vote (as this may sway the ranking of priorities)
- They can stick their dots on any items; just make sure it is clear which point they are sticking them on.
- They can use all of their dots on one item, or distribute them one per item, or two per item. . . it is up to them.
- They cannot move any dots after they have stuck them on the sheets.

STEP 4

- Tell them they can begin voting. Make sure there is no one sitting back and not voting at this time.
- It is best if people are not verbally checking with others as to where they should place their votes, or how they should vote at this stage.

STEP 5

- Beginning with the highest "dotted" results, the facilitator tallies up the dots per item and records each result with a marker and circles it. You can recruit a helper for this part if needed.
- Announce the results, usually the top 5 items, beginning with the one with the most votes.



Variations:

- Vary the number of dots per person!
- Try telling participants they must vote on a <u>minimum</u> number of ideas with their dots. i.e. You must vote on at least 3 separate ideas / bullets.

Timeline / Calendar

What is it?

A timeline reviews and outlines an organizations history. It takes the individual memories of a group and combines the individual sums into a collective group history. It is useful for sorting issues or events into chronological order. Building a timeline documents an organizations history.

Important inventions by decade (example):

1920's	1930's	1940's	1950's	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000's	2010+
Sound film, insulin, liquid-fueled rockets	Antibodies, Penicillin	turboprop engine, microwave oven	Nuclear power reactor, Optical fiber, video cassette recorder	Neil Arm Strong / moon landing	Personal computer, email, pocket calculator	Camcorder	World wide web 1st proposed	Digital satellite radio, artificial heart & liver	Ipod, I phone, etc

Use this process:	**Do not use this process:**
• As a group • To set the stage for strategic planning, move into the future. • To create a meaningful story • To determine the flow of events that lead your organization to what it is today.	• When you are short on time. You need at least an hour to complete this process. 

Step One:

- Put a large piece of paper on the wall. Several flipchart pages taped together or a roll of paper works best. Divide the large paper into dates you are working within. Think in months, years, or decades.
- Identify the purpose of this exercise. I.e. Identify the major changes in the organization or reviewing our past before beginning the strategic planning process.

Step Two:

- Explain to your group the purpose of the timeline.
- Introduce the question: What do you remember about this period of time? What events occurred? What happened that was significant? What were the milestones or turning points? When did this event occur?
- Participants may use a marker or post it notes to record the milestones on the posted timeline.

Step Three:

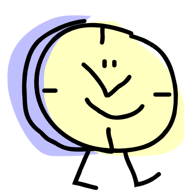
- Once all ideas have been posted, review the timeline as a group.
- To ensure everyone in your group understands each event and its significance, invite group members to ask clarification questions.

Step Four:

- Talk about and debrief the timeline.
- Record the discussion on a flipchart. Ask the group the follow debrief questions:
  - Is there anything missing?
  - What trends do you see?
  - What lessons do you see?
  - What do we need to keep in mind as we move forward?

Variations:

- Draw a horizontal line through the middle of the paper. Ask participants to post this highlights or positive events above the line and post the struggles or low points below the line. This can be used to visually show where the organization has struggled.
- A volunteer board can create a timeline for all the tasks they need to do in any given month. Additional work can be balanced during slower times.
- Try future forecasting using the timeline process.



Icebreakers and Energizers

Icebreakers

Icebreakers can play an important role in helping participants connect with one another. Icebreakers may help stimulate cooperation and participation. Choose icebreakers appropriate for your groups' age and abilities.

Icebreakers:

- Help a new group get to know one another.
- Help new members to integrate into a group.
- Help people feel comfortable together.
- Encourage cooperation.
- Encourage listening to others.
- Encourage working together.
- Encourage participants to break out of their cliques.
- Build a rapport.
- Create a good atmosphere for learning and participation.

Energizers

Energizers are typically added to lengthy sessions. Energizers provide participants the opportunity to re-energize through some healthy activity and / or laugher.

Energizers also create an atmosphere for learning and participation as well as the benefits listed above.

Simple Ice Breakers

What's Different? (5 minutes)

This activity gets people to interact with somebody new and helps everyone feel comfortable with each other. It also shows how observant we are.

1. Get participants to form groups of two, preferably with someone they have just me.
2. Ask participants to turn around (back to back) and change 5 things about their appearance.
3. When ready, partners turn around and try to guess the 5 things that have been changed.

Variations:

- Get participants to change one thing that is very silly!

4 C's (10 – 15 minutes, 4 – 6 people per team)

This activity gets people talking. It provides an opportunity to get to know other participants.

1. Facilitator hands out index cards and instructs participants to write down his / her favorite: **Color, Cuisine, Country** to visit and **Closet Dream**.
2. Facilitator collects the cards, shuffles them and gives one card (not their own) back to each individual.
3. Have each person read aloud the card they picked up. Participants each take turns guessing who wrote the card.

2 Truths & A Lie (10 – 15 minutes)

This is a simple fun activity that helps gets the group know more about each other.

1. Ask everyone to write on a piece of paper 3 things about themselves. Two statements are true and one statement is a lie.
2. Taking turns, have participants read out the 3 "facts" about themselves. The group votes by show of hands which are statements are true and which are false.
3. The individual reveals which statements are true and which statement is false.
4. Continue until everyone has participated.

Group Juggle Energizer

Step One:

- Gather many soft balls.
- Place people in a circle.
- Explain to participants that this energizer works best if all participants can throw the ball carefully so everyone can receive it.

Step Two:

- All participants start the group juggle by holding up one hand.
- The facilitator passes one ball to one individual in the group. The first individual calls out the person's name and throws him / her the ball. This person puts their hand down.
- He or she catches the ball and calls out another name and throws that person the ball and so on.
- This repeats until everyone has thrown and caught the ball once.
- Practice the pattern.

Step Three:

- The facilitator continues to add balls to the pattern one at a time until a ball is dropped.

Variations:

- Keep adding in balls and ask people to speed up; hurry up; faster; get going; etc. etc.

Debriefing Discussion:

Question: How is this game like working with your board / organization?

- May feel like going in different directions
- Messages/priorities/demands coming at you from all directions
- Get thrown a curve
- Had to slow down to help others (teamwork)
- Had to say person's name before tossed the ball (communications)