

ICEBREAKERS

Whenever you have new members come to a meeting of your organization, or when you need to a simple way to recharge your batteries, an icebreaker is just what the doctor ordered.

Icebreakers are simple, short activities that can erase awkward silences and put smiles on faces.

Icebreakers are also a great way to infuse some energy into a meeting that is losing steam.

Icebreakers and getting acquainted exercises are important elements of team building as groups come together again each year and especially when bringing in new members. Following are some reasons for using icebreakers as well as some easily implemented examples:

1. They can be excellent devices to help people feel more comfortable with themselves and with others and feel more "at home" in a group.
2. They break up the "cliques", invite people to form random groupings, and help individuals meet others in a non-threatening and fun way.
3. They can be used to set a tone for the time a group will be together, will encourage people to feel "safe" and hopefully will evoke lots of laughter and release tension.
4. They can foster team building within the group and make effective feedback possible.

The key to team building is to provide fun, creative, lighthearted activities for each member of your group to get to know one another. The ideas below can be implemented throughout the year to create a strong organizational team or to liven up a meeting.

Examples of Icebreakers

- **Circle Introduction:** Have the participants stand in a circle. They have two minutes to find out who the person to their left is and some interesting facts about him/her. Each person will introduce the person on their left to the whole group.
- **Human scavenger hunt:** Find someone who - is a graduate student, owns cross-country skis, has been to Europe, wears contacts, (or make up your own).
- **Have a bingo type game** where you have a grid and you write different things in each box like "has green eyes" or "been to Boston before" then you go around and have to find the people who fits that box and have them sign it! When you are through with the boxes (usually like 15 boxes) you end up knowing a lot of weird facts about the other people and it is tons of fun scrambling to be the first one finished!
- **Do You Love Your Neighbor?** All group members form a circle with one person left in the middle of the circle. The caller (the person in the middle) says, "Hi, my name is..." Everyone else repeats the caller's name aloud, (Hi...). The caller goes up to another member in the circle and asks the person their name. The person tells the caller their name, and then the caller asks the person if he/she loves his/her neighbors (the two people on either side). If the person loves his/her neighbors, he/she says, "Yes, I love my neighbors, but I don't like people who are wearing tennis shoes. (The person can name any type of characteristic they want for example, people who have brown eyes, people who are freshman, people who own their own cars, etc.) Then everyone whom the characteristic pertains to must move to a different spot in the circle at least two places away from their original spot. The caller's object is to get into someone else's spot so someone else is left in the middle. If the person does not love his/her neighbor, the person will say, "No, I don't love my neighbors" and the two people on either side of this person have to change places before the caller gets in their spot. The person left in the middle in

either situation is the new caller and the game continues. Keep your circle tight, shoulder-to-shoulder, so you can see where your empty spaces are. Have fun!!

- **Hometown:** Members tell where they are from and information about their hometown.
- **Silent Identification:** Each participant is asked to either write words or draw pictures that describe themselves. This is done silently. They pin the picture on their chests, walk around and have everyone look each other over. Pictures are then shuffled and participants are asked to identify the person to which the picture belongs.
- **Getting To Know You:** Divide a large group of people into smaller groups and have them answer the questions listed below and have each group share their answers.

Personal:

- A moment in my childhood I'll never forget
- What I wanted to be when I grew up, what I want to be now
- The best time of my life was...

Organizational:

- My expectations of the group
 - What I can give to the group
 - Something that bothers me about the group
 - I will strive to...
- **Name games:** Why or how the member got his/her name.
Tell name and hobby, members try to memorize information.
 - **Name Game:** Sit in a circle. One person starts by using an adjective starting with the same letter as their first name, followed by their first name (i.e. Clever Claire, Kind Karen) The next person and following has to repeat the first person's adjective and name and then add their own. It goes around the circle and the last person has to repeat all other names in order and end with their own.
 - **Pairs Game:** Make up pairs or group of people that go together (Mickey Mouse/Minnie Mouse, Barbie/Ken). Give each person a card with one of the group or pairs on it. The pairs or groups must find their match. When they find each other, they must discuss the best program they have been to and the qualities that made it a good program. Then they turn the card over, find their new pair and then go through the same process of the worst program ever attended and the qualities of a bad program.
 - **Favorite Songs:** The object of Favorite Songs is to collect all of the songs that your group holds dear to them, for one reason or another, or that best represents them or the organization. For a surprise, this should be done with no explanation as to why. After all the music has been collected, put it together on a cassette tape. Play the music for the group and have them guess which music belongs to which group member. Then have the group member explain why they chose that particular piece of music. As an added bonus, you may choose to have copies of the original tape made to give to your group after the fun is over - a great gift.
 - **Human Circle:** Form a circle by holding hands with the persons on each side of you. Without letting go of each other's hands try to turn the circle inside out.
 - **Human Knot:** Have a group of 10-15 stand very close together. Tell them to reach out their arms so all hands are jumbled and intertwined. Tell them to grab one hand for each of their hands, but not the one of the person's next to them. Now they are a human knot and

must use teamwork to untangle themselves into one circle without letting go of their hands.

- Frisbee Anyone? Have a Frisbee at the meeting. Throw it around the room and have people that catch it answer a question or tell about themselves to the others in the group. Once that person is finished throw the Frisbee to someone else in the group.
- Dyads: Members get into groups of two and find out information about each other.
Possible questions/statements to use:
 - Who do you think is the most important person who has lived in the past 100 years?
 - What is the best movie you have seen recently?
 - What is the title of the last book you have read?
 - If you could be any animal other than human, what would you be?
 - If you could travel to any place in the world, where would you go and why?
 - What is your favorite sport?
 - One adjective to describe me is....
 - The emotion I find most difficult to control is....
- Toilet Tissue: Tell the participants to take a length of tissue. Only after all have taken some, tell them for each panel of tissue they have to say one positive thing about themselves. (You could vary what they have to do or say for each tissue square: tailored to your objective) (Variation: use M&M's- for each color they have to say one thing i.e. yellow: something sunny about themselves, red: an embarrassing moment, green.....)
- Human Lines: Have the participants line up according to some criteria. It could be according to the alphabet, length of membership, or height. Have each person introduce the person on their left to the whole group. Allow two minutes for the participants to gather information before starting the introductions.
- Crest or Coat of Arms : Members create their own "Coat of Arms" by filling in information about themselves using words or drawings. Information can include:
 - Hobbies
 - Hometown
 - Major
 - Favorite Emotion
 - Family Members
 - Five or Ten Year Goals
- Two Truths and a Lie: Go around group and everyone has to say two true statements about themselves and one false. The rest of the group has to guess which one is false. You may be surprised. You can learn some crazy things about each other!
- Name Tag Game: Introduce yourself to another person in the group and after conversing two minutes, exchange nametags. Share the information about your partner with another member in the organization.
- Forced Choice: Ask members to stand in the middle of the room and have them move to either side to indicate their choice. Have them find a partner on the side they have chosen and discuss reasons for their choice.
Are you:
 - More like a Cadillac or a Volkswagen?
 - More of a saver or a spender?

- More like Colorado or New York?
- More yes or no?
- More like a student or a teacher?
- More here or there?
- More like the present or the future?
- More religious or non-religious?
- More like a file cabinet or a liquor chest?
- More intuitive or rational?
- More like a tortoise or a hare?
- More like an electric typewriter or a quill pen?
- More like a roller skate or a pogo stick?
- More like a bubbling brook or a placid lake?
- More like a gourmet restaurant or a McDonald's?

The Forced Choice exercise questions may be amended as needed to include topics that may foster diversity and human dignity within the group.

- **Fast Lemon-** This game is for 4 players or more. First divide the group into two or more equal lines. Then give the leader of each line a full-length pencil and a full-grown lemon. As the teams line up single file mark a starting line and finish line on the floor (about 20 feet away at most) the object is to push the lemon with the pencil along the floor in a straight line-if you can. Each player must push it to the finish line and back to the next teammate in line. The team to finish first wins. What you discover is that the lemon always keeps rolling, despite a slight wobble. You'll have trouble keeping it in your lane so be sure the furniture is pushed back.
- **Name Whip:** Not recommended for groups over twenty: Have the group sit in a circle. Each participant will introduce them-selves by saying their name and a word using the first initial of their first name. The topic on which the word is based is flexible. The facilitator would start by asking the group to think of a favorite food item, or some other topic, that begins with the first letter of their first name. Each person will be responsible to remember the names and matching items for every person who precedes him or her in the circle. The whip ends when the last person in the circle names everyone in the room and the item they like. The facilitator should ask if anyone in the group can name everyone in the circle and the item they liked.
- **Psychiatrist-** Select four or five people from the group to be "psychiatrist" and then send them out of the room. The remaining members of the group choose a 'problem' that needs to be solved. For example-each person assumes the characteristics of the person to his or her right. For example, if asked the color of the "patients" hair, the person questioned would say blonde if that is the hair color of the person on his right. Other 'problems' could be all are person on left, all are one person in the group, every other person, etc...
- **People To People:** Everyone is directed to pair off except one person left standing in the middle of the group. The person who does not have a pair calls out directions for the partners such as nose-to-nose, finger to forehead, ankle to shoulder, etc. (body parts to body parts). The partners will do whatever the person in the middle calls out (like Simon Says). The person in the middle gives between one and five directions and calls out "People to People." Everyone grabs a new partner, including the person in the middle, so

you are left with a new person in the middle. The game continues. This game ought to be played in a large area or outside.

- Life Saver Relay- Divide group into two teams. Give everyone a toothpick to hold between his or her teeth. Place a lifesaver on the toothpick of the first person on each side. The game begins. The lifesaver is passed from person to person by lining up the toothpicks so that the lifesaver slides onto the next person's toothpick. No one can use his or her hands. Should a lifesaver be dropped, that team begins again with the first person. The first team to relay a lifesaver to the end of the line is the winner.
- Scavenger Hunt: Have each participant write down their name and an obscure fact about themselves that few people know about. These are typed up on a sheet of paper, but with the names left blank. Hand out the sheets to all the participants and tell them that they are to match the obscure facts with everyone's name. This could be done in two ways, one way is to have everyone just guess and see how many they get right. Afterwards they could discuss first impressions and stereotyping. The second method is to have everyone work on the sheet throughout the meeting, week, or until next meeting and offer a prize to the person with the most correct answers. If there is a tie, have a runoff to see who can remember the most without looking at his or her sheet.
- "If you love me baby, smile"- Everyone sits in a circle, and one person goes up to somebody in the group and tries to make them smile by saying, "if you love me baby, smile" and they are not allowed touching the person at all. They may make funny faces or whatnot. If the person does not smile or laugh, they will reply, "I love you baby, but I just can't smile." And if the person succeeds, the person they made smile moves on, and if they lose, they have to go to another person.
- Take As Much As You Think You'll Need: Props: M & M's, peanuts, a roll of toilet paper, Skittles or anything else with lots of pieces (choose one) and small cups. To begin, the leader passes around the bowl of M & M's or the roll of toilet paper. Each person is given the instructions to "Take as much as you think you will need." No further instructions are given until each person has received their M & M's. Once everyone has some, the first person begins by telling one thing about himself for each M & M or piece of toilet paper they have taken. When the first person has finished, you move on to the next person in the group. As an interesting twist, and to be sure that you find out some different information on each person, you may give each color M&M a different meaning or category. We suggest the following (example using Skittles):
 - Red: personal information (name, major, school, age)
 - Yellow: family information (parents, brothers, sisters, pets)
 - Orange: free category - use it to say something fun about yourself or you don't have to say anything
 - Green: dating experience (favorite date, worst date, significant others)
 - Purple: hobbies, other interests (sports, dancing, talents)
- What's In There: Have everyone pull out their wallet or purse and pick two items they store away and explain why they keep them (pictures, tickets, receipts, etc.).

You will find that after you have conducted a few of these icebreaker activities, your group members will work cooperatively to successfully accomplish the group's goals. Your members will feel connected to your organization because they know others and feel comfortable around

the group. Attendance should remain steady, if not higher, because group members will enjoy going to your meetings, activities and events and will most likely tell a friend about the fun they are having with your organization. Your members will be happier because they are having fun!

For additional icebreakers and/or get acquainted exercises please refer to the Office of Student Activities, Leadership, & Involvement Resource Library.