



C.O.O.L.-Idealist Civic Engagement Curriculum

Games and Icebreakers

Overview: In this workshop, participants are introduced to several different games and icebreakers that are especially suitable for the beginning of a workshop. Each icebreaker helps to set a particular tone for the training and encourages participants through positive energy.

Category: Facilitation; team-building

Level: Activities are suitable for all levels.

Type: Structured activity suitable for workshop (e.g. retreat, training) or use during regular meeting structure. Icebreakers are designed for groups of 15-25 people, but can be modified for larger groups

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Provide participants with examples of effective team-building icebreakers
- If training students or participants as trainers, reinforce their skills by providing practice and the opportunity to debrief

How to Prepare:

Review the trainer guide and become comfortable with all information and activities. In this guide, you will find instructions for facilitating 35 different icebreakers. Please refer to detailed preparation for each of the activities within the text below. You can also see the suggested resources at the end of this facilitator's guide for further ideas on games and icebreakers for groups.

Games and Icebreakers

1. Guess Who?

[This icebreaker is good for small groups of less than 20]

At the beginning of the training, have all the members write three important facts about themselves on one side of a blank sheet of paper, and their name in pencil on the back.

Have them turn in the sheets. Then have a trainer number each sheet, make a separate list of what number corresponds to what name, and erase the names from the back of the sheets. Post the sheets around the room. Tell the members they have a set amount of time to read all the sheets and try to figure out who is described on each sheet. Give all members a sheet of paper that lists all the numbers so they can record their guesses. Whoever gets the most right wins a prize.

2. Human Sculptures

[This icebreaker is best with groups of about 10-20; if there are more than 20 members, split them into two subgroups]

In this non-competitive activity, members of the group serve as the human "clay" to be formed by the one member serving as sculptor. The sculptors should be asked to provide an interpretation or depiction of some category of events or other focus topics that the trainers choose. For example, you might ask for interpretations in "human clay" of any of the following:

- An important event in the life of a member
- An important "public" event
- A movie scene
- An event from a book
- A scene or line from a song

The trainer or another staff member may want to be the first sculptor, in order to demonstrate the process and reduce member inhibitions. Then ask for volunteers. Without speaking, the sculptor should physically move members around, until the human sculpture is complete then explain what s/he created to the group while they maintain their poses.

If public events are used, it is easy to have two sculptors simultaneously interpret the event and then compare their sculptures. Human sculptures can also be done with several individuals, or the whole group, serving as a team of sculptors, in which case talking is permitted.

Be sure there is enough space for the groups to move around. You may want to provide some furniture or other items such as chairs, tables, or books to be incorporated into the sculptures. Allow time for 3-4 human sculptures.

3. We Are Alike

[This icebreaker is good for large groups of more than 20]

Have everyone stand in the center of the room. Explain that this exercise will show that we all belong to many groups. Tell the members that you will start by saying, "We are alike -- we all _____" and you will list a characteristic. All the people who share that characteristic should gather on one side of the room, and those who don't share that characteristic should go to the other side of the room. Then you will call a member's name and it will be that person's turn to list a characteristic s/he has. The member you select will state a characteristic, people will move from their last spot, and then that member will call another member's name to take over. Do this for approximately 10 minutes.

Characteristics should include family, personal background, interests, and values. Some suggestions: have volunteered for a community-based organization, were born in this city,

have Italian ancestry, have successfully cooked a quiche, have eaten beef tongue, have more than five brothers and sisters, etc. Encourage creativity.

4. People Scavenger Hunt – Find Someone Who...

[This icebreaker is especially good for groups of 20+]

Develop a list of statements that are likely to be true for at least several of the members in your group. Then give members 10 minutes to find someone, other than themselves, for whom that statement is true and have that person initial the sheet. Whoever completes all the statements first wins a prize. There is an example in the handout section.

Your statements can be general -- for example, find someone who:

- _____ Has an abuela
- _____ Lives in a co-op building
- _____ Read today's newspaper
- _____ Has a daughter under two years old
- _____ Owns a Michael Jackson album (not a CD)
- _____ Has eaten grits

5. Pictionary

[This icebreaker can be done with any group above 10]

Develop lists of popular movie titles, song titles, proverbs, service terms, or any other categories of phrases that seem interesting. Divide the members into groups of 5-8 people. The purpose of the game is for each team to try to guess the title/term/proverb first. A representative of each group must use drawings to represent the words in the title or proverb. A representative from the team goes to the facilitator in the center of the room. The facilitator announces to the entire group the category of the phrase (movie title, proverb, etc.), and then tells the representatives the phrase to be used. The representative goes back to the group and draws sketches on newsprint depicting the entire phrase or title or each word separately. (For example, for the song *Blue Moon*, the representative might draw a moon in blue marker. For the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the representative might draw a picture of a plate of bacon and eggs and a picture of jewelry store window.) The representative may not speak, and the drawing must not include any words or letters. The team that identifies the phrase first receives one point. Each team then sends a different representative to the center of the room for the next phrase. The game continues until one team gets a pre-determined number of points or a specified amount of time (10-15 minutes) has passed. The team with the highest number of points wins.

This icebreaker needs a large room, so each group can work with some privacy. Each team gets newsprint and a set of markers of several different colors.

6. Name and.... Game

[This icebreaker can be done with any group up to 15 people]

Everyone sits in a circle. One person introduces herself or himself, saying their name and then one word that describes a reason they have become involved in community service. (For instance, a children's book that is important to you, what you would be doing if you were not here, what you like about the place where you volunteer, etc.). The second person repeats the first person's name and the word/adjective and adds their own. The third person repeats the previous two, adding their own. And so on. The last person has the hardest job

because they must remember all of the names and words/adjectives. If there is time, you can go around the circle again and ask each person to explain why they chose their word/adjective.

7. Shake All Hands

[This is good for groups over 25 people.]

Explain the game. At the count of three, everyone in the room has to try to shake everyone else's hand within a strict limit of one minute. Start the game. A variation is to have everyone sit in a circle and each person says their name fast right after each other. Keep the time to see how long it takes the group to go around the circle. Challenge the group to beat their time by trying other methods. Both of these games gets energy up, and obliges each participant to acknowledge everyone else.

8. Mime the Lie

[This is good for any size group.]

Have participants stand in a circle. One person goes into the middle of the circle and mimics an action, such as pouring a drink of water. The person who was standing next to the first person asks what s/he is doing. The first person lies, and says for example, "I am running a race." The person who asked now goes into the circle and mimes whatever the previous person said that s/he was doing. When the second person is asked what s/he is doing, s/he lies and the game continues as the third person takes up the miming, and the fourth person asks.

9. Hold Your Breath

[This is good for any size group.]

Have participants sit in a circle. Everyone looks at the person directly across from them. At the same moment, everyone holds their breath and sees who can hold it longer, without taking their eyes off their partner's face. By the time everyone runs out of breath, people are laughing at the absurdity of the situation. This activity is good for diffusing tension.

10. Word Tag

[This is good for groups under 25]

Word tag is an improvisation game. Ask everyone in the group to find a partner. Each duo must find another duo to form a group of four. Each group of four must become "one person" (they may do this by linking hands, pressing their heads together, or other means of showing they are one person, if they so choose). As "one person," the pairs should attempt to form a coherent sentences, one word at a time. The facilitator gives the topic of the dialogue, making the topic relevant to the workshop content. For example, if you were about to prepare the group for an "Into the Streets?" service project, you might choose the topic for one group as "painting." The group of four must create a coherent sentence, one person and one word at a time. The hardest part is saying only word at a time and trying to make sense as a single person.

11. Word Toss

[This is good for small groups of five in each circle.]

Ask each group of five people to form a circle. Give them an imaginary ball to throw back and forth to each other. Practice with throwing and catching the imaginary ball first. When this is mastered, ask the groups to now throw words to each other, like they were doing with

the ball. The facilitator gives a topic for the words (e.g. words pertaining to a service project, things I like to do on the weekend, etc.). They throw a word to a group member, the group member then repeats the word thrown to them as they catch the word. That person then throws a new word to another group member, who catches it, repeats it, and chooses a new word to throw, and the process continues.

12. Boop

[This is good for smaller groups – if you have a large group break them into smaller groups of 3-4 people.]

Have the small groups join hands to form a circle. Give each group an inflated balloon. Make sure there is space in between the different groups so they can safely move around. The object of the game is for the participants to keep the balloon up in the air and off the ground. The groups must keep their hands joined together throughout the game—if they break their hands, they are out of the game. Give the groups about two minutes to practice keeping the balloon up in the air before beginning the game. As the facilitator, you call out certain body parts which the group must use to keep the balloon in the air. For example, start off by calling “hands”, then move onto “elbows” or “knees.” You can then use combinations, “head-elbow.” What this means is that a head shot must follow an elbow shot, or the group is out of the game. Have fun with making up your own body combinations. Keep doing this until one group is left. A fun way to end the game is to say “fire in the hole.” This means all the groups must use their body to pop the balloon as if it were a fire the group needed to put out.

13. Hot Seat

[This is good for small groups under 15 people.]

Have one person sit in a chair in front of the room. The other participants ask the person one question at a time. No discussion is allowed. No “yes” or “no” questions are allowed. You can find questions in the books [If](#) or [The Book of Questions \(where do you get this book?\)](#). Some example questions are, “If you could have dinner with anyone living or deceased, who would it be?” or “What do you want to be doing five years from now?” After # of questions, switch person in the hot seat.

14. Show and Tell

[This is good for any size group; in a large group you might want to do five-at-a-time, spread throughout the workshop.]

Before the training, ask each participant to bring an item from home and to be prepared to speak about the object in front of the group. Or, you can ask them to take something out of their pockets, bags, etc. and explain the object to the group. They must share the significance and any other tidbits about the object to the group.

15. Koosh Ball Introductions

[This is good for any size group.]

Explain to the group that when a fellow participant throws them the Koosh Ball they must say their name and answer a question from the person who is throwing the Koosh Ball. You can tailor the question to the workshop topic (e.g. for a workshop on Children’s Literacy, a question could be: “Say your name and tell us your favorite children’s book”).

16. Snapshot of ME!/Personal Homepage/Coat of Arms

[This can be used with any size group. If you have a large group you may want to post the homepages or coat of arms around the training rooms so people can look at them during breaks.]

You can create a template or have people be creative and create their format. Give people topics they must answer. Provide art supplies for the participants to use to create their homepage or service shield as they register or during another down time of the training. You can suggest they place their shield/homepage in a file folder so it is protected and can travel easy without being damaged (is this last sentence relevant or at least relevant to whom... "instead of collecting the shield, you can suggest..." .

Some possible topics you may want to include are:

- Draw a banner on your coat of arms for our group motto (this is something that is left blank until the group is together – then as a group, they ask each other what they want to stand for as a team e.g. what phrase/quite? best describes this?)
- What I need from this team to be personally effective is...
- My biggest challenge for the year is...
- One thing I am going to commit to this year is...

17. Goal Squares

[This is good for any size group, though with groups of more than 20 there should probably be multiple, smaller groups created.]

Give each person a piece of paper. Instruct them to fold the paper in half, then in half again, and once more. They should have eight squares on their paper. Ask the group to think back at a time in their life when they said to themselves, "I wish I could do that." Tell them it is time to start doing something about it. On one side of the paper they are to write one thing they want to learn, try, create, (e.g. climb a mountain, eat sushi) in each square. They should have eight items written down, one in each of the 8 squares. After they are finished, instruct the participants to then flip their papers over and write **one word** behind each square that describes why they want to do that respective action. What is the motivation? What is the draw? For example, "I want to run a marathon" is in one square, on the back of that same square I write the word "adventure" because that best describes why I want to run the marathon. Using flip chart paper or a blackboard, record as people shout out those words they wrote that describe why they want to accomplish a certain task. Write about 10-15 words down. They do not need to tell you the action at this point, just the descriptive word. Discuss with the group any similarities and differences in the words. Typically, the words we write down are things that are missing in our lives and we find concrete ways to bring those feeling to our lives. The problems we run into are that we do not follow-up with our dreams and get so bogged down with daily tasks that we forget to take care of our desires. Challenge the group to choose at least two of the 8 items to accomplish within the next six months.

18. Grandparents' Lessons

[This is best used for groups under 15 people.]

If you have a larger group you may choose to have a few people do their lesson throughout the training or break the group into smaller groups. Ask each person to say their name, the

campus they are from, major, and one lesson they learned from a grandparent or someone from their grandparents' generation.

19. I Like Someone Who...

[This activity is best for groups over 25 people.]

Have participants sit down in chairs that form a circle (there should be one less chair than the number of people participating in the activity), while you begin the activity by standing in the middle. As facilitator, begin by introducing an "I like someone who..." statement that draws connections among participants based on preferences, interests, or experiences. Some examples include: "I like someone who is a night person," "I like someone who likes sushi," "I like someone who makes pottery," "I like someone who has listened to the Dead Kennedys." Direct all participants who can relate to the statement to move from their space and find a new seat in the circle (recently vacated by another person who likes the same thing). Those who can not relate stay where they are seated. Participants cannot take a new position that is directly left or right of their current place. Join the participants in finding a new seat, thus leaving one person in the center of the circle without a seat. This participant comes into the middle and provides another "I like someone who..." statement.

20. Name Tags

[This is good for groups under 25.]

Give each person a half piece of hard paper (called tag board, you can also use file folders cut in half). The paper must be thick enough to create a nametag, like a name tent, each person will place in front of them. Have each person write their first name or the name they go by on the front of the nametag. On the back, the side that will face them when placed on a table, they must DRAW symbols of significant things in their life (e.g. I like nature, so I might draw some trees). They can use symbols only – no words, no letters. They should then share what their symbol means with the person next to them. The partner picks out ONE symbol the other person described and will use this symbol to describe the person to the larger group. Each person says their partner's name as they describe the symbol. Ask the group, would these things/symbols/preferences be visible to someone meeting you for the first time? How can we avoid judging a book by its cover or from being judged?

21. Check-In

[This can be used with any group size.]

In order to constantly check-in with the group and their energy levels, you can use a few creative ways in place of asking how they feel. One option is to have the group go around the room and have them relate how they feel right now to a type of weather. You can ask the group, if you were the weather, what would you be right now? An example response is "sunny" because I'm feeling happy. You can also use colors or candy (I fell like talking so I would say, "like a twizzler because they make your mouth happy.")

23. Go Fish

[This is best used with a smaller group of under 15 people.]

Select a group of tiny items that make you think of the topic you are training in. We will use "service" as the example. Gather items like a picture of child, seeds, etc. Tie a string to each item and place the objects hidden in separate paper bag, leaving the string hanging on the outside of the bag. Have each person grab a string and object. After everyone has

looked at their object tell them they must describe a service experience that comes to mind. In addition, you can leave some strings empty and allow the person to describe any experience.

24. Motivation

[This can be used throughout a training or workshop to bring people back from breaks or to re-focus the energy/attention of the group.]

Ask a person in the room, “Why did you get out of bed this morning?” or “Why do you get out of bed when you are home?” This gets them to think about what really motivates them to be social agents of change. It is a simple question, but it takes a great deal of honesty and thought.

25. Goalball Fight

[If your group is over 15 people, you will want to break the group into smaller groups when processing the activity.]

Each person writes one goal for the year or for the training on a piece of paper. Then everyone crumbles up their paper into a ball, forms a large circle, and starts throwing the goalballs at each other. After about 30 seconds each person should grab one of the goalballs. Then break the groups into smaller groups and have each member share the goal on the piece of paper aloud. This is a fun way to hear what the participants want to learn from the training. Tell the group, “A goal written is a goal half attained,” or “Ideas won’t keep, something must be done about them” (a quote from Alfred North Whitehead).

26. Bag of Goodies

[This is good activity for a retreat setting for any size of group.]

Fill paper bags with random items – paper clips, tape, balloons, glasses, toilet paper, stickers, etc. Give each group of people a bag of goodies and tell them they have 20 minutes to plan a skit using ALL the items in the bag. You can give the skits themes relating to work you are doing, or leave it open so that they groups can decide on the theme on their own. The skits are very amusing and bring the groups together.

27. Board Games

[This is a good activity for small groups of under 15 people.]

Board Games (Trivia Pursuit, Pictionary, Scattergories, Taboo, Twister, Cranium) are fun ways to revive the group after meals. You can break the groups into teams and play against each other, or you can simply ask a few trivia questions before each segment of the workshop. You do not have to play by the rules written down in the game; make up your own to fit the needs, and time constraints, of the group.

28. Knock Your Socks Off

[This is good for groups larger than 10 people and can involve as many people as you would like – large groups of 30 or more are ideal.]

Instruct people to take their shoes off and get on all fours (if people do not have socks or if they have a skirt on they can observe). At the word “go,” the participants try to pull off other people’s socks with trying to keep their own on. People must stay on all fours – no running

or hopping to get away. The player is eliminated once they lose BOTH socks. The one left with both or one sock is the winner.

29. Mystery Partners

[This is good for groups under 25 people.]

On index cards before this icebreaker, write out the names of recognizable pairs – one name on each card (i.e. Fred Flintstone is on one card and Wilma Flintstone is on another, Hillary Clinton is on one card and Bill Clinton is on another, etc.). When the icebreaker begins, tape an index card to the back of each person in the group. Their mission is to ask others in the group questions in order to discover who their own mystery person is, then locate their “mystery partner” by looking at everyone else’s backs. After everyone has found their mystery partner, ask each person in the group to introduce their partner (both in character and in reality) to the whole group.

30. Famous People

[Good for any size group.]

As participants enter the room, tape or pin a name of a famous person (rock stars, movie stars, politicians, leaders) on their backs. Tell them they can not look at their own back. For about 10-15 minutes have people mingle around the room asking items yes/no questions about their identity. People can also treat the other participants as if they truly were the famous person that is on their back. After people mingle, ask the group to come back and guess who they are.

31. Family Bonding

[This is good for groups over 20 people.]

The facilitator must prepare index cards of famous families (Flintstones, Simpsons, Brady Bunch, Cosbys), having one family member name per index card. Give an index card to the participants as they come into the room. Once everyone has a card they are to find their family. Once they find their family they are to sing a song for the entire group, say famous lines, or do an action that is affiliated with that family group.

32. M&Ms

[This is good for any size group.]

This is a great introduction game for people who are meeting for the first time. Everyone sits in a circle. Pass a bag of M&Ms around and invite people to help themselves. If people have dietary restrictions, you may choose to pass marbles or playing cards. Once the bag is passed, participants tell their name and, for each M&M in their hand, one thing about themselves. Give some categories if they are having difficulties, i.e. where your grandfather lived as a boy, what you would want to eat every day, your favorite book, etc. A variation is to have set questions for the colors of the M&Ms. For instance, everyone with a red M&M says the last book they read, everyone with a yellow M&M says their favorite band, etc.

33. Clues for Suckers

[This is good for groups under 15 people.]

Each participant writes three things about him/herself on an index card. The items should be things others in the room do not know. The facilitator collects the cards and reads the

clues aloud to the group. Whoever guesses who the clue describes gets a sucker (a lollipop).

34. Music Choice

[This is a great activity for large groups.]

The facilitator puts up signs of various music categories: rock, punk, folk, country, opera, showtunes, oldies, new age, reggae, classical, gospel, heavy metal, jazz, alternative, hip hop, etc. Everyone stands under the sign with their favorite music category. After they are under a sign, the group must come up with one song to hum or sing for 30 seconds. Allow the groups 5 minutes to plan and practice.

35. Photo Scavenger Hunt

[This is a great activity for a retreat setting in a city.]

Break the groups into teams of no more than five people. Give each group a Polaroid camera or a disposable camera. Create a list of sites, trivia questions, funny poses, and other creative actions that they must document using their camera. This takes at least four hours. You can then give each group enough money to get their camera developed at a one-hour photo place. You should arrange a location they can bring their camera to ahead of time and alert the photo shop they will be coming with a deadline of when their pictures must be ready. If there is no one hour developer and you are not using a Polaroid camera, you can do this activity in the beginning of a retreat. Then, get the film developed, and on the last day allow the groups to create a photo album using construction paper to show-off the pictures and, of course, to determine the winner.

Additional Resources for the Facilitator

Book of Questions, The, Gregory Stock, Workman Publishing Company, 1987.

Cowstails And Cobras II, Karl Rohnke, Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 1989, Project Adventure, Inc.

If, James Saywell and Evelyn McFarlane, Villard, 1995.

Islands Of Healing: A Guide To Adventure Based Counseling, Jim Schoel, Dick Prouty, and Paul Radcliffe, Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company 1988, Project Adventure, Inc.

Quicksilver, Karl Rohnke and Steve Butler, Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 1995, Project Adventure, Inc.

Silver Bullets, Karl Rohnke, Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 1984, Project Adventure Inc.

Teamwork And Teamplay, Jim Cain and Barry Jolliff, Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 1998.

Association for Experiential Education (AEE)

<http://www.aee2.org/customer/pages.php?pageid=28>

Project Adventure, Inc.

<http://www.pa.org/index.php>