

Introductions and Icebreakers

Any session designed to ignite action needs to begin with participant introductions.

Why introductions?

Below, you will find helpful ways to lead introductions among your group. Introductions let each person's voice be heard at the beginning of the program, create a safe way for people to open themselves up to one another, and serve as a "warm up" for the sessions ahead.

Types of introductions

Your style, the group's preferences, and the length of the session will determine the type of introduction that is used.

1. Quick and Easy Introductions

- Efficient and effective, these intros will work for most gatherings

2. More In-depth Introductions

- If participants are going to spend a significant amount of time together, more in-depth intros will allow a better understanding of one another. While this may take more time, it will be a worthwhile investment in getting the group more comfortable.

3. Icebreakers

- Designed to be a bridge between the Introductions phase and the program content itself. Choose one or more icebreaker activities to create a safe environment and build group rapport. This activity offers any stragglers an opportunity to settle in without interrupting a more intensive part of the program.

The tool you select will depend on the facilitation design and your style. However, each introductory segment should include:

- Introductory remarks/get acquainted activity
- Acknowledgment and thank you to participants for their attendance

- Explain your role as a facilitator
- State the purpose of the session; express desired outcomes and results of the session
- Familiarize participants with a program or agenda (either individual printed handouts or common-use display by projection screen or flipchart)
- Develop group norms (rules of behaviours, cell phones off, break times, etc.)

QUICK AND EASY INTRODUCTION

Ask these questions to allow participants to share information and to have fun:

- What might we be surprised to know about you?
- Introduce yourself by sharing a story about your name i.e. do you have a nickname, who you were named after, etc.
- Share what you consider your personal “claim to fame”.
- Introduce yourself and the name of someone who you consider a leader.
- Introduce yourself and tell us what it is important to know about you if we’re going to work with you.
- Share one of your hobbies.
- Share one of your special talents.
- What’s your most favourite food?
- What is the greatest advice you have ever received?
- Say your name and something you are thankful for that starts with both initials. For example, Ernie Jones might be thankful for eggs and jam. Ted Hawthorne might be thankful for Technology Help!

IN- DEPTH INTRODUCTIONS

1. “FIND THAT OBJECT”

Give participants 10 minutes to find an object that represents how they feel today, what they aspire to, what their job feels like, or what they would like to “let go of to be present”- the possibilities are wide open.

Participants can either hold on to their object or put it in the centre of the room. Have each participant share with the group what the object means to them. You can either go in order, let someone volunteer and then go in order or let it go according to whoever is reading (this option often feels best.) It is helpful to emphasize that they do not have to

find the ultimate object and they should not think too hard about it but just let objects speak to them (i.e. whatever seems to catch their eye should be considered.)

Alternatively, each participant could introduce themselves and then show the group an object they brought into the session (it could be from their pocket, purse etc.) They must then tell the group why that object is significant to who they are.

2. "ASK AND ANSWER"

Have participants complete the following:

1. My name is...
2. I have a question about...
3. I can answer a question about...

3. WHO DID THAT?

Prior to the session, make a list of about 25 items relating to work and home life. For example:

- Grow my own garden every year
- Enjoys cooking
- Has delivered cooking classes
- Has experience in teaching others about nutrition
- Enjoys volunteering in the community

Ensure there is plenty of space below each item (three to four lines) and then make enough copies for each person. Give each person a copy of the list and have them find someone who relates to one of the items and can sign off on it. Allow about 30 minutes for the activity. This activity allows for participants to learn about each other and creates an inventory of skills and interests in the group.

4. PERSONAL ASSETS MAP

In this activity participants reflect on their individual gifts, skills and passions. Ask participants to reflect on their gifts on the head, hands and heart and invite them to share. The facilitator can take notes of the assets of the group on large pieces of paper to develop a community asset map.

Gifts of the Head: Things I know something about and would enjoy talking about with others (e.g. art, history, movies, and birds)

Gifts of the Hands: Things or skills I know how to do and would like to share with others (e.g. carpentry, sports, gardening and cooking)

Gifts of the Heart: Things I care deeply about (e.g. protection of the environment, social justice and children)

ICEBREAKERS

1. GIVE AND GAIN

Each person tells one thing that he/she wishes to gain from the session and one thing that he/she can contribute (give). This can be done verbally, or have participants write two cards, attach the cards to their shoulders, and walk around the room, sharing information with the others. This activity can be done at the beginning of each session.

2. HOPE AND FEARS

In either small groups or with the whole group, ask participants what their hopes and fears or goals and expectations are for the meeting. Post recorded answers and review at the end of the session.

3. MAGIC WAND

Have participants write on a piece of paper what they would change in the community about a predetermined session topic if they had a wand. Randomly read the responses to the whole group.

4. SHORT CASE STUDIES

Suggestion group size: pairs, trios or groups of four

Preparation: Prepare one or two case situations (maximum 1 page) that are directly relevant to the session content. Use a large font and incorporate graphics. For each case study, prepare two to four questions that are directly relevant.

Instructions: Give participants three to five minutes to review the case and highlight any information that is relevant. Then, form the groups and ask the groups to record their answers on large pieces of paper or flip charts. When the exercise is complete, ask participants to circulate and read the other groups' answers to the topics that will be covered during the session.

Adapted from: A Toolkit For Community Leaders, Alberta Recreation & Parks Association. 2008 Grassroots Enterprises.