

Networking Activities Toolkit

Created by the Network Learning Exchange

Contents:

- Reasons to do Activities
- Types of activities with brief examples
- 3 longer activity guides
- Blank activity worksheet

Why should I include networking activities in my agenda?

Networking activities have several benefits, including:

- Building trust in a group
- Facilitating deeper connections and greater awareness
- Reducing stress in social situations
- Bringing participants minds into the present moment
- Hearing more voices in a crowded room
- Creating shared understanding and visions among participants

Types of networking activities:

- Icebreakers (are generally at the beginning of events and relatively short)
 - Digital Icebreakers: In an email to the whole group before the meeting, send a picture of you doing something you love.
 - Word Cloud (digital or in person): list 3 words that describe you. Or, list 3 things you value. Or, list 2 things you hope to gain from the experience and 2 things you hope to give. These offerings could be generated into a word cloud.
- Ways to split into groups (help participants meet new people)
 - Stickers on Name Tags: all the blue dots gather, one of each color gather
 - Deck of Cards: all the Kings gather, all of the diamonds gather
 - Birth Month: join a group with others whose birth month is Jan - Mar, April - June, July - Sept, or Oct - Dec.
- Brainstorming (quick ways to generate ideas and glean a common vision)
 - Body-storming: The rule is you can't stop moving as you shout out ideas to be recorded by a scribe.
 - Reflect and Write: After introducing topic, allow 2-5 minutes for everyone to reflect quietly, then write as many responses as they can think of to the question posed; one idea per sticky note. Round Robin (one person at a time, with everyone getting a turn) to hear one idea, post on flip chart. Keep going until all ideas are heard.
- Team Building (help the group find common ground, build trust and explore ways to cooperate)
 - See following activity worksheet "Connecting through Areas of Focus or Interest"
 - See following activity worksheet "Let's Collaborate"
 - See following activity worksheet "Weaving Connections"

- Celebration (giving and receiving appreciation encourages further participation)
 - Peer Awards: participants draw a name and create a certificate/award/ribbon and present it at an awards ceremony. Could be silly or sincere.
 - Recognition Awards: Give Dollar Tree gifts that represent some quality or story of the person you're recognizing. (Ex: glow stick for the person/organization whose work lights up the community or hand clappers to 'give someone a clap on the back' for their hard work.)
 - Toast: participants with beverages and take turns toasting the group for their accomplishments.

Networking Activity Worksheet

Activity Name	Connecting through Areas of Focus or Interest
Length of Time	40-45 minutes
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Table or chairs to sit on so everyone can see and hear each other ✓ Flip chart, easel, markers ✓ Sticky notes with pre-marked 'cues': Challenges, Common Challenges, Opportunities to Work Together
Objectives and Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn more about who is in the room and what they are working on (networking / connecting) • Share challenges and strategies for addressing them • Discover opportunities to work with others on common areas of interest; potential to share resources and eliminate duplication of efforts
How many people/groups?	<p>As many as 6-8 groups of 7-10 people, each group representing a different Area of Focus, such as:</p> <p>Arts and Culture Economy and Business Education and Youth Health and Human Services Natural World / Recreation Public Safety / Government / Infrastructure</p>
Steps	<p>Invite participants to go the area of focus that most represents the work their organization does.</p> <p>Facilitator Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask for a volunteer scribe. Ask the scribe to write the names of café participants. ✓ Prompt the group to respond to each question in order. ✓ There will be sticky notes printed with the cafe questions to prompt participants, assist you in keeping everyone on task, and to help in transcribing the notes. ✓ A timekeeper will announce when it is time to move to the next discussion question. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each participant states name, organization and top two things they are working on. (8 min / ~1 min each) 2. Briefly name a primary Challenge your organization is facing in this area of focus. (8 min / ~ 1 min each)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Based on what you just heard, what are some Common Challenges many of you are facing in this area of focus? (8 min) 4. Next explore any Opportunities to Work Together – Are there some things you might do together? Summarize 1-2 key Opportunities to Work Together – e.g.; share information and resources, coordinate activities, work cooperatively, network, partner, and/or collaborate to effectively address this area of focus. (10 min) 5. Ask the Scribe to write your summary points on a fresh flip chart sheet for the report to the full group. Report: 1-2 challenges and 1-2 opportunities (10 min total report time)
How to Debrief:	<p>After each Area of Focus Table reports out, ASK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ How was this experience for you? ✓ Did you find you had much in common? How did that feel? ✓ Did you discover any opportunities to work together that you think you'll follow-up on – either as a group or with one or two other organizations?

Networking Activity Worksheet

Activity Name	Let's Collaborate: Building Partnerships Activity
Length of Time	30-40 minutes
Materials Needed	Flip chart, easel, markers, name tags
Objectives and Outcomes	<p>Encourage more partnering to eliminate duplication, leverage resources and coordinate activities.</p> <p>Provide an opportunity to create business/nonprofit partnerships, coordinate fundraising activities, volunteers & resources, or do joint promotion of events and activities.</p>
How many people/groups?	Groups of 8-15 people in each of 4 seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall. Have flip charts in each of 4 corners of the room, with a sign for one of the seasons.
Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite participants to go to the season in which they sponsor a major event or activity (winter, spring, summer, or fall.) 3-4 min to organize and gather.) ● Participants select a facilitator and scribe or have people pre-arranged. Do a round robin with everyone saying: (~10 min, depending on size of group.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name of their organization & a 5-6 sentence (no more than 1 min) description of a major activity, program or resource building (funds or volunteers) effort they sponsor or are involved with. (Scribe to capture on a flip chart.) ○ A need or interest they have in sharing and/or recruiting volunteers, finding resources, combining activities, or doing joint promotion of an event or activity. (Scribe to capture on a flip chart.) ● Participants find an organization, or organizations, they have something in common with & explore opportunities to: (15-20 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ share volunteers or resources, ○ combine activities, or ○ do joint promotion. <p>If opportunities seem worth pursuing, identify next steps.</p>
How to Debrief:	Ask for a few examples of results. Capture on flip chart. (5 min)

Networking Activity Worksheet

Activity Name	Weaving Connections
Length of Time	10 minute minimum; could go longer, based on time available or until all challenges addressed.
Materials Needed	A skein of yarn rolled into a loose ball. Space large enough for all members to stand in a circle.
Objectives and Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote networking and peer learning ● Visually demonstrate the web created through networking
How many people/groups?	Minimum of 8-10 people to make a big enough circle; up to 20-25 will work
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The facilitator asks everyone to stand in a circle. Start by asking 'who has a challenge they would like to share?' Hold onto the end of the ball of yarn and gently toss the ball to that person. They briefly share one challenge. 2. The facilitator then asks if there is someone who has 'solved' that challenge or has a success story or relevant strategy to share? The person with the challenge grabs the end of the yarn and throws the yarn ball to the person with the success story/strategy. 3. They share their 'success' (strategy), then share another challenge (either from their own experience or one that came up in the small group activity). 4. Continue sharing challenges and successes/strategies and tossing the ball (with the new speaker always holding onto the end) for a few rounds depending on how much time has been set aside or until the group feels finished. 5. Lay the web down on the ground in front of the circle and notice the complexity of the web and connections that have been woven.
How to Debrief:	<p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What did you learn or experience from this activity? ● What did it demonstrate about networking and networks? ● Based on what you heard/learned, did you 'meet' someone who has knowledge or experience that you'd like to know more about? (network connection)

Networking Activity Worksheet

Activity Name	
Length of Time	
Materials Needed	
Objectives and Outcomes	
How many people/groups?	
Steps	
How to Debrief:	

