

[350.org Workshops](#)

- [Toolkit](#)
 - [Toolkit Overview](#)
 - [2. Why Organize?](#)
 - [3. Telling Your Story](#)
 - [4. Build a Movement](#)
 - [5. Build a Campaign](#)
 - [6. Media: Online and Offline](#)
 - [7. Putting it All Together](#)
 - [Extra: 10 Steps to Plan a Workshop](#)
 - [Extra: Facilitation tips, games, and energizers](#)
 - [All Downloads](#)
 - [Go deeper: more training resources](#)
- [About](#)

[Contact](#)

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[Home](#) > Facilitation tips, games, and energizers

Facilitation tips, games, and energizers

Making your workshop interactive, participatory, and fun will be key in engaging your participants and creating an effective learning environment. To help, many sessions already have participatory activities built in to the curriculum, and here we provide a number of ideas for energizers, name games, and interactive activities that you can adapt and incorporate to keep your participants energized and ready to learn. Have a great activity or tip to add? Email us at workshops[at]350.org.

Contents

- [Intro/name game activities](#)
- [Experiential learning tools](#)
- [Energizers and games](#)
- [Closing activities](#)
- [Facilitation tips](#)

Intro/name game activities

Activities and games that help set a “safe space” for participants to learn and share. You will likely want to do more than one of these, at least one name game and one activity that involves personal sharing.

Circle name game: In this most basic “name game”, names are said around the circle along with an adjective or animal that starts with the same letter as their name, and if you’d like, a movement which everyone repeats.

One minute intros: Everyone in the group gets one minute (need a firm timekeeper for this!) to introduce themselves in whatever way they want. This allows for different types of expression such as dance, song, or just speaking.

Buddy pairs: One helpful way to build in reflection and support is to pair people up into “buddies” at the beginning of the training. Its important to “randomize” buddy selection so that people don’t end up with people they already know – one way to do this is to create to circles, one inside the other, of people holding hands, with equal numbers of people. Then you have each circle rotate a different way – when you say stop, people will be facing their buddy. You can have buddies check in to reflect and share what they are learning at different points throughout the training, and here are some good prompts to open and close:

Opening:

- “Some wishes I have for this workshop are...”
- “Some fears or reservations I have for this workshop are...”
- “Some support I could use from you might be...”
- “You’ll be glad I’m your buddy because...”

Closing:

- “Something I learned that I can’t wait to take home is...”
- “Some ways I noticed you shine in this workshop are...”
- “My hope for you is that...”

Goal setting: Its important to allow time for a discussion about goals – it can be helpful for you as the facilitator to share the overall goals set out for the training, and also invite participants to think about and share their own personal goals for learning. You might want to do this in your “buddy pairs”, or small groups first, followed by asking for examples in the larger group so that you can build a common sense of the goals people have for the workshop.

Norms and guidelines: Its helpful at the beginning of the workshop to take time to brainstorm “norms and guidelines” – in other words, rules that the group would like to set for themselves for how they participate and interact. Its good to build this list from suggestions from the group, and keep it visible the rest of the training so you can refer back to it when norms are not being respected.

Diversity welcome: A nice way to welcome and acknowledge the diversity in the room is what’s known as a “diversity welcome” – the idea is to welcome all the different types of diversity in the room to make people feel included, and to acknowledge and show respect the important differences that exist. Here are a few examples of how to frame it:

“I’d like to welcome into the room...”

- Women, men, transgendered people”
- Young people, older people, people of all ages”
- Single people, married people, people who are dating
- Your families and people who supported you to be here
- People who speak English, Spanish, Chinese, etc....
- People who are (name the different races or ethnicities in the room)
- People who are from (name the different geographies in the room)
- The people native to this land
- Your emotions – joy, grief, anger, disappointment, inspiration, and otherwise.
- etc....

Experiential learning tools

The following are approaches for experiential learning – ways to teach concepts based on the experience and knowledge your participants already possess.

List building – One of your most powerful tools as a facilitator is good questions, and building lists from your participants knowledge from these questions. Having big sheets of paper and markers or a chalk board will be very helpful for eliciting input from the group. Here are a few types of lists you'll want to think about making to help participants learn in a participatory way:

- **Brainstorm** – example: brainstorm all types of “tactics” you can think of
- **Harvesting** – example: after working in small groups, ask for examples of what each group learned about a particular topic
- **Maximize/minimize** – example: “What makes a good story?” followed by, “What hinders good story-telling?” to build participants’ understanding of story-telling.

Small task groups – You'll notice throughout the 350 workshop curriculum that much of the learning takes place in small groups. In groups over 15, this ensures active participation from all members. You can design activities for small groups for reflection, to practice a skill, brainstorming, or many other uses. Sometimes it can make sense to form groups that work together for the whole training (especially if they are from the same place and will be working together later on), but can also be good to mix things up.

Mingle – individuals mingle around in the group. The facilitator says stop, asks participants to pair up, and gives a prompt which could have to do with the content, or be something personal. Some examples include, “A childhood memory that makes me happy is...” or more focused on the training, “My main goal for this workshop is....”. Once each partner has shared, they'll move on, find a new partner, and share with the next person.

Noticings – The group is invited to give observations or questions, without judgment, about the workshop – could be about the content, the group dynamics, their personal development. A useful open space activity to read how participants are doing, and to encourage them to take ownership over their learning.

Energizers and games

The shakeout: in a circle, everyone shakes out their left arm, right arm, left leg then right leg, starting with 16 times for each limb, then repeats all four limbs with 8, 4, 2, and then 1. Count out loud for full effect – counting in other languages encouraged!

Short meditation: everyone is invited to take a minute of deep breaths with their eyes closed.

The big wind blows: Create a circle of chairs with one less chair than the number of participants in the room. One person starts in the middle and gives a prompt such as “the big wind blow for anyone who speaks more than one language” at which point everyone who is multilingual has to leave their seat and find a new seat, leaving a new person in the middle. This is a good game to recognize diversity in a fun and safe way.

Lifeboat: Lifeboat is similar to “big wind blows” – you have the group mingle around and then prompt them to get into “lifeboats” with people who have the same number of siblings, speak the same number of languages, have the same favorite color, etc. The last group to form is “out”.

Yes Lets: walking around, people take turns calling out what they want people to do “Lets climb a tree” then everyone says “Yes lets!” and pretends to climb a tree.

Mirrors: in pairs people mirror each other, then switch leaders.

Party guest: someone is hosting a party, everyone else is a guest at the party with a secret identity/occupation that the host has to guess.

Birthday lineup: Ask the group to line themselves up in the order of their birthday (or height, for example) without speaking.

Systems game: walking around a designated space (room, field, lot), everyone secretly chooses two people, and try to remain exactly in between both of them – the ensuing organized chaos can be a good analogy to the organized chaos of interdependent living systems!

Closing activities

“The Network” Activity: Bring a ball of yarn for this nice closing activity. Get into a circle. One person starts with one end of the yarn and passes it to someone else in the circle after telling the group their commitment to work after the training. Afterwards, everyone takes a piece of the yarn to tie onto their wrist as a bracelet.

Roses and thorns: Everyone in the circle shares a high point and low point from the training with the group – can be done at any point throughout the training.

Affirmation mingle: Have the individuals mingle around in the group, and instruct them to stop in front of someone and share with them one way in which they noticed that person “shine” during the workshop. Keep switching partners so each person gets feedback and support from different members of the group – and so that people get practice giving positive feedback!

Facilitation tips

Some helpful tips for good facilitation:

- *Hold boundaries* – set out time boundaries, the number of questions you will take, etc. and stick to them to create a safe and consistent space for participants
- *Take risks* – at the same time, take risks in asking difficult questions or pointing out developing group dynamics.
- *Be transparent* – be open with the group about why you’re doing particular activities, or that you’re experimenting with something new – this makes you more part of the group and helps them learn about facilitation as well.
- *Listen for emotions* – try to read the group’s emotions and reactions, and try to see what is not being said, or who is not speaking – try to bring those out through good questions.
- *Have clear goals* – know what you want out of a particular session.
- *Reflect and summarize* – your job as facilitator is often to take, generalize, and summarize what participants are saying about a particular topic to help the conversation arrive at a good conclusion.
- *Ask good questions* – some examples to get more clarification or go deeper, or to guide the conversation back to the topic at hand:
 - Can you give me an example of that?

- Can you say more about that?
- How did you get to that conclusion?
- How do you see that relating to [whatever topic you're covering]?
- What do you think a solution to that could be?
- Have you experienced something like that before? What was it?