

Youth & Young Adult Facilitation & Engagement Strategies

developed by the California Youth Advocacy Network

Icebreakers, Check-ins, & Energizers: What's the Difference?

Icebreaker

A game or activity used to introduce people to each other so that they feel more relaxed together. Following an icebreaker, participants should know more about one another.

Check-in

The process of talking to someone to connect on new information. A check-in creates time and space to share and address thoughts, feelings, and updates.

Energizer

An activity meant to get people engaged physically within their environment. At the end of an energizer, participants' brains and/or bodies should feel stimulated.

Choosing an Activity Type

The group atmosphere:

- You have new members in your group
- Not everyone seems to feel comfortable in the space
- You know or sense that there are differences in culture or backgrounds in the group

You may want to choose:

Icebreaker

- Not everyone is up-to-date with information
- The group had a recent challenge/success
- You sense some members are feeling unwell or unsure

Check-in

- The energy feels low in the room
- The group has been sitting for a while

Energizer



Sample Activities

Icebreaker

Name Tag

- Have everyone in the group create and decorate a "name tag" on a half sheet of paper or virtual canvas. Prompt them to add any pictures, text, emojis, etc. that best represent the things they value, love, and are passionate about.
- After 5-10 minutes, have each person share their name tag and explain what they chose to include on it.
- **Tip:** While everyone is working, play background music or open up the space for free-flowing discussion on random topics. This can help "break the ice" even more!

This activity is a lengthier icebreaker, and that's okay. Sometimes it is necessary to prioritize time for relationship-building. What makes this activity a great icebreaker is it allows space for participants to both self-reflect and make connections with others.

Check-in

Pulse Check

- Have the group form a circle, or establish an order for sharing if the group is not seated in a circle.
- Ask the group any relevant prompt such as "What is your current energy level?" or "How is everyone feeling about our project?" or "What is something you know about today's topic?"
- Allow each person to share or pass in the order set up.
- After everyone has shared, synthesize what was said. You can choose to follow up with any needed actions or words to address the current "pulse."

This activity works well as a check-in because it allows everyone to share their thoughts on a given topic, giving the facilitator an idea of where everyone is at.

Energizer

Team Stretch

- Have the group form a circle (standing or sitting).
- Start by prompting everyone to loosen their bodies with a body shake and deep breath.
- As the facilitator, lead everyone in the circle through a stretch or movement.
- Moving around the circle, each person takes a turn leading a movement for the rest of the group to follow.
- End with either a final body shake and breath, or a round of applause.

This exercise works well as an energizer because everyone is a participant and leader. By the end of this energizer, the group will have completed a diverse series of movements and motions to help reengage their bodies in the space.

Sample Activities (continued)

Although it is important to note the differences – icebreakers, check-ins, and energizers can certainly overlap. The following activity, “Weather Check,” involves components of all three.

Part 1: Weather Check (Check-in)

- On a slip of paper, have everyone express their emotions by using a weather pattern. Have everyone hold on to these for now. Here are some example expressions:
 - “I feel like a cozy rainy day” may be used to express comfort.
 - “I feel like a pile of leaves being blown all over the place” may be used to express uncertainty or confusion.
 - “I feel like a heavy storm” may be used to express frustration.

Part 2: Snowballs (Energizer)

- Have everyone crumple their paper into a ball.
- Toss the papers around in the circle for 10 seconds.
- At the end of that time, everyone picks up another person’s paper ball.

Part 3: Sharing Circle (Icebreaker)

- Have the facilitator begin by reading the note they’ve picked up. The facilitator can also begin by letting someone volunteer first.
- When a person’s paper is read, they will raise their hand. They may share more about what they wrote, or pass on this step.
- They then read the paper they picked up from the pile, and the process continues until all papers are read.



Tips and Considerations for Facilitating

- Don’t just have activities. Make them as relevant to your work and/or culture as possible.
- This is a youth and young adult space! Invite one or two of your youth/young adult members to help facilitate these activities, or even the meeting as a whole.
- The facilitator should model activities by going first.
- If you have limited time, or want to create a setting for deeper conversation, consider breaking out into smaller groups for activities.
- Music can be a major factor in mood setting. Invite everyone to add to a group playlist!



California Youth Advocacy Network
info@cyanonline.org | (916) 339-3424 | www.cyanonline.org

This material was made possible by funds received from the California Department of Public Health, under grant #19-10235.