

Icebreaker Activities

The following list of icebreakers is a non-exhaustive list of those used in the Illinois Leadership Center® i-Programs. As Cohort Leads, please feel free to refer to this list when planning for your Cohort Meetings. You are also free to contribute your own icebreakers and energizing activities to your meetings. *If you know you would like to do a particular activity on this list that requires materials, please talk with the Leadership Certificate Team Graf Intern.*

Icebreakers: *These are typically longer (5-15 minute) activities that help individuals get to know one another and decrease awkwardness within a group.*

Human Knot

Materials: None

This activity gets a group working together, thinking critically, communicating clearly, and developing chemistry in solving a familiar puzzle.

1. Divide the larger group into smaller subgroups of about ten people.
2. In each individual group, have participants get into a circle.
3. Have each participant reach across the center of the circle to grab someone else's hand, until each person is holding hands with two different people.
4. Group members now try to extricate themselves from the knot without letting go of one another's hands.

Find Your Mother

Materials: List of animal names, created by facilitator

This activity energizes participants and gets them outside of their

comfort zone in a fun and controlled environment.

1. Randomly assign each group member an animal from a predetermined list such that several people are assigned the same animal.
2. Instruct participants to close their eyes and make the noise of their assigned animal as they move around the room.
3. Participants try to move around and find other people who have been assigned the same animal by listening for the appropriate noise.
4. This continues until all participants have found their animal groups.

Magic Carpet

Materials: 1 tarp/blanket/bed sheet per group

This activity encourages group members to be active, work together creatively, and think outside the box to solve a physical challenge.

1. Obtain a piece of flexible fabric (a tarp, bed sheet, blanket, or towel can work)
2. Lay it out flat on the ground and instruct a group of participants (at least ten people) to all stand on it together. Both feet need to be fully on the tarp.
3. Without leaving the tarp or touching the ground, the group must work together to flip the tarp completely over.

Window

Materials: 1 long rope per group of 10+

This activity encourages group members to be active, work together creatively, and think outside the box to solve a physical challenge.

1. Create a rectangle made out of the rope. The group should select two people to hold the rope rectangle vertically, like a window.
2. Begin by holding the rope window slightly above the ground. Group members must work together to get all of the group members, in turn, through the rope window without touching it.
3. If anyone touches the rope, that person must start over and try again.
4. Once everyone gets through, two new people must hold the window and raise it a bit higher (waist height) than it was the last time, and everyone must go through the window again.
5. This process continues until the window reaches too high a level or (if desired) everyone has had a chance to hold the rope window.

Common Ground

Materials: List of statements, created by facilitator

This activity allows participants to see similarities in situation or character among the members of the whole group.

1. Prepare a list of statements that can demonstrate similarities between group members, or try to highlight particular issues (i.e. questions related to curricular topics like social justice issues for *Insight*).
2. Have participants form a circle.
3. The facilitator then reads one of the statements from the list. If that statement applies to a participant, they should take a step forward into the circle. Other participants remain stationary.

4. After a few seconds, they step back into the circle, and the facilitator reads a new statement.

Move Your Butt

Materials: Chairs

This activity creates an opportunity for participants to be alert and active all while learning basic facts about and similarities between other group members.

1. Count the number of participants and arrange that number of chairs minus one in a circle.
2. One participant should be without a chair. Have this participant enter the center of the circle, and instruct the other participants to sit in any open chair.
3. The center person first introduces themselves and then says, "Move your butt if . . ." and substitutes a statement that is true about themselves and likely other group members (examples include, ". . . if you're wearing red", ". . . if you're from the suburbs", ". . . if you enjoy knitting", etc.).
4. Every group member to whom this statement applies must now get up and move to a different chair at least two places in the circle away from their current position. This results in another person left without a chair, and that person enters the circle.
5. This pattern continues until a set amount of time has passed or until everyone has had a chance to be in the center of the circle.

Candy Game

Materials: Candy with different colors

This energizer represents a fun way that participants can get to know basic facts about one another, all while being able to have some delicious candy.

1. Obtain a colored candy (like Starburst or Skittles).
2. Assign each color a specific category of question (i.e., red Starburst could represent questions about hometown).
3. Each participant, one at a time, selects a colored candy at random. They then answer a question of the category that the color represents. (Say Student A chooses a red Starburst. They would then answer a question related to their hometown.)

Possible categories include: campus involvements, how do you spend your free time, an aspect of pop culture, your favorite Netflix show, etc.

Swap Chairs

Materials: Music

This activity energizes participants while providing an organized method by which groups can change participants or members.

1. Have each team put their chairs in a circle, minus one chair less than the number in the group.
2. Play musical chairs, whereby the facilitator plays a song as participants walk around the chairs. Once the music stops, participants rush to sit in an open chair.
3. A participant is 'out' when they are unable to find an open chair to sit in. After each round, you should remove one more chair (the # of chairs will always be one less than the # of participants).
4. Have players who are "out" move to the side and sit down on the floor, and continue playing until each circle has

three people left.

5. The facilitator then informs the group that it is a reality of our world that groups do not remain static, but are always changing and also are part of larger systems and environments.
6. The three “winners” in each group then joins the opposing team (the other team working on the same project) for the remainder of the workshop.

Nametag Swap

Materials: Nametags

This activity puts a clever spin on basic introductions and allows group participants to learn a bit about each group member and a great amount about one other member.

1. Divide participants into small groups (of about 8 people), but make sure that the group has an even number of participants.
2. Now, have each member of the small group find a partner.
3. Begin with one person introducing themselves to the other, giving basic information like name, major, hometown, interests, etc. Then, have the other person do the same.
4. After a minute or two of sharing by each person, have partners switch nametags with one another. Each person now must adopt the persona of their partner and introduce themselves to the group using the information that the partner shared.

Networking Bingo

Materials: Worksheets with characteristics, paper, pencil/pen

This activity allows group members the opportunity to get to know one another in a controlled setting, and it teaches them about

what other group members have done or can do.

1. Devise a 5x5 grid in which each box contains a different skill or personal characteristic. *You may have one grid per participant, OR you may display the grid on a projector and have participants keep track on a separate piece of paper.*
2. Participants should mingle with their peers, finding different individuals who have each skill or characteristic. Participants should get the name and signature of the person for whom they are 'counting' as having the skill/characteristic mentioned in that box.
3. This can continue until one person has a signature for every box or until a set amount of time has passed.

Around the World

Materials: Open space

This activity enables participants to find others of like geographic location and background and is a good activity to allow participants to find some immediate, common ground with another. This is especially well suited for groups with large numbers of international students.

1. Divide the room into four quadrants, where one divider represents the equator, and the other divider represents the Prime Meridian.
2. Have each student position themselves in the quadrant and location in that quadrant that best represents their country/state/city of origin.
3. Have each student then initiate conversation with a nearby student about their location of origin or another topic.

Variations: You also can do this activity with participants blindfolded, or when they cannot speak, where the Lead

Facilitator designates themselves to be a location (e.g., I am Alaska, or I am Italy) and participants have to find ways to locate themselves correctly in relation to the facilitator and their peers.

Dance-a-thon

Materials: Music

This activity allows participants to become active, energized, and exercise their personal creativity in a way that is then shared by the whole group.

1. Participants form a circle and one person enters the center of the circle.
2. A facilitator then begins to play some music, and the person in the center of the circle must come up with their own, unique dance move and begin doing it.
3. The other members of the circle then mimic this dance move until the music stops, at which point the person currently in the center becomes part of the circle, and someone new enters the center.
4. This can be treated as a contest to see who has the most unique, creative dance move, or it can be just a fun way to get people active and involved.

Partnership Strings

Materials: Partnership strings, 1 per person

This activity is useful in building communication and critical thinking skills between two team members.

1. Take two strings and tie loops on each end.
2. Now, loop one loop of one string around one person's wrist, and loop the opposite end of the same string around

the other person's hand. Do this also for each person's other hand.

3. Cross the loops in the center between the two people.
4. Now, each person must try to get out of the bind without removing the loops from their wrists.

**Partnership strings are two strings, approximately 2 feet long with loops at either end.*

Two Truths and a Lie

Materials: None

This activity is a simple way for group members to begin talking to one another and learning basic facts about each other in a smaller group setting.

1. Divide the larger group into groups of about 5-6.
2. Each group member then takes turns coming up with two statements about themselves that are true and one that is false.
3. They presents these statements to the group, and the group must come to a consensus about which statement is the lie.

Energizers: *Short (5 minutes or less) activities that require few materials and add a quick shot of energy, movement, or alertness to participants. Energizers are particularly ideal after a break or lunch when energy typically tends to lag.*

Zen Count

Materials: None

This activity allows for group members to develop a sense of rhythm, flow, and connection with one another.

1. The purpose of this activity is to have the group count in order from one to the number of people in the group, with each person saying a different number. No two people can simultaneously say the same number.
2. If two people say the same number at the same time, the entire group must start over counting from one.
3. This continues until the group successfully counts to twenty or the number of people in the group.

Baby Shark

Materials: None

This is a “catch-along” song designed to get participants active, engaged, and having fun.

The lead facilitator begins the song by chanting “Baby shark” and making a jaw like clapping motion with their hands, and repeats this until the group catches on. Then, the facilitator continues to the next verse. The verses of the song are described below.

1. “Baby shark” – with small “jaws” motions just with the hands

Refrain: “ba ba, babababa” (repeats after each verse)

2. “Mommy shark” – “jaws” motions using only forearms
Refrain
3. “Daddy shark” – “jaws” motions using full arms
Refrain
4. “Grandpa shark” – “jaws” motions similar to baby shark, but using knuckles together *Refrain*
5. “Going swimming” – swimming motions *Refrain*
6. “See a shark” – make a fin on your head and wobble back and forth *Refrain*
7. “Swim away” – swimming motions *Refrain*
8. “Swimming faster” – faster swimming motions *Refrain*
9. “Shark attack” – rake your hands across your body in opposite direction like you’re being torn *Refrain*
10. “CPR” – put hands together and do the downward thrust motion of CPR in rhythm *Refrain*
11. “I’m alive” – Jump in the air and throw your arms up in celebration *Refrain*

Shakedown

Materials: None

This energizer is a simple way to engage participants and regain energy.

1. A facilitator begins counting at one. Each participant in sequence shakes each limb once (i.e. a participant will shake their left hand once, then the right hand, then the left foot, then the right foot).
2. The facilitator then calls out “two” and each participant shakes their limbs twice.
3. The facilitator continues up to ten, and then back down again to one.

Amoeba Tag/Blob

Materials: None

Energize participants and get them up and working as a team and as individuals with this modified version of tag, which results in all participants becoming part of one “it” group.

1. Two people are chosen to be “it” and hold hands throughout the remainder of the activity
2. The two people whom are “it” chase down other participants. Each time they tag one, that person becomes “it” as well (they have become part of the blob), and now all three people must hold hands and try to tag other participants.
3. This continues until every person is tagged and has become part of the blob.

Group Sing

Materials: None

This energizer encourages people to develop group chemistry and get excited by singing a set phrase in harmony.

1. The lead facilitator offers the group a set phrase to repeat that is encouraging or related to leadership.
2. Divide the group into three or four subgroups.
3. The lead facilitator then sings this phrase with a certain melody and assigns a subgroup of participants to sing it in the same way.
4. The lead facilitator then invents another melody in harmony with the first for another subgroup of the participants to sing simultaneously.

Clumper

Materials: None

This energizer will allow participants to become active, energized, and involved with the group.

1. Have one facilitator call out a random number (anywhere from 2 people to ½ the group size).
2. The participants then scramble to get into groups of the size that the facilitator called out (all without talking).
3. You can choose to have the individuals in the group discuss various questions (i.e., “What is a current book you are reading?” or “What is your favorite movie?”)
4. The facilitator can call out new random numbers and have them “re-clump” as much as they desires.

Zip Zap Zop

Materials: None

This energizer helps participants develop a sense of rhythm and connection.

1. Have participants form a circle.
2. One facilitator pretends to have a ball of energy in their hands, and they sends it to another person by forcefully saying “Zip!” and using direct body language (such as a darting hand motion to communicate to another that the energy has been sent). Eye contact must be kept to send energy.
3. The person to whom the energy ball was sent now gestures to receive it, and then they sends it off to another person by saying the word “Zap!” and using strong body motions.
4. The person who receives this then sends it off to someone else in the circle saying “Zop!”

5. This pattern of Zip, Zap, Zop continues until the “energy is dropped” (i.e., someone does not make eye contact or a pause between transfers is too long), at which point it begins anew.

Rain Storm

Materials: None

This activity has a calming effect on group members and creates a sense of connection as they create a rain-like sound by in unison. You may go through this once below, and then again and designate different student groups each a sound.

1. The lead facilitator instructs participants to first be still and quiet, and to follow their lead. After two or three beats of silence, they begin by quickly and repeatedly snapping their fingers (to try and simulate light rain).
2. Next, the facilitator starts students sliding their hands back and forth (simulating constant drizzle).
3. After a little while, the lead facilitator switches to slapping their hands on their thighs (simulating harder rain).
4. The facilitator now switches to stomping their feet (to simulate thunder and lightning).
5. The facilitator goes back to simulating harder rain, and then finishes with light rain.