

NETWORKING TOOLBOX:

Easy, Low Resource
Approaches to Create
Better Connections



MODELS

BADGE APPROACHES: Name badges can be retooled to better serve their intended purpose - to truly help people get past those first few awkward moments of hello.

END OF THE PROGRAM NETWORKING: With networking ranked so high in value, states and network groups incorporating a meaningful connection at the conclusion of an event will give the attendees the chance to walk away with a tangible resource/connection to reinforce the sense of belonging to the community.

PROBLEM SOLVERS: The more personal experiences we can create, where attendees have space to identify and discuss their need with peers, the more we are connecting them to peers that can help them address everyday challenges.

TEAM/LEADERSHIP CONNECTION: Volunteer groups that take time to get to know each other better, form stronger personal connections, and take the time to build volunteer skill sets will better serve the organization.

THE ART OF THE BUSINESS CARD: Though rolodexes may have faded into obscurity, the business card has not yet faced the same fate. Structure approaches that will encourage meaning when cards are exchanged.

CONNECTIONS OVER A BITE OR A SIP: Breaking bread or cooking meals for one another is a long-standing approach to inviting another person to get to know you better. Your state or network groups can do more than just setting out a big plate of cheese and crackers to help individuals connect in this often informal setting.

QUICK CONVERSATIONS: There are times when it is useful to use a quick-introduction approach. Starting an event or meeting with such an approach makes it a little easier for participants to find who to sit with and who to talk to, since they just had a moment of connection.

BADGE APPROACHES

ASK ME ABOUT

PURPOSE:

An easy way to take a name badge and share a personal insight that the person wearing it chooses – lowering the barrier to starting a conversation.

SUPPLIES

Name badges that are printed with "Ask me about" at the top

Pens/markers for attendees to fill out the rest

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size – from 5-50,000

TIME NEEDED

Minimal – less than a minute for them to fill out their badge and then mingle as normal

EXECUTION:

As each attendee comes to the event, ask them to fill in one thing they would like to be asked about – it could be personal, professional, trivia – whatever will help others get to know them better. There are even some organizations that will tie this question into a larger event theme! Underneath this, they should write their first name.

This is a quick conversation starter – a way to get past hello. This approach is especially useful in settings where vendors and members are going to connect, creating a topic around which the vendor can start a conversation that isn't sale focused, but is instead determined by the attendee.

FOUR QUADRANTS

PURPOSE:

A name badge activity that will give the networkers choice in what question to ask each other in a personal and fun way.

SUPPLIES

Large name badges – 5x7 labels work well
Pens/markers for attendees to fill out the rest

IDEAL AUDIENCE

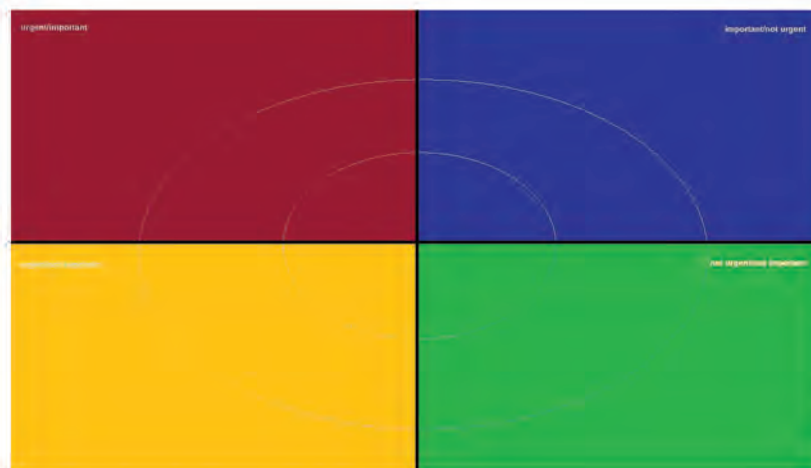
12-100 – ideally an audience who have initial knowledge of one another and this will give them the chance to get to know each other better

TIME NEEDED

4-5 minutes for set up, another 5-10 minutes minimum for them to walk and meet others

EXECUTION:

Ask participants to draw a vertical line through the middle of their label and then a horizontal line through the middle of their label, creating four quadrants. It should look like this



For each quadrant you will ask them to supply a different piece of information. Though you can use any questions you like for the top two and the bottom left, the bottom right should always have their first name.

Sample questions for the top two and bottom left:

- What was your first job ever?
- What was your first job in the industry?
- Write the name of your favorite food to cook or eat, but don't indicate which it is
- If there were no TSA restrictions, what item would you always travel with?
- What is your favorite song to sing in the shower or hum in the car?
- Who was the best performer that you have heard live?
- If you were going to pick your ideal vacation location, which location would you choose?
- If you could convince someone to read one book, what would it be?

For the bottom right, besides filling in their first name, you can also include a name addition such as:

- What is a nickname you have had in your life? (and if they never had one, just put a frowny face)
- What is the meaning of your name?
- What is a name that you have chosen for yourself during your life?

As people go around and mingle, they can only ask the people they meet about one of their quadrants. This will encourage them to meet more people.

Depending on your audience, you can also make the game more in-depth – if they pick the song or performer one, the person who wrote it has to sign the song. If they pick the vacation location one, the person actually has to make a pitch. If they come across someone without a nickname in their life, they can't leave them till they give them one.

HIDDEN SUPERPOWERS

PURPOSE:

We each have talents and strengths – unique qualities that our colleagues may not know about. Sharing a strength that we have is an easy way to get to know something new and personal about colleagues that you may have just met or known for years.

SUPPLIES

Name Badges with participants' first names and space underneath

Pens/Markers

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

7-15 minutes

EXECUTION:

After everyone has their name badge, use the following as a guide to give instructions for the activity:

"Whether in our professional or personal lives, each of us has areas or skills where we excel – where we know we perform at a level of mastery when many of our colleagues and friends may not. For today, we are going to call this your superpower. Think about this for a moment – you may have many of them, but what is one superpower that you have? Perhaps one that few in this room would know? Take a moment to think of what it is, and then write it on your badge beneath your name.

Is everyone done? In a moment, I am going to ask you to get up and go talk with one or two others – you can't start with someone at your own table. Inquire about their superpower – how did they discover it? Hone it? How do they use it? If you want to make it fun, what superhero name would you give them because of it?

Appreciation of each other's strengths is a great way to meet – so please get up and discover some of the superheroes in the room."

SKILL ACQUISITION

PURPOSE:

Every colleague in a networking room has experience, skills, and talents that others may not know. Rarely are these discovered without direct inquiry. This activity will allow a participant to identify something – professional or personal – they want to learn more about and then hopefully find a colleague who can share their knowledge.

SUPPLIES

Name badges with attendee first name and a space labeled: “I want to learn” with blank space following.

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size/background

TIME NEEDED

10 minutes

EXECUTION:

As each attendee checks in for the event and receives their name badge, they are asked to fill in the blank with the following prompt:

“We are going to start our program with the opportunity to learn from one another. On your badge, please think of one thing you would like to learn. Perhaps it is a skill, or an insight from industry. Perhaps you want to learn about where to make specific connections. Perhaps there is a personal interest you are pursuing. If is up to you – but please write legibly since others will have to read your answer.”

After most people are in the room, the following script can serve as a prompt:

“One of the reasons that we come together is to learn from each other. Each person in the room has put on their badge one thing that they would like to learn – I would like to invite you to go up to your colleagues – those you don’t know, those you do – and discover what they are looking to learn. Know an expert they should meet? Make an introduction! Recently read an article or watched a video on the topic? That is a perfect reason to take their business card and send them a follow up message with the content.”

RIBBON COUNTS

PURPOSE:

An introductory conversation that many participants often have revolves around times of involvement – how long have they been in their job, how long in the industry, how long in the association, how many times at the conference, etc. This approach allows for a fun guessing game while acknowledging both those loyal and those new.

SUPPLIES

Blank ribbons and markers
(3 ribbons per person)

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

15 minutes

EXECUTION:

As each person arrives, give them 3 blank ribbons and a marker.

The facilitator should prompt this exercise as follows:

“In a moment I am going to ask you three questions. Please write the number of your answer to each question on a separate ribbon. Do NOT write what the number indicates. For instance, if I ask how many years you have been a member and you have been with the organization 20 years, you would only write 20.”

Here are the questions: (select from the questions below or write your own)

Now that you have three ribbons with numbers, please hang them on your badge in any order you like – it does NOT have to be in the order that I asked the questions.

Now please get up and go talk to one another – and try to guess which number is correlated with which of the questions. You have 7-9 minutes to get to as many people as possible.”

After they have rotated around and sat back down:

“Now please write in next to each number what it indicates, so for the rest of our time we can get to know each other better.”

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How many years in the field
2. How many years in current job
3. How many years until you think you will retire

END OF THE PROGRAM NETWORKING

BRIGHT IDEAS

PURPOSE:

At the end of any learning session, this quick reflection exercise can help attendees meet as they teach each other, cement the learning that they just experienced, and build the shared knowledge bank of the association.

SUPPLIES

None

IDEAL AUDIENCE

No size limitation

TIME NEEDED

As little as 5 minutes, though can be run longer if time permits

EXECUTION:

Reserve the last five minutes of any learning session that you run. Since, most often, people will have been sitting in the same spot the entire time, ask everyone to find one (and if needed two) people next to them – ideally someone that they didn't come to session knowing well. Ask them to share with the other person one takeaway from the learning experience presented in the session. Their learning partner should capture what they are saying in writing and, after they have shared with one another, they should add their final learning pieces to a dedicated social media stream – either on the state or network group Facebook page, on Twitter with an associated hashtag, or even with a photo representation of their learning on Instagram with an associated hashtag.

If time permits, the pair can observe and discuss the pieces of learning others are sharing. At the end they should be encouraged to connect – either on state or network group Facebook page, LinkedIn or a business card – having walked away not just with a tangible summary of learning and with a new learning colleague.

THROUGH ANOTHER'S EYES

PURPOSE:

Throughout an event, attendees will have passing conversations in the hallway or hear a colleague across a room ask a thought provoking question which triggers a desire to have a longer conversation with that person. This activity uses an approach that levels the playing field across all audience segments and gives them the opportunity to ask for that conversation.

SUPPLIES

One blank piece of paper per person, with some extra in the room

Attendees should have a writing instrument

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size – can be a learning group of 10, or all attendees at the end of the event.

TIME NEEDED

At a minimum, you will need about 6-8 minutes. With larger groups it will be closer to 10

EXECUTION:

Once everyone has a piece of paper, start with the following script:

"In a moment I am going to ask you to do something, and I do not want you to do it until I tell you to do so.

At some point during our time together, there has most likely been someone you met or heard that you would have liked to have spoken with longer. Perhaps it was a conversation that got cut off, or someone who asked a question that you had also been thinking. I would like you to scan the room to choose who that person is, but I do not want you to make eye contact with them. I want you to scan past them so they do not know you have chosen them. When you have found your person, please look back at me at the front of the room."

Once everyone is looking back at you:

"Everyone has selected their person? Good. Now please take your piece of paper and draw a picture- it can be of that person, a representation of the conversation you started and want to continue, the question they asked – the only rule is no words allowed. Yes – I am serious – and stick figures are allowed. I will give you a few minutes – please proceed."

A minute or two in there will be a handful of those who quickly completed their drawing that are looking at you, waiting for next instructions:

"For those whose artistic masterpiece is already complete, a job well done. We are going to give those that are creating more robust drawings just another minute or two."

Once everyone has finished:

"Now please write your name and email at the bottom of the paper."

After a moment when that is done:

"Now please go give your drawing to your muse."

This will take a few moments as people move around the room to find the people they chose. At some point ask people to please find their seats.

"Did anyone not receive a drawing? For those who received drawings – please pick one person who didn't and make a topic you are interested in talking about, which you can identify with words this time, with your information on the bottom, and please give it to that person."

"You now have someone who is looking to connect with you, even after our time here is done. You should connect with them on the state or network group Facebook page or LinkedIn before you leave the room – and reach out to find time for coffee, even virtual."

"Whether you frame your art or hang it up on your fridge, this new connection is one of the most valuable aspects of being part of our community – we hope it will be a meaningful next conversation."

STARTING WITH THE END IN MIND

PURPOSE:

Though this exercise can be used in any type of session, it is especially effective when the session will include learning as a focus. This activity will focus each attendee on what they hope to gain from the session and then give them the chance to reconnect with a learning partner to verify whether their goal was accomplished.

SUPPLIES

Paper and pen for each attendee

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

5 minutes at the start of the session and 5 minutes at the end of the session. This activity lends itself well as a point of reflection immediately before filling out a session evaluation.

EXECUTION:

Before the session:

The facilitator should ask everyone to a sheet of paper. They should then ask each participant to write their answer to the following question:

As you think about what will make this session successful for you, where you will walk away feeling that your time was well spent and you would reflect to a colleague not in the room that they missed out by not being here today, what is at least 1 and up to 3 things that will make today successful for you?

Once everyone has finished writing their reasons, ask them to take them and find someone in the room not at their table – and ideally someone they do not know. These pairs should introduce themselves and share what their goals are for the day, and exchange papers.

After the session:

Ask everyone to take the sheet they have from their goal partner and write their own name and email on it.

At the end of the session, have the partners meet back up. Each partner should read what their partner wrote and ask if the goals have been achieved. If not, what could have made the difference? If so, how are they hoping it will impact their life once they leave the event? Encourage the pair to connect with one another and follow up further, after the session.

Following this is the perfect time to distribute a session survey.

GREAT QUESTIONS

PURPOSE:

Adult learning theory tells us that we imprint what we learn better if we are able to articulate what lessons were gained during the session and what questions went unanswered. This approach allows for participants to continue their learning past the session by seeing who is interested in discussing what, for them, they didn't get to finish discussing.

SUPPLIES

Paper and Pens, tape and blank walls

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Depends size of room – but could theoretically be done with any size

TIME NEEDED

~8 minutes at the end of a session

EXECUTION:

About 8-10 minutes before the end of the session, a facilitator should come to the front and prompt everyone with the following:

“As you reflect on what the session covered today, what is one important question that you are left with, that you wish had been discussed further? Think about that and then write that on top of a blank piece of paper with your name and email.

After you have written your question, please hang it on the wall.”

Once questions start to go up, continue with:

“Please walk the wall(s) and find conversations that you would like to have beyond this session. Please write your name and email on any sheet where you would like to be part of a discussion going forward.”

PROBLEM SOLVERS

FOUR CORNERS

PURPOSE:

This pop-up exercise will get attendees out of their seats to select a topical area that resonates with them. This will help them connect with colleagues as well as put them in an active thought-contribution mode instead of a passive-listener learner mode.

SUPPLIES

Space in the room big enough to send groups to four corners

Optional: Easel-sized post-it sheets with the name of the subject area hanging by each space

IDEAL AUDIENCE

At least 20 attendees and, depending on space, up to 100. Larger groups will require the leader/volunteer participation as described below.

TIME NEEDED

12-15 minutes

EXECUTION:

Simple Approach: Select four topics that correspond to major disciplines or interest areas in your industry. Write each on a large piece of paper and hang it in a different corner of the room.

After attendees arrive, use/modify the following narrative:

"In a moment, we are going to all get up and take a few minutes to discuss an issue in our industry that we find meaningful. Around the room, you will see four topics (read the topics). Take a moment and think about what conversation you would like to be part of for the next few minutes."

When I tell you to, please go to that area and form a circle with those who join you. At that point, whoever speaks first gets the floor, and the focus of the circle. What is one question that you have about the topic, an obstacle you are facing, or an overall discussion point that you want to explore? Everyone else in the circle is invited to answer the question and participate in a few minutes of focused discussion about a topic that is meaningful to you. So please get up, choose your corner, form your circle, and start."

If there are a larger number of attendees, or if one topic is more popular than others, leaders or volunteers may need to be stationed at each corner so they can split attendees into multiple circles. Ideally, circles have at least 5-6 people and do not have more than 15-20 people.

Before the end of the time, make sure to take note of the proportion of people that have chosen each topic area. You can use this information to tweak later presentations to speak to the topics a majority are interested in.

As time expires, ask participants to return to their seats. If the conversation is still ongoing, invite them to connect with their colleagues at a later point in the program or virtually when they are back home.

Other options to set up and execute this program:

- Send the attendees a list of possible topics before the event to let them vote, before arriving, on which four are of greatest interest.
- Collect discussion questions on each topic before they arrive and have them listed on the sheets hanging in each corner.
- Assign a volunteer to each corner to moderate the conversation and organize the circle.
- Assign a second volunteer to each corner to capture any great ideas that were shared.

MICRO-MASTERMINDS

PURPOSE:

There is a unique opportunity when you are surrounded by your peers to invite advice on the challenges you face since they live them every day as well. This activity allows time for to create meaningful connections based on that shared perspective.

SUPPLIES

None

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

As little as 5-7 minutes, as much as 15-20 minutes

EXECUTION:

Gather attendees into groups of 4-6, encouraging them to form groups with people they do not know well, and ask them to sit or stand together in a circle – or in some fashion where they can hear each other easily.

Next, you have to identify one person in each group. There are a number of ways you can do this, such as:

- Whose birthday is closest today
- Who traveled the furthest to get here
- Whose first time is it, or closest to first time

Here is a narrative you can use for the next part of the exercise:

“Let me see the hand of the person from each group who has been selected (make sure every group has one person) – perfect. It is YOUR lucky day! Please think of one challenge or obstacle you are facing in your job, organization, or career or an opportunity where you would like feedback. Everyone else in the group – for the next few minutes you are consultants. Please help your person solve their problem.”

At the end of the time, encourage the groups to connect to each other so that they can hear from the person how their advice helped them in what they choose to do next.

WISDOM NEXT DOOR

PURPOSE:

Adult learning theory tells us that we imprint what we learn better if we are able to articulate what lessons were gained during the session and what questions went unanswered. This approach allows for participants to continue their learning past the session by seeing who is interested in discussing what, for them, they didn't get to finish discussing.

SUPPLIES

Paper and Pen

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Size doesn't matter, but room set up is best if participants are at roundtables or in groups of at least 4-5. Ideally, they can be mixed in background/perspective/position

TIME NEEDED

~15 minutes

EXECUTION:

The facilitator should use the following prompts as a guide:

"Welcome. You have sitting all around you, at your table and those next to you, peers and colleagues that understand our industry – they know the acronyms and lingo, they get the challenges and pressures we face. Today we are going to tap into that collective strength of knowledge.

I am going to give you about 4 minutes – at your table please discuss some major challenges facing our profession, or our members. As you talk about this decide on one such challenge that, as a table, you would like addressed and write it down on the paper on your table. Make sure what is written will make sense not just to you, but to someone who has not been part of your conversation. Also, please write your table # or the name of the person who is scribing on the paper."

Wait about 4 minutes

"Now, please pass your paper to the table on the right.

Everyone should now have a problem authored by another table. You have 4 minutes to do a quick analysis and suggestion brainstorm - one person write neatly on the paper capturing the thoughts of the table. Big ideas are good, and so are low hanging fruit immediate shifts."

Wait about 4 minutes

"Please stop working and pass the sheet onto another table – not the original table that gave you the paper.

You now have a problem and some initial solutions – you have 4 minutes as a table to build on what is there, either adding your own suggestions or creating some new ones."

Wait about 4 minutes

"Please return the sheets to the original authors.

Please review what has been added. Share contact information and see if one person will type it up and share amongst your table after the event."

TEAM/LEADERSHIP CONNECTION

PUZZLE IT OUT

PURPOSE:

To highlight communication styles and how they can affect leadership dynamics within the team.

SUPPLIES

Two 12-piece puzzles per group – puzzles such as these. You should get a variety so there are no duplicates.

Table space for each group to do the puzzles

IDEAL AUDIENCE

State Leadership Team and the Network Group Leaders, divided out into small groups of 3-4 people

TIME NEEDED

7-12 minutes

EXECUTION:

Have each set of puzzle pieces in a Ziploc bag. Ask the groups you assign to come together, put the bags down, and – with no other guidance – quickly say:

“Inside the bag are two 12-piece puzzles – let’s see who can put them together the fastest. On your mark, get set, go!”

They will dive in and usually shout out, “Done!” when they finish. Recognize who finishes first, second, third, etc. If one or two groups are dragging behind, you can also at some point say that we are just going to pretend that they finished. Ask all the groups to break apart their puzzles and put them back in the bags. As you collect the bags, continue with this narrative:

“I am going to give you about 3 minutes. Use that time to discuss your strategy – what will help you put the puzzle together faster?”

Switch the bags up so every group receives a different set of puzzles. Tell them they cannot touch the bags until you say go.

After few minutes, give them another "ready, set, go!" See who finishes first this time and ask them to share their strategy.

After each round, talk about what was challenging and how they overcame the challenge.

At the conclusion, besides giving out a token award of some kind, ask the group as a whole to process what communication lessons could be learned from the activity.

Other Options:

- No one can talk on the team
- One or two people can't touch the puzzle
- Pre-set a time limit and you will see who is the furthest along
- One person is designated 'team captain' and everyone else has to follow their direction
- And for a really hard one – only two people can touch the puzzle, but they are blindfolded, and the others have to tell them what to do

FOLLOWER PHILOSOPHIES

PURPOSE:

Every leadership team is comprised of individuals who come to the table with their own, unique philosophy on what style of leadership they like to employ. Yet, even if this is a team of leaders, there is often a need for subset working groups or task forces where there will be a leader and a set of followers. This exercise helps share those varied leadership philosophies, giving insight to the varied approaches and styles on the team.

SUPPLIES

Post-it Notes – big enough for a quote, enough for 1-2 notes per person

Pen/writing instrument per person

Copies of a pre-set list of leadership quotes

Wifi so participants look up quotes on their own if they prefer

IDEAL AUDIENCE

State Leadership Team and the Network Group Leaders of any size

TIME NEEDED

10-12 minutes

EXECUTION:

The facilitator should start by sharing a leadership quote that speaks to their own philosophy and why. They can then ask the participants to do the same – here is an optional script to use:

"We know that whether it is the State Leadership Team or the Network Groups, that we look to have people serve with different experience, education, points of view, and insights. They also will have differing leadership styles. Just as I have shared mine with you, I would like each of you to find a quote that speaks to your leadership style – there are sheets in front of you with some options and if you google "leadership quotes" you will get thousands of pages that you can browse to find one that works for you. Please take a few minutes to find the quote and once you do, please write it out (legibly) on a post-it note. I will give you a few minutes to do this."

Once everyone has chosen a quote and filled out a post-it note, the next set of instructions will prompt them to get up and read each other, but with a different lens:

“Often when we serve on any sort of leadership team there are moments where we take on the mantle of leader and moments where we best serve the team by following someone else. In a moment I will ask you to get up, display your quote where others can read it, and walk around the room to view what others have chosen. As you read the quotes, you are not looking for a leadership style similar to your own. Rather, you are looking for a leadership style that is one that speaks to a leader you would like to follow. As we continue to work together, if along the way we form smaller groups, perhaps this will be one factor in which one you choose to join.

Sometimes people like to capture other insightful quotes they read, so feel free to take along your phone to snap a picture or two.

Please get up and take a few minutes to see as many quotes as possible.”

VISUAL ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION/VISION

PURPOSE:

When a Leadership Team takes time to craft a strategic plan, part of the process is often confirmation of the association's mission/vision to ensure it is in line with the future organization they want to create. While the words that emerge from this work may eventually live on the website as the standard bearer for the association, for many members, words don't make the same impact as an image. This networking exercise will build bonds between the leadership as they each bring back to the team their personal perspectives of the mission/vision.

SUPPLIES

None from the organization other than space and time – each leader should have their own mobile device with them.

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Leadership Team

TIME NEEDED

A few minutes to give the assignment before a conference, enough time after so each Board member gets 2-4 minutes to share

EXECUTION:

For many groups, the Leadership Team structures their meetings around meetings/conferences of the membership. This exercise requires assigning a task to the team before the member meeting/conference, the Board executing the task at the meeting/conference, and then allocating time to process the activity at the following team meeting.

Pre-meeting/conference exercise instructions – best presented by the Chair/President:

“As leaders, we know that the mission/vision of our organization is (insert mission/vision). While we may talk about what that means and how it guides us in our decisions, I would like to ask you to take on a small assignment at the upcoming conference.

As you spend time with members at the meeting/conference – either directly engaging them in conversation or observing how they engage with one another and/or the activity that we as an organization is providing – I want you to actively look for a moment that, to you, captures the essence of our mission/vision. When you see that moment, please take a quick picture of it. If it happens you experience more than one moment, feel free to take a number of photos. We will share these at our next meeting.”

During the meeting/conference (especially if it is multi-day or takes place some time after the above request was sent out) it is usually a good idea to send out a quick reminder

At the next Leadership Team, here is language that can guide the processing of the pictures:

“Hopefully everyone was able to capture an image or two that, for them, encompasses our mission/vision as an organization. I would like us to go around, show the image we captured, and share why, for us, it sparked a connection to our mission/vision.”

If appropriate, the organization can actually take the pictures and start a page on its site that is linked to its mission/vision – visual representations from the leaders. The organization can even ask the membership to share their own perspectives.

CREATE YOUR COMMITTEE

PURPOSE:

Our leaders inherit set systems, tasks, and even strategies. Rarely are they given a blank slate to imagine and co-create what they would author if given the chance. This networking model will give them the space to do so – hopefully both sparking some ideas of what is possible while together building governance from scratch.

SUPPLIES

Paper and pen for each attendee

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Leadership, divided into smaller groups of 3-5 (4 is ideal)

TIME NEEDED

12-15 minutes

EXECUTION:

After the leaders are divided into their subgroups, the facilitator prompts the groups as follows:

“The first step of this exercise is individual – you have 2 minutes – think of one major challenge facing our organization right now – one obstacle that you would prioritize as an area of focus. Write it down on your paper, and if you have the time, a sentence or two capturing its impact.”

After the time passes

“Please stop – each of you have 30 second to present your idea to your team, and then vote that if you are going to work on one idea, for this exercise which will your team work on?”

Give them 2-3 minutes

“You now have 4 minutes to design the governance team and scope that would work on this problem. Do not be locked in by our structure. Do you think this is a laser-focus task force that will operate for 3 months with recommendations back to the President? Do you think this is a working group that is representative of certain key audiences? Does the group that should work on this include or be led by a partner outside the organization? By someone with a fresh perspective? By a past leader?”

Here are the questions you should try to answer:

- 1. What is the governance body that will address this issue initially?*
- 2. How large is it and who comprises it?*
- 3. How long will it last/meeting?*
- 4. What are its success milestones?*
- 5. (If time) What resources will it need?*

Go ahead:

Note: those questions should be listed on the screen or at the front of the room

After the 4 minutes:

"Each group will now have up to one minute to present."

Allow them to present, and if time allows:

"For final, closing discussion – from the models presented as what would be needed, how do we need to start thinking about the volunteer models we are utilizing as an organization today?"

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS OF TOMORROW

PURPOSE:

While organizations select new leaders every year (or few years), rarely do they take the time to think about team needs further in the future. This exercise will allow leaders to co-create for organizational needs in the future, getting to know their own visions better.

SUPPLIES

Paper, Pens

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Leadership Team

TIME NEEDED

12 minutes

EXECUTION:

This exercise is ideally done shortly after the Leadership Team does strategic visioning for the future of the state. Based on that the following script should be adapted for where the state is:

Ideally, it is the President who facilitates this:

"For a moment, I would like everyone to picture our organization 5-10 years from now, not just surviving but thriving. Think about the world that we will be living in at that point – what you can picture from generation shift, from technology shifts, from any other internal or external factors that you think may be at play.

I would like each person to work as a partner and take a few minutes and vision together – as you are picturing the changing landscape and what the team will need in that reality, what are some qualities of the team as a whole, or team members as individuals with specific skills that you think the Leadership Team will need? Please work with your partner to come up with a list of those traits or skills. I'll give you a few minutes."

After they have created lists, have each share their list and listen for points of overlap. Hearing each other's vision will provide insight into personal perspectives of leadership needs of the future of the organization.

THE ART OF THE BUSINESS CARD

WHAT I LEFT OFF

PURPOSE:

Before handing a business card over, to allow the giver a change to personalize it further, making a memory of the meeting.

SUPPLIES

Each person brings business cards

Each person has a writing utensil

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size audience

TIME NEEDED

As much time as you want to allocate to a business card exchange – this can be an exercise to use for the duration of an event

EXECUTION:

To start this activity, ask all attendees to abide by this guideline:

"In order to help you make more meaningful connections with new colleagues, for this event we are asking everyone to do the following – before giving a business card to someone new that you meet, we ask you think of one thing that, based on the conversation you had with the person, you would add to your card. Perhaps it is a specific area of experience you have, or a place you have both been, or the next time you are going to be in the same place. What is the one extra point that will take this momentary meeting and make it more of a memory? Please write that on the card before you hand it over."

MAKE IT COUNT

PURPOSE:

More and more, a business card exchange is meant to be the starting point for continued dialogue rather than the close of a singular interaction. This activity focuses on that often-unspoken promise and makes it a requirement for exchanging cards.

SUPPLIES

Each person brings business cards

Each person has a writing utensil

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size audience

TIME NEEDED

10-20 minutes on average

EXECUTION:

You can start this activity with a narrative similar to the following:

"For the next few minutes, we are going to focus on meeting each other through a lens of quality over quantity. When I ask you to get up, you are allowed to take only (3) of your business cards with you. As you mingle and meet someone new, you are invited to engage in a brief conversation. I will ask you to move to another conversation at 3-minute intervals – though if you move sooner, that is ok too. The only rule is that you can ONLY take a business card from another person if, in the course of conversation, you have something tangible that you are going to send them after. On the screen is a list of questions that may help spark conversation that will lead to a resource sharing. Perhaps it is an introduction to someone they should meet. If you reach that place, you can take their card and write down what the next step will be and by when.

During these exchanges, it is ok if only one person takes a card – not every brief interaction will have both people walking away with something to share – but hopefully this is just the first in a series of interactions."

Sample questions you can have on display:

- *What is one area where you are looking to learn more for better performance at your current position?*
- *What is one area where your organization is challenged in the current environment?*
- *When you think about your future career aspirations, what is one area where you could learn more today to reach those aspirations tomorrow?*
- *If you were to seek mentorship, what skill set would you want that mentor to teach you?*

YOUR REAL TITLE

PURPOSE:

Any professional working in the association space can tell you that their title rarely reflects the full scope of their job. This exercise will address that in a light-hearted way.

SUPPLIES

Pens, Blank Ribbons

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size/scope

TIME NEEDED

10 minutes

EXECUTION:

Facilitator can use the following script:

"Everyone please take two business cards and stand up. Please find one person in the room to talk to, not someone sitting next to you. Please exchange business cards. We all know that titles are deceiving, and rarely account for the full scope of what someone does. Please take 1-2 minutes each, and one at a time, talk about what you really do at work. Your partner can then give you a new title, based on your description. Please then have the other person talk about their scope of work and receive a new title."

Wait about 4 minutes.

"Now please find another partner, give them your other business card so they can see your current title – DON'T tell them the new one you were just given and repeat the exercise."

Wait about 4 minutes

"Please head back to your table, where there are blank ribbons. Please choose one of the new titles you were given, write it on the ribbon, and attach it to your name badge."

BUSINESS CARD FROM SCRATCH

PURPOSE:

The business card, in its current form, is a vehicle that is meant to serve as an exchange of contact information for further connection, but was designed for the days of rolodexes. If we accept that we are going to keep the business card as a medium for the moment, how would we design what we put on it.

SUPPLIES

Business Card from Scratch

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

10 minutes

EXECUTION:

Facilitator guides the activity as follows:

"For a moment, let's not assume that business cards have to look like what they look like today. Let's think about why we have them – what is the win of business cards – and then see how we would design them to meet that win.

Find a partner – it can be someone sitting next to you. I am going to ask you a series of rapid fire questions and give you 60 seconds to discuss each. Capture on paper the conclusions that you determine:

(Give 60 seconds between each question)

- 1. If you are going to follow up with someone after a conference, what is the minimal and most impactful contact information you need to take away about them?*
- 2. If you are going to remember someone, what personal attributes/indicators would help you remember who they are?*
- 3. For people that you meet with whom you follow up, what do you wish you could briefly take away that would help you with that follow up?*
- 4. Is there anything that you have seen (or could imagine seeing) on a business card – even in its design – that would make it a more memorable, pleasing, effective tool for connection and future collaboration?*

With the answers to those four questions, now take a blank business card and design what you would like to have where on both sides. You can try a few iterations.

We will collect them and have the designs in the back so at the end of the session you can see what everyone designed as you leave."

BECOMING A CONNECTOR

PURPOSE:

Often we meet our closest colleagues not through direct networking, but through introductions. Those who introduce two colleagues – who connect, deepen their own social capital for having made the connection. This activity will encourage that connection to be made.

SUPPLIES

Participants to bring their own business card

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

6-8 minutes

EXECUTION:

This is ideally done at the start of a multi-day conference – one where there will be opportunities for participants to connect with a number of colleagues.

At the opening of the conference, the facilitator can use the following script:

“To open our time together, please take one business card and find a partner to work with – ideally someone you don’t yet know well.

Please each take two minutes and tell your partner who you are looking to meet at this event – not a specific person, but colleagues with what interests/knowledge/approaches/discipline affiliation/etc. As you hear your partner describe these things, jot down on their card the main points of what you hear.”

Wait until the 4 minutes are up.

“Now please take your partner’s business card and place it inside your badge. As you meet new people throughout the conference, if you come across someone who makes you think about the information written on your partners card, please get their information and make an introduction.

While random introductions can be, random, in this case – since everyone is going to help everyone else – the introduction you receive will come with a specific purpose of connection.”

CONNECTIONS OVER A BITE OR A SIP

TWO TICKETS

PURPOSE:

Offering to get another person a beverage when you are out together is a simple way to show appreciation that they are spending time with you. Organizations can set up a similar scenario without significant extra cost.

Note: This activity is predicated on a cash bar at a reception when an organization uses drink tickets.

SUPPLIES

Two different color drink tickets

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size audience

TIME NEEDED

No extra time needed

EXECUTION:

If each attendee usually gets one drink ticket, this time give them two. One color is a drink ticket as usual – they can get a drink with it. The other color can only be used to get someone else a drink. While there are some that may 'game' the system, this will encourage individuals to meet each other, offering to get them their next drink.

CRAFTY CHOICES

PURPOSE:

In today's world, there is ever increasing interest in specialized or craft products – particularly craft beverages. For this activity participants will meet by learning and tasting together with a craft experience of their choosing.

SUPPLIES

A craft selection of 3-4 different types of beverages, such as tea, coffee, beer, wine etc.

Small tasting cups

Someone who can speak with some level of expertise about each type of beverage. You can usually find someone coming to the event that would be able to do so or search the internet for the information.

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Ideally, there are not more than 10-15 people at each beverage station, so it is still an intimate experience. It can be run with more people, but there will be the need for more space, help pouring and passing out, and sound considerations so the craft expert can be heard

TIME NEEDED

At the event, tasting of 2-3 beverages may take 20-25 minutes.

EXECUTION:

Preparation:

Find a volunteer who has an interest or level of expertise with each type of beverage you will have represented. In conjunction with the volunteer, arrange to have 2-3 brands of the beverage present at the event. Note that in terms of quantity, this can be a tasting – so small pours for each participant are acceptable.

The day of the event set up the room so that each beverage has its own space in the room and invite the craft volunteer leaders to arrive early to set up and prepare anything they have to for their space. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to give each leader an additional volunteer to help with pouring and distribution.

At the event:

Invite all participants to choose a craft beverage station to join. The leader of each station has 20 minutes to share a bit of history of their beverage, their own passion for it, and lead their group through a tasting of 2-3 types. In between each taste, allow the participants to connect with one another, sharing their own experiences and passions.

A SESSION/ORGANIZATION TOAST

PURPOSE:

This could be used at the start of the session, or at the start of a conference. A toast is typically a moment of thanks, or a moment of expressing intent and good wishes. This is a fun way to have participants do the same as they start their time together.

SUPPLIES

Cup/glasses and sparkling liquid (champagne/wine/juice/even water!)

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Ideally not more than 20-30 people

TIME NEEDED

Depends how many toasts you take – each are potentially just a few second, so could be 5-15 minutes

EXECUTION:

As your event or session is starting have cups/champagne flutes at each setting with a pour of sparkling liquid available. As people come in ask for them to not yet drink from that glass.

Once everyone has arrived, the facilitator can prompt the following script:

“Before jumping in, I would like to invite anyone who so wishes to make a toast. Your toast can be an expression of gratitude for someone (or someones) else in the room. Your toast can be a wish for what you hope everyone will gain from our time together. Your toast can be a wish for the future for our organization or industry. Not everyone has to give one, but it will be nice to start with positive thoughts of gratitude and wishes.”

Allow for people to make their toasts – with a “Cheers” after each.

You can also seed one or two – asking one volunteer to toast the staff or volunteers who organized the event, or a toast to the future growth and success of the industry.

QUICK CONVERSATIONS

NETWORKING SPEED DATING

PURPOSE:

This is an approach that levels the playing field – it doesn't matter how well-connected a person is, whether they are a member, sponsor, or a first-timer. This allows a good deal of people to meet one another in a short time.

SUPPLIES

Enough space in the room to line the group up in two lines

Questions for the facilitator to use (examples below)

Microphone for the facilitator

IDEAL AUDIENCE

At least 20

If more than 100, will need to split into multiple lines and have leaders/volunteers helping with alternate lines

TIME NEEDED

At least 15 minutes, can go to 25/30 minutes

EXECUTION:

Divide the audience up into two, equal number lines that face each other. Have everyone shake hands so you can make sure everyone has a partner. If there is an odd number of people, join the last two people in one line with a partner across the aisle.

Explain you are going to ask a question that each pair will have a short amount of time (45-75 seconds) to both answer. When you ask for their attention back, the two lines should split apart so that there is an aisle between them and the front person on one line will go down the aisle to the end, shifting everyone else down one. You will then ask a different question, they will have time to answer, and then rotate again.

You should decide beforehand which questions you will ask. Following are sample questions you can use. Three categories you may want to use for questions are:

1. Light/Introductory Questions
2. Deeper/Get to Know you Questions
3. Organization/ Meeting Specific Questions

By moving through these categories you will build trust between the participants so they are more willing to share personal details with one another.

Some questions which are always good to add to the mix:

1. What is a moment of triumph or despair you have had in your life?
2. What will make this program successful for you today?
3. What is one key takeaway you are going to bring back from today?
4. What brings you joy?
5. If someone was thinking about coming to this meeting next year, what would you tell them?
6. If someone was thinking about joining our organization, what would you tell them?

Here are a few great resources for questions:

<https://funattic.com/76-fun-icebreaker-questions.htm>

<https://www.signupgenius.com/business/icebreaker-questions.cfm>

<https://blog.knowyourcompany.com/the-25-best-icebreaker-questions-for-team-building-at-work-cf5f48740240>

INTRODUCTION VISUALS

PURPOSE:

Each of us carry on our mobile devices images of our life – where we have been, what is important to us, what has struck us as unique or even humorous. Instead of facilitating networking introductions with words, this approach encourages the use of a personal visual prompt/aid.

SUPPLIES

None from the organization other than space and time – each participant should have their mobile device with them, so it is still an intimate experience. It can be run with more people, but there will be the need for more space, help pouring and passing out, and sound considerations so the craft expert can be heard

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Any size

TIME NEEDED

Time needed: 5-15 minutes depending on how many people are in attendance and how many people you want participants to meet

EXECUTION:

The facilitator can use/adapt the following language:

“Please take out your mobile device – the one where when you are in a moment you want to capture you snap a picture. Scroll through your pictures and look for ones that are memories or moments that resonate with who you are, or important parts of your life.”

(Pause for 60 seconds)

“In a moment I am going to ask you to get up and find someone you don’t know or you don’t know well – and they can’t be at the table where you are sitting now. As the two of you connect, please share with the person one picture on your phone and tell the story of the picture. Then switch roles and listen to someone else’s story.

About every 60-90 seconds I will ask you to find another person – and when you do, you have to show them a different picture – rather than the same as the last person you met. In this way you will make connections based on unique narratives in your life. Ready? Let’s begin.”

Ask them to find a new connection and invite them to rotate every 60-90 seconds.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY

PURPOSE:

Whether we are preparing for an interview, or simple meeting new people, conversations often start with “tell me about yourself.” This exercise will help participants refine their answer to this question.

SUPPLIES

None – just space for the activity. Ideally everyone seated at rounds of 8 or 10)

IDEAL AUDIENCE

Those looking for a job would be most helped, though this can be helpful for any audience

TIME NEEDED

15-20 minutes

EXECUTION:

The facilitator can use the following approach:

“In a moment I am going to ask you to get up and, by table, to divide up into two lines of 4 (if tables of 8)/ 5 (if tables of 10). Everyone should be in line and have a partner.

You will ask your partner, “So tell me a little about yourself.” You should answer that question assuming a professional context (whether that is an interview or a professional networking event where you just met). Answers should be kept to 60-90 seconds. After each person answers, their partner should give a quick round of feedback of what resonated and what fell flat, and then the partners should reverse roles.

We will then rotate the line so everyone is with a new partner from their table. The question will be asked again, and you will have a chance to refine your answer and vice versa. As time permits, we will do this a third time.

Hopefully, this allows you to meet three people and refine/sharpen your own personal-elevator pitch.”

Have them start, and then rotate them about every 5 minutes.



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