



Diversity: Activities for Cultivating Community

Name Games, Icebreakers, Energizers, Team-Building, and Closing Activities

These games offer skill-building opportunities that often result in more cohesive groups — critical to any successful service-learning experience. Not only do they help participants experience and process conflict, but they also foster communication, cooperation, and leadership in safe environments.

For each of these activities, this guide includes basic directions and list any materials needed, followed by ideas to make the experience more challenging and reflection questions to help tie the experience to the real world.

With any game, keep in mind issues of safety — both physical and emotional. People have different levels of comfort with physical touch and some are unable to participate in the more physical activities. NYLC’s philosophy is “challenge by choice” and it is important to let participants know that they may elect out of any activity that pushes them too far out of their comfort zone. Rarely do participants abuse this choice. If someone is opting out of too many activities, discreetly pull the participant aside and discuss what he or she is feeling.

The reflection questions for each activity are intended as suggestions to be adapted. Finding the right balance — making sure not to either under-reflect or over-reflect — can be difficult. Young people, in particular, will tune out if they feel overprocessed. Always be mindful of the “temperature” of the group and adjust accordingly.

Name Games

These games are designed to help group participants learn each other's names, usually through the use of mnemonic devices. As such, they also serve as icebreakers.

Name games do not necessarily need to be processed. Sometimes they can be used simply as a way to get to know names or as an activity to add energy to the group. Consider what activities follow the game in deciding whether to ask the reflection questions.

Movement Name Game

Hint: You may want to start the game with an active and creative motion, as the first one will set the tone for the group. If the first movement is an easy thumbs up, the energy of the activity will be low.

Procedure: Ask the group to stand in a circle. The first person says his or her name and adds a movement to go with it. The entire group then says "Hi, _____!" and repeats the motion. Continue around the circle until all participants have had a chance to say their name and add a movement.

Challenge: Speed up the game.

Reflection Questions: Who found this exercise easy? Why? What does the game illustrate about learning that might apply to working with younger children, elders, or those with special needs?

Adjective Name Game

Procedure: With the group sitting in a circle, ask participants to think of an adjective that describes an aspect of their personality. The adjective must begin with the same letter as their first name (e.g., elegant Elizabeth, vibrant Vickie, daredevil Dan). The facilitator begins by stating his or her name and an accompanying adjective. The person next to the facilitator then repeats the facilitator's adjective-name combination and adds his or her own. The names and adjectives accumulate as the group goes around the circle.

Challenge: Add a phrase to make the statement a complete sentence. For example, "Elegant Elizabeth wears her prom dress to school." The challenge can go further still, having everyone aim for alliteration such as, "Daredevil Dan danced with his dog until dawn."

Reflection Questions: Do you think it would have been easier or harder just to go around the circle and say people's names? Why? What does that tell us about learning that might apply to working with younger kids, elders, or those with special needs?

Two Truths and a Lie

Procedure: Have the group sit in a circle. One at a time, participants introduce themselves with two truths about themselves and one lie. The group then guesses which statement is a lie. The crazier the truths are, of course, the harder it is to discern which are the truths and which is the lie.

Reflection Question: What does this exercise teach us about making assumptions or "judging a book by its cover"? What are the ways that this exercise relates to upcoming service-learning projects?

Group Name Juggle

Materials: Tennis ball or other tossable items (Beanie Babies, rubber chicken, etc.)

Procedure: Have all participants stand in a circle, facing inward. The facilitator starts by saying his or her name, and then passes the ball, remembering who the recipient of the toss was. Each person gets the ball once only, and says his or her name loud enough for all to hear. The last person throws the ball back to the facilitator.

Challenge: Once everyone remembers the pattern of who tosses to whom, add more language like, “Here you go, _____!” or “Thank you, _____!” Add more tossable items, one at a time, until chaos ensues. See how many items the group can juggle.

Extra Challenge: Time the group and ask if they can improve their time. Have them discuss possible ways to cut down their time and continue trying. See whether they figure out how to maximize the efficiency by changing their positions in the circle so they are standing next to the person they are throwing to and receiving from.

Reflection Question: With whom might you use this game? For whom would it not work? Why? Do you see other applications for the game? How would you adapt it to a second language-learning group?

Name and...

Procedure: With the group sitting in a circle, the facilitator starts this game by establishing a question all participants will answer when they give their names. The questions can be very basic: What is your favorite food? If you were a reptile, what kind would you be? Everyone in turn tries to repeat what all the others said before them.

Challenge: Questions relevant to the upcoming service-learning experience can be used if the group has a basis for familiarity with the issue — for example, “What do you think is the worst pollution site in the park?”

Reflection Questions: If using the higher-level service-learning-specific questions, ask whether this activity was helpful to the experience to come.

Ice Breakers and Energizers

A bit more involved than name games, ice breakers and energizers work best among group members relatively new to each other. They are designed to help group members learn about each other and exercise skills relevant to service-learning projects. Most can be done in 10-15 minutes.

These activities do not always need to be processed. Sometimes they can be used simply as a game to get to know each other or as an activity to add energy to the group. Be aware of what activities precede and follow these activities when deciding whether to include the reflection questions.

Arrow Game

Materials: Flip chart page containing four rows of arrows facing different directions, including curly arrows.

Procedure: The group stands in rows in front of the flip chart. The facilitator stands next to the flip chart calling out arrow directions, reading arrows from left to right, like reading a text. As the facilitator reads out the direction, the participants point their hands and bodies in the same direction as the arrow.

Challenge: Repeat the exercise, and increase the pace.

Reflection: What was challenging in this exercise? Have you had similar experiences in a classroom setting? What did you do about it? What makes it hard to speak up?

Birthday Line-Up

Hint: This is a good activity before a team-building exercise in which the participants need to be split into groups. It results in a random line from which the participants can count off.

Procedure: The facilitator tells the group members to organize themselves into a line, from youngest to oldest, without talking. The challenge in this activity is for group members to communicate their birthdays without speaking.

Reflection Questions: What was the critical strategy used to make this work? How long did it take you to figure out this strategy? What does this teach us about the power of language? How much faster would the process have gone with language?

Rumpelstiltskin

Procedure: The group brainstorms categories of their favorite pastimes, simple categories such as sports fans, reality T.V. shows, movies, foods. Within each category, there should room for several subcategories. For example, within sports fans, you might have the subcategories of basketball fans, baseball fans, and non-sports fans. In this game, when the facilitator yells “Rumpelstiltskin!” participants choose a subcategory and discuss why they are drawn to that subcategory. This can also be done with something physical dividing the categories, so that participants are moving from one side of a “line” to another.

Challenge: This exercise can be targeted to the social issues underlying a service-learning project and can be used as a pre-reflection activity before the project, helping participants share their concerns or previous experiences. For example, the facilitator might say, “People who have worked with elders before in nursing homes, move to this side of the line. Those for whom this is a new experience, move to the other side of the line.” Then the facilitator might ask the groups to talk about their prior experiences or reasons they have had no prior experience.

Reflection Questions: What similarities did you find with your fellow group members? Did you find yourself repeatedly landing in the same category as someone else? How did this make you feel toward that person? How do we learn about people’s backgrounds and preferences in real life? Does this exercise make you think differently about question-posing?

Impulse Circle

Procedure: Stand in a circle, holding hands. The facilitator squeezes the hand of the person on his or her right, sending an impulse around the circle. See how quickly this can be accomplished.

Challenge: After a couple of times around with an impulse, add a second impulse. See if the group can keep the two going at once.

Reflection Questions: How difficult was this? Why is this exercise challenging? What were the challenges? What were the distractions? How could you minimize the challenge of this activity? Were you able to make the impulse move more quickly? If so, what strategies did you use and how were they decided on?

Balloon Bust

Materials: Balloons for each participant; string to tie balloons to participants' ankles.

Hint: Before you hand out the balloons, make sure that no one in your group has issues with balloons or the noise they make when they pop.

Procedure: Each participant blows up a balloon and ties it to his or her ankle with the string. When the facilitator gives the signal, the participants try to break one another's balloons by stepping on them. Participants are eliminated from the game when their balloon is broken. The last person with an unbroken balloon is the winner.

Reflection Questions: What were your dominant feelings in this activity? What are the strategies you used? Did success feel like success? Why or why not?

Not-So-Knot

Procedure: Have participants stand in a circle, shoulder-to-shoulder. Each person then crosses their arms, either right over left or left over right, and joins hands with the people on either side. Make one break in the circle so that there are two loose ends. With everyone's hands tightly held and arms crossed, the challenge is to untangle the group into one continuous line. If hand-holds are broken during the exercise, the group must start over. Participants are not allowed to go underneath their own arms, do forward flips, or twist off the wrists of their fellow participants!

Reflection Questions: How many of you had an intuitive sense of how to untangle this knot? Was it hard to get the group to go along with your idea? What worked in negotiating the proposed solutions? What skills were involved? Are these skills transferable to real-world situations?

1-2-3 Line-Up

Procedure: Ask the group to form a letter or geometric shape or symbol around the facilitator. The group members then need to remember their place in relation to the facilitator. The facilitator moves, and the group recreates the same shape and orientation, saying "1-2-3, line-up!" This exercise can be used at a later date to test the group's memory. It can also be a fun way to make sure all members of a group are accounted for after a field experience.

Reflection Questions: What are the keys to success in this activity? How might this be useful with a group of younger people?

Mirror

Procedure: Have the group divide into pairs and sit facing each other. As the partners face each other, they try to mirror body motions and facial gestures.

Challenge: See if the pairs can do it so carefully that an observer can't guess who's leading.

Reflection Questions: What can we learn from this activity about observation? When might it be important to have strong powers of observation in a service-learning activity?

Hog Call

Materials: Large space that allows for noise; blindfolds for all members of the group.

Procedure: Have group members line up in two parallel lines, facing each other. Each couple facing each other is a pair. Have all the pairs select a compound word like "signpost" or "stoplight." Each half of the pair chooses half the word as identification. Then, pair by pair, they shout out the compound words. Now blindfold all players, and have the participants move around the room, with their arms out, bent at the elbow, palms out. The challenge now is to have all the compound nouns find their other halves.

Reflection Questions: Without sight, what other senses did you rely on to find your partner? How well did this work? What other senses did you rely on more heavily? What does this teach us about physical limitations, like blindness?

All My Neighbors

Materials: Chairs, one fewer than the total number of participants, set in a circle facing inward.

Procedure: This is a "You're it!" game. One person stands in the middle of the circle, while everyone else sits in the chairs. The person who's "it" calls, "All my neighbors who..." then fills in the blank with such phrases as "are wearing black shoes"; "have been to Minnesota"; "know how to knit." Every participant who matches the description, including the person in the middle, must get up and then find a new chair quickly. The person left without a chair is the new "it." Participants cannot move to the chair on either side of the one they currently occupy.

Reflection Questions: What did it feel like to be the first out, or one of the two remaining? Did you feel this game had more to do with competition or cooperation? Why? How does this experience apply to real life?

Group Count

Hint: Be aware of physical limitations and make sure this is a challenge-by-choice activity. Participants can opt out of if they feel physically uncomfortable with the exercise.

Procedure: Ask participants to form a circle. The goal is to count to 10 by random individuals saying each number in sequence. The trick is that they must watch each other and silently figure out a strategy to accomplish the task. No words can be spoken outside of the numbers themselves. The person on either side of the one who just called a number may not call out the next number. If two people speak at the same time, the group must start again at 1.

Reflection Questions: How did you figure out a strategy to accomplish this? What skills were needed? How might this apply to other situations?

Lap Sit

Hint: Be aware of physical limitations and make sure this is a challenge-by-choice activity. Participants can opt out of if they feel physically uncomfortable with the exercise.

Procedure: Have everyone stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Then ask everyone to turn to their right. The facilitator can make the circle very tight by stepping into it. Once everyone is certain that the circle is perfectly round, on the count of three, everyone sits down on the lap of the person behind them. It is essential that everyone sits at the same time.

Challenge: If the group is feeling stable, try to make a right step all at once. At the end, each can give the person ahead a back rub.

Reflection Questions: Ask the group how many people they think made the largest group sit on record. (Answer: 1,306 New Zealanders in 1974.) What did it take for that to happen? How can this experience be applied to upcoming projects?

Stand Up

Procedure: Divide the group into partners. Partners sit in the group, back to back, with their knees bent and elbows linked. Then, they attempt to stand up, supporting and leaning on one another.

Challenge: Once the partners are successful, have them join with another pair and attempt the same with four people.

Reflection Questions: What did you need to figure out in order to be successful? How did you do this — by talking it through or by experimentation? What does this tell us about differences in learning styles? Can you imagine times when analyzing ahead of time is most effective? When might jumping in and experimenting be the better approach?

Community Game

Hint: Use this for people who have been sitting a long time and need to get energized.

Procedure: Ask participants to form groups of the number you call out, as quickly as possible. These groups should then hold hands, or link arms. Individuals who are unable to create a group of the selected number are out of the game. Continue calling out numbers until only two people remain. The remaining two are the winners.

Stand Up/Sit Down

Hint: Make the group aware that it is their choice whether they sit or stand and that they may choose to stay seated even if the answer is “yes” for them.

Procedure: Participants stand up or sit down in response to a series of questions, with standing up representing “yes” and sitting down meaning “no.” Start with simple questions and then lead to more challenging ones that relate to the service-learning project. For example, you might want to start with, “Who is left-handed?” or “Who has brown eyes?”

Challenge: This exercise can become one of self-disclosure, related to the project. For example, among people who feel safe with each other, you may ask more challenging questions like: “Who has felt discriminated against based on race?” or “Who has been discriminated against based on gender?”

Reflection Questions: Processing this exercise can be as simple as, “What did you learn from this exercise about the group? What did you learn about yourself?” Add depth by talking about minority/majority status in any answer to any question, and what it feels like to be the only one standing up to a question.

Tangled Knot (a more difficult version of “Not-So-Knot”)

Procedure: Form groups of 8-12 people, and have participants stand in circles. All the participants then extend their hands into the middle of the circle. Each person grasps the hand of two people across the circle. Make sure that no two people have simply grabbed each other’s hands. Without letting go of the hands, the group should unwind, freeing themselves of the knot and forming a circle. Grips may change and palms may pivot, but contact must be maintained.

Challenge: The initial grabbing of hands can be done with eyes closed.

Reflection Questions: What worked well in solving this problem? What didn’t work as well? What might this exercise be a metaphor for? Were there a few people who did most of the talking — if so, why?

Pair Drawing

Materials: Marker and paper for each participant, plus two flip chart pages that have been decorated with a design or picture. These decorated pages should be hidden or covered before the exercise begins.

Procedure: Have the participants form pairs and spread out across the room. Partners sit back-to-back, with one person facing the flip chart at the front of the room, and the other facing the opposite direction. Each pair needs a marker and two sheets of paper. The partner facing the front of the room will try to explain the drawing to the partner facing the back of the room **WITHOUT** naming the object specifically. The drawing partner will then try to replicate it based on the partner’s description. (For example, a sun might be described as a big orange ball with rays emanating from it.) The person drawing may not ask any questions of the partner giving direction. After completing the first drawing, the partners compare their drawing to the original. Then the partners switch as the facilitator changes the drawing on the flip chart, and they go through the exercise again.

Challenge: Do this with geometric shapes like a rectangle overlapping a circle which has a square in it. The sighted partner can not use the terms circle, square, etc.

Reflection Questions: How hard was this? Was one of you better at describing the drawing? Was one better at interpreting the words of the describer? What was critical in direction-giving? What does this teach us about language use?

Pruui (pronounced proo-ee)

Hint: You may want to use blindfolds as young people can have a hard time with the eyes-closed rule.

Procedure: Have everyone stand together with their eyes closed (or blindfolded). Quietly designate one person as the Prui, who will remain silent during the activity. Tell everyone that they will start walking about, and when they bump into someone, they are to shake the other person’s hand and ask, “Pruui?” The Prui will not answer, but everyone else should respond, “Pruui.” Participants keep walking blindly and asking, “Pruui?” to those they meet. When a “Pruui?” question is not answered, they know they’ve found the Prui, and they become a Prui as well, and may open their eyes, remaining silent when asked, “Pruui?” Eventually everyone in the group will be a silent Prui.

Reflection Questions: How frustrating was this? Did you find tactics that worked? If so, what were they? How might this be like a social issue? What then makes solving a social issue difficult? (You might provide the example of the “I’m one too” button campaign of the 1970s, when lesbians and gays were first coming out, and their buttons were meant to help quietly spread the word and provide comfort to other gays and lesbians coming out.)

Incorporations

Procedure: The goal of this activity is to become as large a “corporation” as possible. As the facilitator calls out categories, the participants group and regroup. The facilitator should assure participants not to worry if they’re not in the first group by the time the second group is called. They should just head for the second group. The directions begin simply. For example, the facilitator might say: “Get into groups of three!” or “Get into groups of five with everyone having at least one piece of clothing that is the same color!” Then the directions progress: “Find four other people who share the same last digit of your phone number!” or “Find four people who live in a state you’ve never visited.”

Reflection Questions: What did you learn about the group in this exercise? Did the activity get easier or harder as it progressed? Why? How might this be like a service-learning project environment?

Zoom

Procedure: The group stands in a circle. The facilitator starts by turning to the person on his or her right and saying, “Zoom!” That person repeats the word “Zoom!” and turns to the person on his or her right. Each person passes the word “Zoom!” around the circle as quickly as possible.

Challenge: Try speeding up. Then add variation of putting on the brakes by saying “Mooz!” and changing directions.

Reflection Questions: What does this remind you of? Do you consider yourself adaptable? Why or why not? How many of you have been in second language settings where you’ve completely misinterpreted or misunderstood someone? What was the result?

Who Started It?

Procedure: Have the group sit in a circle, and send one person away. The group then chooses a leader who will create hand movements (claps, snaps, jives, etc.) that the group will follow. When the person comes back from exile, he or she has three tries to guess who the lead is.

Reflection Questions: What strategy worked to discern who was starting the movements? How frustrating was it? What misled you? How is this like fitting into a new place, culture, language? What does it mean to read someone’s “tea leaves”? Why is this sort of behavior detrimental to a group?

Elbow Tag

Procedure: All participants pair up and link their inside elbows loosely. Select one pair to separate. One person is “it” and chases the other. The person who is not it, runs away. When he or she doesn’t feel like being chased anymore, the chasee can link elbows with a pair, forcing the partner on the other side of the pair off the link to become the new “it.” If the person who’s “it” catches the chasee, they switch roles.

Challenge: The game rules can change the limitation on the number of people linking elbows from two, up to eight.

Reflection Questions: What was most confusing about this game? Are there safety concerns if you were doing this with younger children? How might you help avoid catastrophe?

Team-Building Activities

More involved than initiative games, these exercises usually involve problem-solving and thus allow the talents of individual group members to shine while reinforcing the importance of cooperation, listening, and leadership skills.

Ideal Community Member/Community

Materials: Glue, roll of paper, magazines, magic markers for several groups.

Procedure: Divide the larger group into groups of four. Each group will draw a large outline of one of the members on roll paper so that they have the outline of a body to decorate. Have groups find images that represent their sense of an ideal community member. After the activity, each group reports out on the dominant characteristics they've identified as ideal attributes of a community member.

Reflection Questions: How did this work at the smaller group level? Were there any arguments about the attributes themselves? How different were your ideals? Why do you think this might be? How many of you feel these values are reinforced in your family? In your school? In your larger community? Which attributes are most valued?

Blind Square

Materials: Blindfolds for all and rope (50-75 feet).

Procedure: Start by having all participants blindfold themselves, then stand in a line, holding on to the rope. The participants are not to let go of the rope during the entire activity. Ask them to form a square.

Challenge: They can also make triangles, circle, etc.

Reflection Questions: What needed to happen for the goal to be accomplished? What were the most critical skills for the success of this experience? How might these skills relate to a service-learning experience? Was everyone involved in solving this initiative? What types of leadership were exhibited? Were people who were not talking exhibiting leadership?

Human Machine

Hint: Watch the groups closely to make sure that safe choices are being made.

Procedure: Break larger group into groups of three. Have each group devise a human machine to move 15-20 feet. Only two legs and two arms of the three people, however, may touch the ground at any time. Also, once a machine has covered the course, that team has a patent on their method of movement and no other group can duplicate it. Groups go one at a time.

Reflection Questions: What became the biggest pressures for the group? Did you anticipate this ahead of time? What might have helped? What worked? What would you do differently next time? Did anything make you uncomfortable?

Talk Back

Procedure: Have the group split into pairs. One of the people from each pair talks about himself or herself for three minutes while the other listens carefully. Then the roles within the pairs switch. After everyone has talked, each partner introduces his or her partner to the larger group, recounting as many details as possible.

Reflection Questions: What was hard about this exercise? Why was this hard? How might these listening skills help in a situation where you are interacting with people you don't know?

Plane Wreck

Materials: Several rolls of masking tape, many pieces of cardboard, blindfolds for the entire group.

Procedure: Divide the participants into groups of four. Give each group a roll of masking tape and pieces of cardboard. Explain to the groups that they have crashed on a tropical island. In the wreck, one person in each group has lost use of his or her hands. (Then tie that person's hands behind his or her back using a blindfold). The rest of them have lost their sight and ability to talk. Hand out blindfolds to all the others and have the groups remain silent, all but the one whose hands are tied. Using the cardboard and tape they are given, they are to create a vessel that will hold water. All must contribute to this endeavor, but only the sighted one may speak. Tell them they will have 10 minutes to solve this problem. After 10 minutes, test the vessels' efficacy with a cup of water.

Reflection Questions: How well did it work to have only one person able to speak in the group? How did you manage to involve all people in the solution? What kinds of accommodations did you have to make for those without sight? What did this experience remind you of? Did everyone follow the rules? Why or why not? How does this compare to when people don't follow rules in real life?

Group Obstacle Course

Materials: Rope and chairs set up in an obstacle course, with a goal at one end.

Procedure: Explain that the objective is to reach the goal as a group, moving together through the obstacle course. Have the group do a group hug, then tie a rope around them. Let the fun begin!

Reflection Questions: What was most challenging about this sort of teamwork? How clear were the roles at the start? What did it take to make the whole group successful?

Be the Machine

Materials: Machine names written on separate sheets of paper. (Machine types might include a copy machine, blender, pencil sharpener, hair dryer, washing machine, fax machine, etc.).

Procedure: Split the group into subgroups of three or four. Explain that the teams will need to become the machines that they have been given, and that others will guess what they are acting out.

Reflection Questions: What did you learn about the skills of your fellow group members in this exercise? How might knowing these things help a service-learning project?

Building Bridges

Materials: Lots of newspaper, several rolls of masking tape, and shoeboxes full of junk.

Procedure: Divide participants in teams of five. Tell them that their challenge is to build a bridge that will hold a shoebox full of junk, allowing the shoebox also to slide under it. Give the teams about 10 minutes.

Challenge: Tell them they will get extra credit if someone can sit on it without the bridge collapsing.

Reflection Questions: Did everyone in your group participate in a meaningful way? Was there any dissension in your group? Did the first plan work, or did you have to resort to other plans? Were these decisions to try other plans unified decisions? What grade would you give yourselves for teamwork? Why?

The Great Nail Challenge

Materials: Boards with a single nail hammered into each one, and twelve tall nails for each group. All nails must be the same size and have big heads.

Procedure: The goal is for each group to balance all twelve nails on the head of one nail. (This actually can be done! One nail lies on the head of the first; 10 are hanging off of this one, five to one side and five on the other, alternating. One nail goes on top of the contraption to hold the dangling nails in place.) After about 15 minutes, show the groups if they haven't met the challenge.

Reflection Questions: Did you figure out the challenge? What worked well? What didn't? How much time do you feel was wasted in your group? What strategy might have worked better? For those who didn't solve the problem, did you gain some group cohesion through the process anyway? Did the challenge seem impossible? If so, how did you feel when you saw the nails balanced?

Pass the Story

Procedure: Have the group sit in a circle. One member then offers the beginning to a story. It can be as basic as the infamous, "It was a dark and stormy night," or might be more useful if it's relevant to the moment. The next person adds on, with consideration for building plotline and characters. Continue around the circle at least once, until the story either gets too farfetched to have a logical ending or comes to a natural conclusion.

Reflection Questions: For how many of you was this relatively easy? For those of you for whom it was difficult, why was that the case? What attributes help this activity along? What doesn't work? Are these traits transferable to a service-learning project? If yes, how?

Balancing Act

Hint: Watch participants carefully for safety, and make sure they know they can opt out.

Procedure: Have groups break into pairs, facing one another. The partners then take one small step away from each other and lean forward with their arms outstretched until their palms meet. As each distance becomes comfortable, the pair take another small step backward.

Challenge: This can also be done with one partner leaning backward, while the other holds his or her hands out, palms up to catch the back of the person. Then he/she pushes the other back into balance. With this version of the activity, it's important that the catcher has one foot further back than the other, arms out, ready to catch the leaner.

Reflection Questions: What did it take for each partner to be effective at this? What other settings might these traits be appropriate for?

Team Balance

Materials: A gymnastics balance beam, fallen tree, or horizontal telephone pole long enough for the group to stand on.

Procedure: Divide the group in halves, with one on one end of the beam/ tree/pole and the other half facing them. The challenge is to have the two groups exchange places without touching the ground. The group has to begin again if someone touches the ground.

Reflection Questions: How many of you think you learn best from direct experience? How many of you would prefer to analyze the situation before plunging into it? Which approach worked best in this activity? Why? What were some key epiphanies?

Electric Fence

Materials: Rope or string tied between two trees or poles.

Hint: Watch the groups closely to make sure that safe choices are being made. Be aware of physical limitations of participants and make sure this is a challenge-by-choice activity that participants can opt out of if they feel physically uncomfortable. This can be a very uncomfortable activity for people with different body sizes.

Procedure: Tell everyone that they have to clear the “electric” fence without touching it, as a group, with their hands held. If either someone touches the fence or lets go of another’s hand, they have to begin over.

Reflection Questions: What made this activity challenging? What aspect of it required the most strategizing? How might this experience provide an analogy for what you experience during a service-learning project?

Ultimate

Materials: Frisbee, nerfball, football, or water balloon; a playing field, and two goals.

Hint: Watch the groups closely to make sure that safe choices are being made. Be aware of physical limitations of participants and make sure this is a challenge-by-choice activity that participants can opt out of if they feel physically uncomfortable. This can be a very uncomfortable activity for people with different body sizes.

Procedure: Many people have played Ultimate Frisbee, but the game takes on added dimensions when the Frisbee is instead a water balloon, for example. Tell new players that Ultimate is reminiscent of soccer: The objective is to get the “ball” past the goal. Divide the group into two teams. One team “kicks off” to the other team from the center of the field. Participants can run anywhere on the field but cannot run with the ball. When a player catches the ball, he or she must stop running. Then, they can only advance the ball by throwing it to a teammate. If a passed ball is dropped, thrown out of bounds, or intercepted, the other team immediately takes possession of the ball, and the direction of the play shifts to the opposite goal. Players must stand at least an arm’s length apart so that the defensive players do not prevent the offensive players from throwing. Intentional physical contact is not allowed.

Reflection Questions: How many people have prior field-sport experience? How many don’t? What was the most challenging aspect of this game? What skills did success rely upon? How might these skills be helpful to a service-learning project?

Minefield

Materials: Large area cluttered with tennis balls, boxes, or chairs; blindfolds.

Procedure: Divide group into pairs. Blindfold one partner from each pair, and have the sighted partners walk their blindfolded partners to one end of the minefield. The sighted partners go to the opposite side. The objective is for the blindfolded partner to make it across the minefield, relying on verbal guidance from the partner.

Reflection Questions: Did you try different verbal strategies in talking your blindfolded partner across the minefield? What was most challenging about the activity? What worked? How is this situation a metaphor for what might happen in a service-learning project? What skills are most important to success in this situation?

Closing Activities

These activities are the wrap-up version of icebreakers, designed to bring groups back together after a project and help them reflect on their experiences.

Rainstorm

Procedure: Have everyone sit in a circle on the floor. Explain that participants are to replicate any action the person on their left does. The facilitator starts the action, which is usually finger-snapping. One person after another snaps his or her fingers as the person to the left picks up the action, until it travels around the circle like a wave. Once the action has traveled all the way around the circle, add a motion to the wave, so that the sequence of actions is increasing in number for everyone. The action sequence might be: snapping fingers, rubbing hands together, slapping knees, stomping feet while slapping knees, slapping knees, rubbing hands together snapping fingers, resting hands on knees. The exercise ends when the facilitator grabs the hand of the person to his or her left, to signify that he or she has completed the sequence.

Reflection Questions: What skills does this exercise illustrate? Could you use this in working with younger children or with elders? Why is it a good activity for the end of the day?

Weaving the Web

Materials: A ball of yarn or string.

Procedure: Have participants stand or sit in a circle. The person holding the ball is the facilitator and makes a statement on a topic he or she has selected as a way to reflect on the day. These statements might pertain to qualities each person would like to offer the program, or one thing each learned through the experience.

Reflection Questions: Explain the symbolism of a spider web, a group's interconnections and interdependence. Ask what the strengths of a spider web might be. Are there weaknesses? How might these relate to group work?

Marker Race

Materials: Wide felt-tip markers and flip chart paper; tape indicating starting line.

Procedure: Divide the group into relay teams of at least four members each. Pose questions about the day. These might include: "What one word describes your favorite part of the day?" "What surprised you most about the experience?" Team members race one at a time up to the flip chart to record their answers.

Reflection Questions: Look for themes across the relay teams. Are there any patterns? What can be applied from today's experience to the next community issue?

Finale Clap

Procedure: On the count of three, have the group offer a single clap together, signifying the end of the experience and the beginning of an altered world due to the effects of their experience together.

Reflection Questions: How did the group interact and influence one another? What will be different now for group members as individuals? What will be different in the community? (Often it's nice to end the reflection questions with another group clap.)

Group Gift Box

Procedure: Participants stand in a circle to pass around an imaginary box. When the box comes to them, offer a gift to the box for the good of the group and take something out that they've gained from the group. (For example, a participant might take out the support he or she received from the others and offer good wishes for their future projects.)

Symbol Circle

Procedure: Participants pass around a symbolic item (drum, egg, branch, etc.) from their time together. When the participant has the symbol he or she shares feelings about the group's time together. The symbol does not need to go in a linear fashion around the group.

Question Line

Materials: Two rows of chairs facing each other. It helps to have a bell or gong to interrupt the chatter and to signify the time to switch seats.

Procedure: This activity can be used at the planning stage of a project or as a debriefing tool. Have people take seats so that everyone has a partner they're facing. Pose a group question that helps participants process the day, such as, "Describe one thing that surprised you about the project," or "Describe one thing you'd do differently on-site." Give the group three to five minutes for conversing, so that each member of each pair has the chance to explain his or her perspective. Then have one row stand up and move down a chair. Pose a new question.

One Word

Procedure: Have the group sit in circle. Ask everyone to offer a one-word reflection on their experience. (This can also be a pre-reflection technique before a service-learning project if framed as one word about their feelings pre-project.)

Reflection Questions: Does anyone feel they'd like to more completely explain their one word? Observe any similarities in words expressed.

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Team-Building Reflection

Write a reflection on what you learned during the team-building exercises. Keep in mind that your learning process involved not only what you learned about communication and building a stronger class community, but it is also about what you began to understand about yourself and others in the group.

Consider, before you begin writing, what you've learned about:

- Your ability to lead or follow to solve a problem as a group?
- Your own communication style?
- Your ability to interact with others you do not know very well?
- Your comfort level in taking physical and verbal risks with a group?
- Your physical space needs?
- Your psychological pressure point, limits, and boundaries?
- Your learning style?
- Your understanding of balancing your own personal needs with those of the group?

How did you recognize the group needs during the activity, challenge yourself, and alter your own behavior based on those needs?

How did you think you will be able to use this information in the class and upcoming projects?

All Lift materials are based in the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, available at www.nylc.org/standards.