

# BEGINNING THE WORK



## OBJECTIVES

- Acquaint participants with one another, the space, and the plan for the session or program
- Build trust in the group; set a positive and participatory tone for the training
  - By introducing yourself, you build trust; by inviting input for an agenda (how the group will spend its time together), you create a culture of agreement and cooperation
- Build awareness of how the identities and experiences each participant brings into the room carries different amounts and kinds of power, a fact that will need to be managed within the training and within the cooperative entrepreneurship process.



## TIME

- **10-15 minutes:** For a brief check-in (e.g. a familiar group is convening, workshop is a brief one-off training), focus on very simple introductions (e.g. Name, Identity) and a mixer activity to get the group talking.
- **90 minutes:** If able to dedicate more time, use more in-depth introductions and multiple warm up activities alongside more fully exploring the agenda. This kind of introductory session will better prepare a group for a series of trainings over the next days or weeks.



## PREPARATION

### SUPPLIES

- **Sign-in Sheet & Pen:** Make this available for participants to fill-in as they enter the room. Since folks will sometimes walk past or may hesitate to provide their information if they're not sure what it is for, explain what you will use their contact information for and pass it around once after the session begins.

### POSTERS

- **Agenda**
- **Introduction "How To"**
- **Objectives**

### ADAPTATIONS

- **Size:** If the group is larger than 20, participant introductions are best accomplished by breaking into two to three smaller groups. This allows folks to take more time with their introductions – to 'feel heard' and not rushed. This can also shorten the total time dedicated to introductions.
- **Note:** Whatever the group size, you will likely benefit from giving participants time guidelines for check-ins – it allows you to closely estimate the time needed according to the number of participants, and keeps you from asking folks to stop talking as they are making themselves vulnerable in the group for the first time (e.g. 3 minutes/person).
- **Audience:** You may want to create your own list of power and identity questions in "What's Your Analysis?" to demonstrate unique power dynamics among the group.

# SETTING THE TABLE

This initial section covers how to manage the gathering of participants in the room, addresses logistical issues, introduces the educator, and reviews the agenda for the training. The goal is to set both the “table” and “tone.”

1. **SET TONE:** As participants arrive, set a welcoming and accessible tone for the workshop by doing the following:
  - A. **GREET EVERYONE:** Orient folks as they gather in the space by inviting them to find a spot, indicate the location of any refreshments, and/or offer other instructions that could help them acclimate.
  - B. **TIME WARNINGS:** A few minutes ahead, remind folks of the start time to allow them to get settled and close out other conversations before you begin addressing the group.
  - C. **HOUSEKEEPING:** Once everyone is assembled, welcome them to the training and “conduct housekeeping” - this is a key accessibility moment for you to share the things that will empower and equip people to participate. For example - indicate where the nearest bathrooms and drinking water are located. Encourage people to stand, sit, or take breaks, as needed, etc. *Refer to the Accessibility Checklist in the Appendix for more information.*
2. **INTRODUCE YOURSELF:** Sharing more information about who you are and why you are facilitating the training is an important first step to build trust and create a culture of openness. Your introduction will provide a model for participants, and will also allow them time for preparing their own introductions. Use the following items as a guide for your introduction –
  - ♦ **NAME:** Your full name and/or what you would like to be called during the training. *e.g. “Alice Allium, you can all me Alice!”*
  - ♦ **HOME:** Where are you from? Where do you live? *e.g. I grew up in the Midwest – have lived in four Midwestern states, and currently live on the Southside of Minneapolis.*
  - ♦ **IDENTITY:** Share anything that you feel is important to reveal about who you are (not just demographic info!) - keeping in mind the importance of this first connection with the participants. This is a time to counter any assumptions or misinterpretations folks might have about you and to model identity openness to others.
    - ♦ Specifically, even if most people correctly assume the pronouns you use, it is helpful to model sharing pronouns - e.g. she/her.

The “**Identity**” piece of the introduction is essential to the facilitator introduction and to the success of the session. By sharing your identity, you invite openness to participants who may be shy or uncertain about articulating personal information that is important for them to share to fully and comfortably participate in the training.

- ♦ **NEEDS:** Share anything you might need in order to fully participate in the training - accessibility needs, scheduling issues, etc. - e.g. "I am more able to focus if I can stand during parts of the training." "I have to leave early."
- ♦ **MOTIVATION & GOALS:** Why are you here? What do you want to accomplish by being here? Make it personal! - e.g. "I started a cooperative with my friends without the help of any experts - it was an empowering and transformative experience that I hope more people can experience."

**Avoid Popcorn.** In order to both keep the introductions moving quickly and not create a rushed atmosphere, opt for introductions to happen round-robin style or via another established turn-taking order instead of "popcorn-style" (i.e. spontaneous introductions). Eliciting spontaneous responses, especially at the beginning of a workshop, often takes longer and has the potential to create silences which slow down and complicate conversational momentum. This can quickly change a comfortable atmosphere into an awkward one.

**Be Confident.** In your role as facilitator, make sure to steward the agenda, as it is your responsibility to make sure the content is effectively explored in a given timeframe. If someone suggests a change that you don't consider helpful or relevant, briefly explain your perspective and thinking attempt to work towards a shared understanding of training priorities. If you do choose to turn down a suggestion, get the group's general agreement for you to do so. A possible middle path is to add a suggested change or addition to the end.

**3. INTRODUCE PARTICIPANTS:** Ask for someone to begin a *go-around* of introductions using the "Name, Home, Identity, Needs, Motivation/Goals" format. This is the first chance for folks to begin getting comfortable addressing the larger group and talking with one another, so it is important to dedicate sufficient time to this task to ensure folks don't feel rushed and begin to contribute to the group dynamic.

- WRITE DOWN NAMES:** As participants introduce themselves, write down each person's name and one or two things they shared that will help you to recall them. Address folks by name, whenever possible, throughout the training.
- THANKS:** Closing out the introductions by sharing your appreciation for everyone's attendance and participation is a simple way to strengthen the peer-exchange dynamic.

**4. REVIEW OBJECTIVES & AGENDA:** Next, review the session objectives and agenda so all participants will know the suggested time frame and aim. Be sure to provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions about content or logistics, as well as suggest changes to the agenda.

- SUMMARIZE:** As you proceed through each agenda item, summarize its content and method (e.g. presentation, small group work, role play) in one to two sentences.
- CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** Ask participants if they need clarification on any of the agenda items.
- MAKE CHANGES:** Ask if anyone would like to add to or change the agenda, as written. Keep in mind your aims and responsibilities as steward of the agenda. Post the agenda and then use markers to record any changes. Be open to additional modifications as you move through the training, as the flow of discussion and timing may necessitate them.

# WARMING UP THE GROUP

After laying out the framework and content for the time the group will spend together, get people talking! Since this form of training depends a great deal on participant input and participation, it is important to get folks actively engaged as soon as possible.

- 1. LEAD A WARM-UP MIXER:** This activity is intended to continue to reinforce a positive conversational tone. If most participants are physically able, incorporating movement into the activity is a great option, as it keeps participants from hunkering down in their seats in “classroom mode.” There are loads of mixer activities available online or in facilitation books - you can also create your own. Choose a few that you especially enjoy and use them interchangeably. You can easily modify this basic mixer by changing the prompt(s).

## A. CONVERSATION CLOCK

- I. Provide Directions:** Instruct the group to form the “clock” - having any less mobile folks sit in the outer circle, as the inner circle will be the one to rotate.
- II. Frame:** Explain that the group will be responding to one or more prompts and sharing their answer with the person across from them in thirty seconds or less. Share that you will keep time, announce when the inner circle needs to rotate, and if/when the prompt changes. Share that if a person feels uncomfortable responding, they can skip a prompt.
- III. Prompt:** Use some of the following or create your own prompts that can be answerable in no more than a few sentences and should be one that you think everyone would feel comfortable answering in front of all those present. Questions can range from the mundane to the profound.
  - » What do you usually do on Tuesdays?
  - » What motivates you?
  - » What do you know about cooperation?
  - » What did you want to be “when you grew up?”
- IV. Keep Time:** Time each thirty second segment and warn people when there are five seconds left. Depending on your

**Be Aware of Different Abilities.** A mixer will likely involve standing and movement, which - while valuable for those who are able - may be too physically demanding, uncomfortable, or impossible for some. Assure participants they can remain in one place. Remind participants of the importance to connect with everyone both mobile and less mobile.

scheduling needs, it may be necessary to end the activity before the clock has rotated fully.

**V. Wrapping It Up:** When time has elapsed or after the clock has fully rotated, reconvene the group and ask a few questions:

- » Did you learn anything surprising from the mixer?
- » What did you notice about who is here, based on the responses you heard?
- » Were there any themes or patterns in responses?
- » Were any assumptions made in some of the questions asked?

**2. CHECK “TEMPERATURE” OF GROUP:** If the group seems “warm,” close out the activity and move into the next session. If you don’t think the group is “warm,” ask a few questions of the group or plan another round of the mixer activity or use a different warm-up activity or prompt. You can also ask for group suggestions for a fun, short activity that they enjoy using in group spaces. Always keep in mind that the differences in abilities and your time management responsibilities.

#### Places to find other Mixers & Facilitation Games:

- **Seeds for Change**  
[seedsforchange.org.uk/resources](http://seedsforchange.org.uk/resources)
- **NASCO**  
[nasco.coop/resources/facilitation-games](http://nasco.coop/resources/facilitation-games)
- **Volunteer Power**  
[volunteerpower.com/resources/icebreaker.asp](http://volunteerpower.com/resources/icebreaker.asp)
- **Gamestorming (book)**  
[gamestorming.org](http://gamestorming.org)

# GETTING IN LINE

Via a movement activity, the group will explore how power is distributed among participants based on identity and background. Having an analysis of how power is distributed inequitably in society is foundational for working in groups to build democratic and equitable enterprises.

- 1. FRAME:** Share that the group will play a movement game to conceptualize how power is distributed among people of different experiences and identities. It is imperative that we understand how power is structured in society so we can manage it in the groups that we create.
- 2. FORM A LINE:** Guide participants in forming a straight line, side-by-side, facing the same way, in the middle of the space.
- 3. PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONS:** Share how you will read a list of characteristics alongside an instruction to move either forward or backward a number of feet. Participants are to move (however they are able) as directed, if the characteristics named lines up with the person they are role playing.
  - » The activity can also be played using blocks or toy cars moved on a table or the ground, if movement is difficult.
- 4. READ IDENTITY DESCRIPTIONS ALOUD:** Read each of the following, pausing in between and asking people to look around and assess their orientation to others throughout the activity.
  - If you make less than 40k a year, move one foot backward.
  - If you make more than 40k a year, move one foot forward.
  - If you identify as a woman female, move one foot backward.
  - If you identify as trans\* or gender non-conforming, move one foot backward.
  - If you are white, move one foot forward.
  - If you are a Person of Color, move one foot backward.
  - If you are employed, move one foot forward.
  - If you are looking for work, move one foot backward.
  - If you are under 21 years old or over 60, move one foot backward.

**Creating a Consenting Space.** While the activity works best with as many people participating as possible, it is important your training spaces are “consenting.” In this activity, that means allowing for individuals to opt out of all or part of the activity. Discussing why folks might opt in or out could be a good conversation, if the group is brave and equipped enough.

- 5. ASK:** Any observations or reflections on the activity or where you ended up in relation to other people in your group?

- 6. REFRAME THE ACTIVITY:** Share that these differences in power are always at play in our conversations - even when we are working together towards a shared goal (i.e. in democratic institutions like cooperatives). Part of our work in building cooperatives together is intended to equitably distribute power, but that will only happen if we do the work with awareness and intention.

