

Activity or Common Interest Groups – Facilitation Tips



Groups that gather people around a common interest or activity bring new energy and new relationships! Activity groups can draw in people who never imagined themselves in a small group. For leaders, it's a great way to spend time doing something you enjoy and meet others who enjoy the same thing! This tip sheet was created for a range of groups – some tips may apply to your group more than others. Whatever the focus, activity or common interest groups are a great way to connect people!

Community Building

- People sign up without realizing that the heart of small groups is connecting. Share the value of getting to know one another and connecting with new people.
- Think strategically about ways to link people and get them talking with one another. Ideas: opening questions tied to the devotions; ice-breakers around the room to use while working on a project; questions to talk about while traveling, walking or cooking in pairs, etc.
- Encourage people to rotate where they sit (walk) to get to know others. This is especially important to emphasize if friends have joined the group together.
- Keep your own expectations for the relationships low and in-check. It's ok if group members simply get to know new names and faces.

Devotions & Prayer

- Most activity groups have found *Incarnation Connects* to work well. It's been used at a break time or at the beginning, shaping the first section of the time together.
- You can also create a devotion that matches the theme of the group's gathering.
- You may have group members that have never taken part in a devotion or prayer before! Leaders have said that *Incarnation Connects* is a good resource because it's "not intimidating", "allows for different levels of talkativeness" and it is "ready to go."
- This part of the group is what makes it something people wouldn't find in a community center! It could be a stepping-stone in their faith journey!

Planning the Group Time

- Activity group members tend to want to dive in. It may be better to have an informal start with a more structured break time along the way.
- Consider asking other group members to talk about a project or an area where they have expertise, if appropriate. It builds ownership and lightens your workload.
- You may not be able to have eye contact while the group is doing an activity. Continue to facilitate, ask questions, and share information without their visual cues.
- You may not get as much time to work on your own project as you like (or take part in the activity at your normal pace), at least in the beginning. Keep your own expectations low!
- Encourage informal conversations while doing the activity.

- Consider working on a “group project” together for one gathering, if the group involves individual projects.

Logistics

- Sending reminder emails is extremely helpful! This is a great role for another group member to share with you. It will also prompt group members to let you know if they cannot attend.
- Set dates ahead of time, if you can.
- If you are traveling to another location, give group members your cell phone number and ask for their cell phone numbers.
- Take the time to create a covenant. It can cover details that will make your group run smoother and prepare for things that may not come up in another small group.
- Think about what to do when people are not on-time. Do you start? Do you wait? Can you have them call you or call them?
- To keep treats from spilling on projects or equipment, consider placing the treats in a different location or taking an established break.
- Try to setup the room or arrive at the location 10 minutes before the “official” start of the group. Know that some of the group time will be taken by logistics, setup, and people movement. And, those who arrive early can enjoy connecting with you.
- Ask for assistance with different logistical roles. It builds ownership.

Setting the Stage

- There are lots of “moving parts,” so it helps to have a co-leader to take on different roles and generate conversation.
- Explain the format of the group and the value of connecting and doing devotions/prayer. Sometimes the devotion or opening questions feel forced in the early sessions, but once the format is established the group benefits from the structure.
- A common challenge is attendance. Talk about the value of taking time for something they enjoy and the importance of building relationships.
- If you plan to ask others to do a task, do devotions, read aloud, or pray, ask them off-line or ask for volunteers so that they are not forced into something uncomfortable or unexpected.
- Anticipate the variety in abilities and skills. Think of creative ways to work with the variety.

Enjoy, Enjoy, Enjoy!

You are giving others space to do something they enjoy
and connecting people who would have never met!