

## **Fresh Facilitation Tips**

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How many of you veteran facilitators out there have your 'go to' activities, games or strategies that work for you every time you use them? Me too! How many of you, despite that fact, wish you had one or two new strategies to keep things fresh for both your participants and for you? Me too again!



Below are some sure-fire activities I've used in the past, and some are ideas that were generated when Brit Campese, Principal of Vision Driven Consulting, facilitated a session at a [Sandbox Collective](#) networking and professional development gathering in Philadelphia, PA. Each month the Sandbox convenes youth development professionals. The topics for each gathering change based on input from the attendees; sessions are sometimes facilitated

or co-facilitated by an attendee, the goal being to serve as a laboratory for youth development professionals to test ideas or activities and to share resources and information.

What I love about the activities is that they encourage creativity with a big "C" and risk-taking with small "r." Some activities are purely fun, whereas others can be used as tools to elicit leadership, teamwork, playfulness or critical thinking. Choose based on what you're trying to achieve; modify them and make them your own.

### **1. The Big Wind Blows**

- a. Start by having everyone stand in a circle.
- b. One person goes into the middle (have participants close the space in the circle where that person was).
- c. The person in the middle says: The Big Wind Blows for everyone who.... and then they fill in the last part of the sentence with something about him/herself. It could be: Is the oldest child in their family; ate ice cream for dinner; speaks more than one language, is wearing red. It MUST pertain to the person in the middle personally. If they are NOT wearing red or are NOT the oldest child in their family, they need to choose something else.
- d. If the statement applies to anyone in the circle, they have to move to another place in the circle and get there before the person in the center tries to get into an open space. This will leave one person left in the middle again.

- e. They then start the cycle again by stating: “The Big Wind Blows for...” (and then finish the sentence).
- f. Again, everyone moves in the circle and the person in the middle tries to find a spot.

## **2. VisualsSpeak**

[VisualsSpeak](#) is an organization that specializes in visual approaches to facilitation. One of their products is a deck of cards made up of various images, some of them photos, others drawn or water color images and used to elicit deeper thinking than our typical, surface level, “off the cuff” or “preprogrammed” responses to questions. I find they work best when asking an individual or group to answer/respond to a critical question or prompt. Here’s how I would use them in a session:

- a) Lay out the VisualsSpeak cards on a table (image facing up)
- b) Have people to envision a goal they or their organization are trying to achieve,
- c) Get the group back together, and have them discuss (either with a partner or in the whole group) why they selected their image.

## **3. Dance!**

A ritual that I learned while a camp counselor years ago which I try to introduce and incorporate into as many settings as possible is dancing. At this camp, we would all gather together before lunch and dinner outside the ‘mess hall’ and dance to 2-3 songs as a community before having a meal together. Give it a try before the start of a staff meeting, when facilitating a day-long or multi-day retreat. Ask people to teach the newest or their favorite line or social dance!

## **4. Human knot**

This game works best towards the middle or end of time spent with a group. I would not recommend trying it on the first session nor with a group of teens [and especially middle schoolers] who don’t know each other well, or where there are mixed genders. The game entails handholding, which, for some people may not be a big deal, but for the groups I just mentioned, is potentially traumatizing. I would introduce it towards the middle or at the end of the groups’ time together.

- a. Instruct everyone to stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle.
- b. Have them put one hand in and reach across the circle and take someone’s hand.
- c. Then, have them put their other hand in and reach across the circle and take someone ELSE’s hand. They should NOT take the hand of the same person or the person next to them.
- d. Then, tell them they have to get themselves out of the knot, back into a circle.
- e. Variations: assign one person the leader to give directions, have the group work without talking, or time them!

For more fresh ideas, **consider integrating theater, poetry, dance or movement, video or song into your sessions.** An idea that **integrates both video and making/creating:** Create sculptures from home recyclables! Ask participants to bring in a few (clean) items from their recycling bin.

Have them work together to build something that represents a fresh start for the program year, or something that represents the successes they've had throughout year. If you need some inspiration for this one, check out [Cains Arcade](#). It's a video about a 9-year-old boy and how he makes his very own arcade (out of cardboard!)

With the start of the new school year just ahead of us, now is a good time to go through your tool box and consider refreshing some of your go-to facilitation games and activities with one or two new ideas. Why not invite a colleague to swap with you and each of you try the other's favorite game? Maybe there's one here you'd like to try? Good luck!