

Identity Circles: A Foundation for Community

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

BWBR Description: *Bonner Curriculum workshop helps participants reflect on and share their identity, as an introductory community-building and diversity activity.*

Overview: This workshop guides participants through an activity called Identity Circles in which individuals reflect on and share qualities they believe make them who they are. It is an excellent activity to use with a group of individuals (students or staff) to introduce them to thinking more deeply about the issues of diversity (within themselves and their community). This activity can help people build skills of self-reflection, communication, trust, and appreciation for diversity. Identity Circles are an ideal activity for personal exploration to build a foundation for diversity awareness, but it is simple and open enough to be used repeatedly.

Category: Self-efficacy, personal exploration; reflection; interpersonal competencies, diversity

Level: Suitable for all levels (introductory to advanced)

Recommended Bonner Sequence: This training is recommended for Bonner students during the first year (such as during Orientation, a Class Meeting, or a Mid-Year Retreat). It could be helpful as part of the enrichment activities for campuses that have



1st year

selected reflection/personal exploration as an intention/baseline for freshmen year. It may also be done with students in many classes, perhaps as part of a Retreat. A bit more than an hour is best, depending on the number of people.

Learning Outcomes:

- Guide participants through an activity that give each person a chance to share some important aspects of his or her identity.
- Learn more about the kinds of diversity represented by members of the program or campus, while understanding that different people see different things as important.
- Provide a safe, respectful space to explore issues of self-reflection and identity; this activity can works especially well as a precursor for more challenging forms of self-reflection or community building.

Materials:

- Identity Circle blank sheets (see attachment) or blank sheets of paper
- Index cards or post-its
- Everyone should have something to write with

How to Prepare:

Prepare yourself to facilitate by reviewing the guide and becoming comfortable with the facilitation process. You may want to create your own identity circle in advance, so that you prepare to set a tone and can focus on the group during the activity.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

In this guide, you will find steps for taking a group of participants through the Identity Circles activity, which basically involves self-reflection, sharing, and discussion. While we recommend that you set aside time and space (like a special meeting) for this activity, it could also be integrated into a standing meeting structure (such as a Class Meeting), provided there is sufficient time. The activity should not be rushed.

If your purpose is to train-the-trainers, you may want to make that explicit during your session. You can still follow the outlined process, but also have a time for introduction, questions, and closure with the group, so that they walk away feeling prepared to replicate the experience but also have successfully completed the experience and can anticipate what is involved for participants.

The one-hour outline has the following parts. Larger cohorts will require more time for sharing.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) Brief warm up | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Introduce the activity | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 3) Allow group to do identity circles privately | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 4) Sharing of Identity Circles | suggested time 30 minutes |
| 5) Engage participants in discussion | suggested time 10 minutes |

OUTLINE

Part 1) Brief Warm Up (in pairs to save time)

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Within the small or large group, have everyone find a partner that they don't know well. Ask pairs to take turns explaining the origin of his/her full name ~ where it comes from, what meaning or significance the name has, if any. For instance, "My name is Heather Field, heather like the flower because my parents were really into nature." or "My last name is Johnson, the name that was given to my family by the slave owners in Georgia. We don't know what our African name was before that. My first name Abe is the name of my great-grandfather."

As facilitator ask a few pairs to share with the group what they learned. You can also debrief the exercise, eliciting responses from the group or using the following points:

- This warm up provides a simple introduction to this workshop and a chance for people to articulate things that others may not have known about them.
- Even a name often has different significance to people and it can bring up questions of origin, nationality, family influences, histories, ethnicity, race.
- The warm-up was to get us thinking about how unique we each are and to share what makes us who we are within the community.

Part 2) Introduce the activity

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Here is an opportunity for you to get the workshop going and begin introducing the exercise. You may want to introduce yourself more fully to set a stage of sharing. For instance, you can share your own name and its origins and a few things about yourself. Set an appropriate tone, using your own style. The tone should be between casual and semi-serious (probably not too lighthearted nor somber and scary).

Explain the purposes of this workshop:

This is an opportunity for participants to engage in some structured reflection and sharing about people's identities. This activity should be interesting and useful for us as a group and also as an activity we can take back and use with our teams.

You may want to review the outcomes of the workshop:

- Self-reflection, sharing, and the chance to articulate things that are important to us individually
- Explore in more depth what is the "diversity" in this group
- Experience a safe, respectful space for exploration, dialogue, learning about others. You may want to set out some ground rules or briefly have the group offer ground rules for the session related to this point. (A ground rule is a stated expectation that the group members agree to, and that the facilitator agrees to hold participants accountable for).

Explain briefly the structure of the workshop:

- This workshop is designed for a small group of 4-10. Most of the activity calls for self-reflection and sharing. The facilitator will have the dual responsibilities of modeling the exercises and providing structure and movement through the workshop.
- If you are doing the activity with a larger group (e.g. at a retreat), create subgroups in advance and POST THESE VISIBLY SO PEOPLE CAN MOVE INTO THEM. Instruct people to move into teams and have a designated FACILITATOR for each one.

Part 3) Reflect and do identity circles

Suggested time: 30 minutes

The group (or each group) should have a private or semi-private space where they can sit in chairs in a circle. The facilitator will explain the exercise and also go first, modeling a level of sharing and tone. For 30 minutes, the group

should not be larger than about 8. You will need more time for more sharing; adjust the number of questions and time accordingly.

Facilitators should:

- Explain the exercise. Pass out the attached identity circles handout or blank paper while doing so. The visual aid will help people follow the steps of the activity.
- Explain that everyone should draw a circle and write his/her name in the middle.
- Then draw eight “spokes” out from the middle circle.
- On each of their spokes, participants will write something that is important to your identity. For example, it can be a word, like “Asian” or “gay” or a phrase like “parents divorced when I was 5” or “Huge Red Sox Fan” or “love being with friends and family.” *Everyone should be prepared to share most/all of the qualities.*
- Explain that each person makes a choice as to what he/she shares.
- Give people 5 minutes or so to fill in the spokes.

Then, guide the group through sharing:

When time is up, give each person roughly 3-5 minutes to share their identity circle with the group. The FACILITATOR GOES FIRST and sets the tone for sharing. This works best if the FACILITATOR demonstrates trust, humor, and meaningful sharing. You can use the following guide for sharing:

- Share the thing you are most proud of or happy about right now.
- Share the thing that is most controversial for you or that you are struggling with right now.
- Share the thing that you put down that surprised you.
- Share 2-3 others things you want the group to know about you.
- Share the thing that you often feel stereotyped by.

Give everyone a chance to share, without discussion. People may become emotional during presentations (you may observe sadness, happiness, anger, etc.). If they do, don't get anxious about it. Generally, though, this exercise is fairly even. Set a respectful tone of listening and reflection. It is okay for people to expand on an item on their circle. However, you should not allow for people to interrupt each other or go back-and-forth.

Part 4) Team discussion

Suggested time: 40 minutes

After each person has spoken, you can engage the team into dialogue. Some questions to use are:

- What did you think of the exercise?
- Was anybody surprised by any of the words they chose for themselves? How did this exercise challenge stereotypes?
- Are there words that your friends or family might use that you did not use? Why is it that others see us differently that we see ourselves?
- Is race/ethnicity a big factor in identity circles for members of this group? Why or Why not? How about gender? Why or why not? How about sexual orientation? Age? Family upbringing? What did people notice as important common factors?
- What are some of the other ways we differ from each other? What ways are we similar? What can we learn from our differences and similarities?
- Why is learning about each other in this way important to our team/group, Bonner community, organization, or project?

Part 5): (For processing or large groups only) Discussion and Wrap Up

Suggested time: 10 minutes

You can do a few things, in whatever order facilitators deem important:

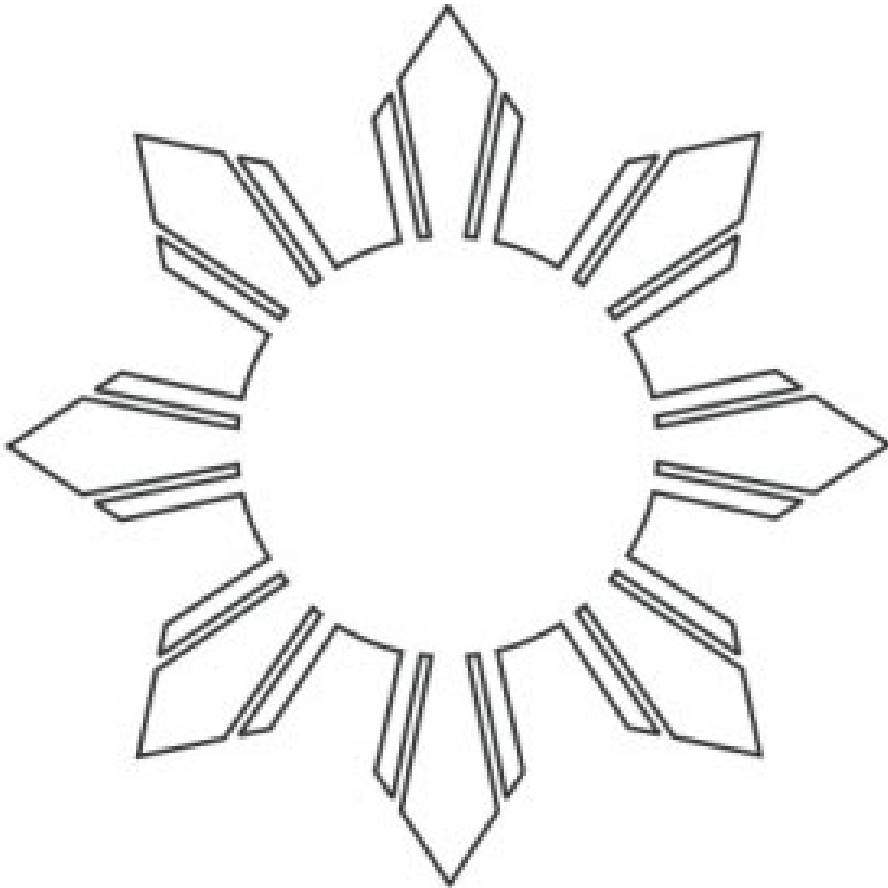
Open the large group for discussion, perhaps by using a few questions or asking for comments about the exercises. For example, you can ask:

- Was it easy or hard to do this? Why?
- Do people, over the course of working together, share things about themselves they want people to know? Why and how? What, if anything, seems to prevent this kind of sharing from happening?
- How can we take this exercise and/or information with us as we work together? How does this exercise lay the groundwork for other things?

Then, you can pass out blank index cards to the large group and ask everyone to answer two questions on the card. **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE CARD.** On one side, write what you learned during this exercise. On the other, write what will you strive to do as a result of this exercise. Facilitators collect cards and read some out, asking for comments.

Wrap Up:

Bring things to a conclusion. Figure out how you want participants to end the workshop. Do evaluations and/or suggest next steps.



Identity Circle

Put your name in the middle and identify 1 quality or trait for each of the 8 spokes. Each should represent some facet of your identity that is important to you and that you believe shapes who you are.