



ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

LEADERSHIP & DIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT

# DEI ACTIVITIES: A GUIDE FOR RETREATS

2018

DIVERSITY

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EQUITY

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INCLUSION

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**ORGANIZATIONAL  
LEARNING**

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*Thank you to all who helped contribute to the creation of this guide!*

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# General Tips for Successful Retreat Activities

## CREATE SHARED GUIDELINES

At the onset of your retreat, create guidelines or agreements together as a team. List the commitments the group makes as to how they will engage with one another throughout the day. Examples include:

- Actively listen to understand.
- Be objective; discuss the issue, not the people.
- Don't interrupt. Let team members finish by giving them ample time to complete their thoughts.
- Encourage everyone's contribution, while allowing anyone who wants to contribute through their listening or silent presence to do so.
- Encourage team members to stretch themselves; take manageable risks that push your comfort zone without compromising your personal boundaries.
- As you contribute your thinking, encourage the use of "I" statements. This mitigates the tendency to assume, generalize, or speak for others.
- Discuss confidentiality early on.
- Connect diverse perspectives. Encourage team members to link and connect ideas by listening carefully to one another and building on each other's contributions.

## ENCOURAGE INNOVATION BY ANTICIPATING GROUPTHINK

Groupthink occurs when the desire for consensus leads to decisions that may not reflect the most accurate, functional, or creative outcome. If you find your team stuck in groupthink, with all members sharing the same perspective, help spark innovation by challenging the group to continue the conversation for an additional five minutes during which they cannot say anything that echoes the shared opinion. Try to consider as many different perspectives, options, or outcomes as possible.

## USE CHECK-INS TO OBTAIN GROUP FEEDBACK

Throughout the day, utilize a quick, non-threatening method of gathering the entire group's feedback; this is particularly useful when the team members may feel pressured to answer a certain way. Ask the group to close their eyes, raise their hand, and indicate a thumb up if they are comfortable and wish to continue with the conversation/activity, thumb to the side if they are indifferent, or a thumb down if they are uncomfortable or don't wish to continue with the conversation/activity. Make sure you pay attention to the physical dexterity of the group; an easy adaptation is having team members hold up different color sticky notes or pieces of paper that represent each opinion.



# ICEBREAKERS & ACTIVITIES FOR INTRODUCTIONS





# Icebreakers & Activities for Introductions

## THE FIVE MINUTE POEM

This activity has team members spend five minutes writing a simple four-line poem about where they are from. The poems can be shared as a large group or in pairs, and can be used as a simple means of introduction or as a prompt for a larger discussion around how where we come from impacts us in the workplace.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Reflect on where they each come from and how their “homes” – in all their myriad forms – influence their workplace experience.
- ❖ Recognize and respect that every team member brings a unique perspective to the table.

Each team member should write four stanzas, each containing four lines. Each line will begin with “I am from...” and reference the following prompts:

**First Stanza:** Familiar sights, sounds, or smells of your neighborhood

**Second Stanza:** Familiar foods

**Third Stanza:** Family sayings

**Fourth Stanza:** Friends and those that have influenced your life

Example:

**I am from** cars honking in the streets,  
traffic jams,  
the smell of hot city grime baked in the sun,  
laughter on the front stoop.

**I am from** mouth-watering vinegar pie,  
savory turkey and dressing,  
chicken and dumplings,  
thin steak and thick potatoes.

**I am from** “Daddy, read to me,”  
“If you can’t say something nice,  
don’t say anything at all,” and  
“Don’t talk back to me young lady!”

**I am from** the watchful eyes of my mother and father,  
the unwashable perfumed hugs of  
Grandma Ann and Grandma Lola,  
and the bruises from my little brother.

Activity Template in Appendix



## Icebreakers & Activities for Introductions

### NAME STORY

In this activity, team members will share their first name and any history or story that name might represent for them, such as: the meaning of their name, who they were named for, why they were given that name, or why they chose the name for themselves.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Remember one another's name by forming personal connections, especially for large teams or groups that are being introduced for the first time.
- ❖ Get a sense of the variety of cultures and histories of their colleagues.

Be sure to use several broad prompts so that team members can choose the information they feel comfortable disclosing. Examples include:

- Who are you named after and why?
- Where does your name originate from?
- Who named you? Who chose the spelling of your name?
- Does your name hold any special meaning for you or your family?
- Do you have any memories or stories about your name?
- If this is a name you chose for yourself, why did you choose this name in particular?



## Icebreakers & Activities for Introductions

### RESONATING IMAGE

This activity leverages the power of imagery to allow team members an opportunity for self-reflection. After a question or prompt is shared with the group, individuals will browse a collection of photos and select one image that resonates with them and best captures their thoughts. Once all team members have selected their image, they can be shared and discussed in pairs or as a larger group.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Reflect on topics of importance.
- ❖ Build a sense of connection among team members.

Begin by creating a “deck” of images; these pictures can be of anything, but should include a variety of subjects, topics, or styles. While you can purchase some image decks, it’s easy and inexpensive to build your own from sites that offer free stock images, like [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) or [freenaturestock.com](https://freenaturestock.com). A ratio of about five cards per person is recommended so there are ample options to choose from. After creating and printing your “deck”, lay each picture out across several tables or hang them around the room. The pictures can be arranged in any order, but should not be stacked.

Once the activity is prepared, ask the team to reflect on a particular prompt, such as:

- What was your greatest success in the past year?
- Which image best articulates your leadership style?
- What is one thing you would like to work on in the year to come?

Encourage the group to view the images from both a literal and figurative lens. After each team member has selected their photo, reconvene in pairs or as a larger group to share why they chose their particular image. Debrief using questions like:

- What do our images have in common?
- What themes did we share related to why we chose our images?
- What did you find interesting or valuable about this experience?





## Icebreakers & Activities for Introductions

### ARTIFACT SHARING

This activity allows each team member to share an object that symbolizes their thoughts, emotions, or responses to a particular prompt. Straightforward directions and minimal planning makes this an excellent option for retreats with packed agendas, while still affording the group a unique opportunity to learn more about one another.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Explore diverse items that hold meaningful representations.
- ❖ Build connection and trust within the group.

Ask team members to come to the retreat prepared with one or two “artifacts” to share with the group that pertain to a given prompt. These artifacts can be any tangible object (or image of said object) that holds meaning for them for the topic in question.

Example prompts could include:

- Bring an artifact that reflects an aspect of your identity.
- Bring an artifact that serves as a metaphor for what inspires you.
- Bring an artifact that represents what your role on our team means to you.

Have each team member share their artifact with a partner or as part of the larger group.



# SHORT ACTIVITIES

## COMMITTING LESS THAN 30 MINUTES





## Short Activities

### CORE VALUES

The Core Values exercise is designed to allow team members an opportunity to explore their personal values on a profound level. By examining a list of values and ranking each of them from “always valued” to “least valued,” individuals will engage in self-reflection and evaluation. By the end of the activity, everyone will have a chart of core values that define them; team members can also be prompted to share their list of core values with the larger group and generate a list of shared values. Doing so will give everyone the opportunity to observe one another’s core values, and will promote dialogue about any differences present as well as any common values.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Determine and prioritize each team member’s individual values.
- ❖ Build appreciation for the vast diversity of values.
- ❖ Prompt teams to discuss the cultural contexts in which their values emerged, and how they learned to pursue some values over others.

Prepare for this activity by printing and cutting out a set of value cards for each team member. If you are working with a large group, a list of the same values can be projected or distributed to each participant, along with a copy of the values map.

To start, ask team members to review their cards or list of core values and begin placing them in one of six categories ranging from “always valued” to “least valued”. Each category can have a **maximum** of 13 values.

After allowing several minutes for everyone to complete this first step, explain to the group that over the next few minutes, they will slowly narrow the list they have created. Emphasize that this *does not mean* they are discarding these values; rather, narrowing our list helps us determine our **core** values from our many important values. With that said, ask participants to identify their top ten values, either by sorting their piles of cards or circling the values on their value map. Next, ask each participant to reduce that list of ten to five core values. After a few moments, ask the participants to reduce that list to three core values. Finally, allowing for another moment of reflection, ask each team member to reduce that list to two core values.

Encourage team members to convene in small groups of 3-5 and, if they feel comfortable doing so, share their top two core values. Ask the team to debrief, in their small groups or as a whole, considering the following:

- How did you begin to pare down your longer list? As you narrowed your list, did you find yourself “bundling” values (embedding one value into another and thus counting two values as one)? Note that this is why you haven’t thrown any values away, but rather clarified what these words mean to you.
- How do these core values show up in your day-to-day life and in the workplace?
- How do we as a team benefit from having a diversity of core values?

Activity Template in Appendix



## Short Activities

### CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

This activity provides a structured approach to engaging in brief discussions around topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion; since this exercise encourages team members to move around, this activity is perfect for enlivening the group after a meal or extended presentation.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Reflect on their own responses to the activity questions.
- ❖ Practice focused and active listening skills.
- ❖ Develop brief, yet personal connections with a number of their colleagues or teammates.

If room allows, ask the team to count off in order: one, two, one, two, etc. Individuals who are number ones will form an outside circle facing the center of the room, while number twos will form an inside circle facing out. Alternatively, if you do not have enough room to form two concentric circles, consider forming two lines, or switching out partners each round. No matter how you arrange it, team members should end up in pairs (or triads, if uneven).

Ask a question or read aloud a prompt to the group, after which each pair will have two minutes to respond. Signal the group after one minute so partners can switch. At the end of each question, instruct the outer circle to move one person to the left, while the inner circle remains stationary. If using an alternative arrangement, ensure that everyone begins each new question with a new partner.

Select the number of questions that best fit the time frame you have. Example questions include:

- Share one thing about your first, middle, or last name.
- What is one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you?
- Describe a time when you were discouraged from doing something because of your gender.
- Describe a time when you were discouraged from doing something because of your age.
- If you could change one thing about society, what would it be?
- Describe a time when someone's words hurt you.
- Describe a time when you witnessed discrimination. How did you respond?
- Describe at least one quality about yourself that you feel good about. How does it contribute to the creation of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture?
- What is your biggest concern about dealing with issues of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination in your workplace?

After bringing the group back together, consider debriefing the activity by asking the team:

- How did it feel to share this personal information with your colleagues?
- Without naming anyone, what did someone do that made you feel listened to?
- Some questions may have been more difficult to answer than others. If you feel comfortable sharing, what questions were particularly hard for you to respond to? Why do you think that was so? Which questions did you particularly enjoy answering or hearing from your partner?



## Short Activities

### WEB OF CONNECTEDNESS

In this powerful activity, team members sit in a circle while the facilitator reads various attributes or life experiences from a list. The individuals that resonate with the attribute or have experienced the event in question stand and a ball of yarn, twine, or string is passed to each person who speaks so the individuals become “connected”. By the end of the activity, the string will form an intricate web between all team members.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Learn new things about their colleagues that build powerful connections.
- ❖ Realize the ways in which they can all relate to one another.
- ❖ Build trust and shared understanding.

After all team members arrange themselves in a circle, begin by handing one member a ball of yarn, twine, or string. As the facilitator, you will read from a list of statements that describe different attributes or life experiences individuals in the group may have had. After reading one statement, allow members of the group that identify with that statement to stand; again, remind participants they are only asked to disclose what they are comfortable openly sharing.

Pass the ball of yarn to each standing team member. Allow them a moment to share a thought or story with the group if they would like, before unraveling the ball of yarn, grasping the end, and passing the ball along to the next standing individual. In this way, the ball of yarn continues to unravel as the activity progresses, with each team member holding on to many parts of the string itself. After all individuals have a chance to respond to the statement, have everyone return to a seated position and read off the next statement on your list. The activity will continue until the ball of yarn ends, having woven a web of connection between the team as a whole.

Statements can be customized to best fit the needs of your group; some examples include:

- Stand if you have visited another country.
- Stand if you know little about your cultural heritage.
- Stand if you have ever been in love.
- Stand if you are most productive in the early mornings.
- Stand if you have ever felt lonely.
- Stand if you have ever lost someone important to you.
- Stand if you have ever felt like you don’t belong.
- Stand if you have taken primary responsibility for raising another family member.
- Stand if you’ve ever felt embarrassed by your socioeconomic background.

After completing the activity, debrief by asking the group:

- How did this activity feel? Is there anything you’d like to share with members of the group?
- Did the activity help you get a better sense of our similarities? Our differences?



## Short Activities

### 15% SOLUTIONS – A LIBERATING STRUCTURE

This liberating structure is a quick activity that helps to reveal the actions, no matter how small, that individuals can take immediately. At a minimum, these actions will create momentum and help the group feel empowered to make a change. Because this activity can be broadly applied to any item on your strategic plan, including DEI, 15% Solutions is a great option for almost all retreats.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Focus on actions that are within their discretion, instead of what can't be changed.
- ❖ Discover their individual and collective power.
- ❖ Build trust, share ideas, and help one another.

Ask the team to consider the following questions:

- What is your '15 percent'?
- Where do you have discretion and freedom to act?
- What can you do without more resources or authority?

Each team member should take roughly five minutes alone to reflect and generate a list of their own 15% solutions. Afterward, have individuals share their solutions within a small group of about two to four people. Offer ample time for group members to ask clarifying questions, provide feedback, and offer advice to one another.

As you bring the group back together, debrief by asking:

- What did you learn from this activity, if anything?
- Were you surprised by the actions your group members came up with?
- Which of your 15% solutions can you commit to carrying out once you leave here today



# LONG ACTIVITIES

## COMMITTING MORE THAN 30 MINUTES



## Long Activities

### INTERNAL & EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

This activity encourages team members to learn about and explore their identities by using an identity wheel. An identity wheel can be one representation of self, organized into multiple dimensions, like personality, internal dimensions, external dimensions, and organizational dimensions.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Identify and reflect on various aspects of their identity.
- ❖ Build trust by learning more about one another.

Begin by providing each participant with a copy of the identity wheel handout. Briefly explain the following about internal and external dimensions:

- A person's core self or **personality** is at the center of the identity wheel.
- **Internal dimensions** of self are identities that a person is born with; we have very little to no control over these identities. Internal dimensions might include: age, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, ethnicity, and race.
- **External dimensions** of self are more closely related to life experiences. The decisions we make and the things that happen around us contribute to our external dimensions. External dimensions might include: geographic location, income, personal habits, recreational habits, religion and spirituality, educational background, work experience, appearance, parental status, and marital status.

Encourage each person to add, remove, or alter components of their internal and/or external dimensions if desired. For example, changing *gender* as an internal dimension to *gender identity*; changing *age* to *generation*; adding *geographic origin*; replacing *ethnicity* with *heritage*; etc.

Have each team member take approximately ten minutes to create their own identity wheel by adding their internal and external dimensions of themselves to the wheel and personalizing them with their unique identities. Encourage them to consider the size of each dimension; adjust the size of each segment to represent how much time, thought, effort, and resources it currently occupies for you right now. For example, an individual with young children may segment off half of the circle representing their external dimension for "parental status," while an individual spending much of their time training for a marathon may segment off a great deal of the circle to represent "recreational habits".

Once everyone has completed their identity wheel, reconvene as a group and ask for volunteers to share. Remind everyone that the identities we share with others are our choice; we, individually, get to decide what, with whom, and when we share parts of our identities. Only share what you would like to share, and keep private what you would like to keep private.

Activity Template in Appendix





## Long Activities

### MY CAREER MAP

This activity should be used in conjunction with the previous activity, “Internal & External Dimensions of Identity”. Team members will be asked to reflect on their current careers and recognize that, though it certainly does not define us as people, our careers are a significant part of how we use our time, talents, and energy. Looking at our careers through the lens of our identity helps us see how who we are impacts what we do.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Reflect on their own unique identities and their influences on what they do in their career.
- ❖ Build trust and openness with one another through sharing our unique stories.

Begin by passing out the Career Map handout, to be used alongside their completed Identity Wheel. Ask each individual to reflect on their identity wheel and consider the ways in which their many identities may have influenced the decisions they have made and the detours they may have experienced in getting to where their career is today.

After taking several moments to consider, use the opportunity to draw out your “career map”. This image may be literal or figurative; it may show many roadblocks or a straightforward path from beginning to end. Encourage each participant to utilize whatever method they feel most comfortable with to depict their career journey and how their identities have impacted them along the way.

Once team members are finished, ask them to share their stories, if desired, in pairs or small groups. Remind them to only disclose what they feel comfortable disclosing, while recognizing that growth takes place as we push slowly past our comfort zones.

Activity Template in Appendix



## Long Activities

### TRIZ – A LIBERATING STRUCTURE

This fun and engaging exercise helps teams work together to solve difficult problems by clearing space for creativity and innovation to take place. This activity is particularly useful when embarking on new, major projects or during team visioning sessions, making it an excellent choice for year-end retreats.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Make space for innovation and creative problem solving.
- ❖ Reflect on previous decisions or behaviors that may contribute to a problem.
- ❖ Build trust by acting together to remove barriers.

Begin by dividing the team into small groups of about four to seven individuals; provide each group with paper so as to scribe their thoughts and responses along the way. Explain that the activity will consist of three rounds, each lasting ten minutes. Encourage each group to be mindful about participation, making sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute.

Explain that their first objective as a small group is to determine the **worst** result imaginable with regard to your top strategy or objective. If, for example, the top goal of a group is to decrease provider error in an operating room, the worst result imaginable might be always operating on the wrong side (e.g. removing the wrong limb).

The first round begins by telling the room, “Make a list of all you can do to make sure that you achieve the **worst** result imaginable with respect to your top strategy or objective.”

After ten minutes, begin the second round by telling the group, “Go down the list you created item by item and ask yourselves, ‘Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape or form, resembles this item?’” Encourage them to be brutally honest. If any counterproductive behaviors are identified, write them down on a second list.

After another ten minutes, ask the small groups to spend the last round going through all of the items on their second list and decide the steps that should be taken to help stop the actions we now see create undesirable results.

Once the activity is completed, encourage the small groups to share their results with the whole team.



## Long Activities

### 25/10 CROWD SOURCING – A LIBERATING STRUCTURE

This activity allows team members the opportunity to equally contribute big, bold ideas, while harnessing the team's collective wisdom to identify the top ten. Another exercise that encourages participant movement, 25/10 Crowd Sourcing is a great reenergizer during long retreats.

This activity will help teams...

- ❖ Encourage novice innovators to think boldly and come up with practical first steps.
- ❖ Develop a group's ability to quickly tap their own sources of wisdom.
- ❖ Obtain results that are more likely to endure because they were generated transparently from within and without imported advice.
- ❖ Create an environment in which good ideas can bubble up.

Begin by passing out index cards to each team member and asking them, "If you were ten times bolder, what big idea would you recommend? What first step would you take to get started?" Give everyone several minutes to consider and write down their big, bold idea.

Next, ask participants to quickly move about the room and exchange index cards with anyone they come in contact with; index cards should be passed between people several times before the round ends. After about one minute, tell the participants to stop exchanging cards; an alternative way to start and stop rounds could be playing music that is then stopped to indicate the rounds' end.

With whatever index card they are now holding, ask them to read the idea and next step and rate that idea on a scale of one to five (where one is low and five is high). Write the score on the back of the index card.

The team members will then repeat the process of milling about the room and exchanging cards when you indicate (or, if using, when the music is turned back on). This cycle will repeat such that there will be **five rounds** of exchanging and rating cards.

After the final round, ask participants to tally the score on the back of their index card. Find the best-scoring ideas with the whole group by conducting a countdown, asking "Who has a score of 25...24...etc.?" Invite each participant holding a card with that score to read out the idea and action step. Continue until the top ten ideas have been identified and shared.

Once the activity is finished, debrief the group, asking:

- What caught your attention about this activity?
- Can we commit to this big bold idea and action step when we return to our day-to-day routine?