



STEP 3: BUILDING A GROUP

Cre8
in 8

*Are we all
heading in the
same direction?*

INTRODUCTION

Team building is a dynamic and ongoing process without which the quality of the final result could be compromised. Even if you are trying to realise a project with a group of participants who already know each other, it is very important to go through a group-building process, since every project has its own dynamics. You might focus on some aspects of team building such as getting to know each other's skills, backgrounds and talents, among others.

CONTENT AND GUIDELINES

The process of building a group entails several different steps:

1. Becoming comfortable with each other and making introductions

Introducing the project and the project team
Arrange a meeting for all project participants (including the project team). Some people may already know each other, while others may be meeting for the first time. Introduce everyone in the project team and their respective roles. Such a meeting will also serve as an important opportunity to re-introduce the project aims, goals, schedule and global plan. Though most people will have already heard all that before, it will be different and somehow more 'real' when done for the first time with everyone present.

At this stage, it is important to keep the focus of the project on the primary beneficiaries and to make sure they understand that the project is their own responsibility and not something that will be done for them. Please avoid long speeches but focus rather on short, inspiring details. When possible, avoid lengthy discussions on everything that could go wrong. Such discussions can often kill a group before it even has a chance to begin. At the same time, avoid highlighting any differences between the participants (e.g. their geographic origins, artistic skills, age, etc.) during this first meeting, but focus instead on their similarities and common goals.

It is important to observe the chemistry between the initiators, the project team and the

participants. With a social project, the interactions, relations and trust developed among the participants will play a major role in terms of its success.

Introducing the participants

Once the project team members have introduced themselves and given the group some information about the project, make sure that every participant also has a chance to introduce him or herself properly, whether by simply sharing his or her name and any additional information he or she wish to share (e.g. the group that he or she represents, his or her age, his or her particular talent, etc.), or by giving a presentation. If the sense of 'security' present within the group is still too low, the latter might be too much to ask of the participants. You could also simply choose to have the participants introduce themselves along with the project group members. Whatever you do, always take the local customs and traditions into account!

2. Getting to know each other. How to do it

There are many ways to have the project participants get to know each other. You can gather everyone in a circle, for instance, and then start with simple warm-up exercises like the 'physical-isolation' exercise, or a name game. Gradually you can introduce more introductory games and exercises. Be sure to keep those short and fun. The facilitators can lead them at

the beginning, but as the atmosphere within the group becomes more relaxed and informal, encourage participants to take the lead in such exercises. Including physical exercises will help get the participants to relax and open up. Including theatre games will encourage participants to express themselves (and to reveal more about themselves to others in the process).

The phase of getting to know each other can take between a few days to a few weeks, but the participants should normally start to feel comfortable with each other after just a few working days. In the process, the facilitators will also gain information about (and an understanding of) each participant's character and background.

3. Building positive interpersonal relationships

After every exercise it is important to encourage the group to ask each other questions and give each other positive feedback. Encourage them to share their thoughts on the exercises and games. This will help them gain each other's trust. The facilitator can choose to assign three participants the responsibility for leading the warm-up games on the following days and ask them to plan their lessons together.

EXAMPLE

During the Jukwa la Vipaji and AMKA projects with Mkombozi in Moshi, Tanzania, the entire group of participating young people, the organisational staff, the Cre8 team and the local skills facilitators all gathered in the main hall. After a brief word of welcome from Simon (the youth recreation officer), Cre8's project coordinator, Ben, described the project goals and briefly told the group about what Cre8 is, what they had done until then and why they had chosen to work with Mkombozi.

Different skills facilitators were then given an opportunity to introduce themselves, but instead of the usual 'my name is....' approach, they introduced themselves through their art. Diana, the dance facilitator, performed a short traditional African dance, while the acrobatics facilitator, Eddy, showed a few of his moves. Harrison, the music facilitator, led the whole group in singing as a chorus. This inspired the participants to

come forth and share some of their own skills as well, which effectively made the introduction session into one big party. Sami, the theatre and development facilitator, led the participants in sharing their expectations and giving their input about the project plan. The participants clearly felt more open and free to express themselves after such an introduction than they would have if we had done a conventional introductory session.

CONCLUSION

The first meeting is an important moment in terms of building a cohesive group, although the group-building process is something that runs through the entire project period and even beyond. At this stage, the goal is to make a good start, in which everyone feels included and valued. It is important to ensure that both formal and informal group-building activities are integrated into each stage of the project.



CHECK-OUT BOX

- **All the participants understand the project, its goals and expected results. This can be verified on the basis of how they answer questions or participate in the discussions.**
- **All participants feel free, open and comfortable. This can be verified on the basis of their level of interaction with each other, their participation in the games and their cross-gender interaction.**
- **The group functions as a team. This can be verified by the fact that participants take responsibility for tasks, manage their time effectively and take initiatives by proposing ideas, etc.**