

Background Exploration Exercise (Storytelling)

Purpose: To help team members learn about what each individual member brings to the team by sharing personal experiences and backgrounds.

Benefit: Enables team members to begin building trust and creating a team identity; helps team members understand better how an individual's background and experiences shapes his/her ideas and perspectives.

Overview: Each team member describes his/her background and experiences to the rest of the team. A number of different queries can be used to elicit the information. The exercise can take the form of a tabletop discussion or it can be expanded to include pictures, graphics, or whiteboard sketches while describing one's personal "story." Use of visual imagery is a way to simultaneously foster creative thought and get team members into a visual thinking mode.

Facilitation Instructions:

1. Select three questions from the list provided below or develop your own (**Note:** Questions should not be too personal or frivolous; the key is to provide an opportunity for team members to learn something new about one another).
2. Go around the table and ask each team member to answer all three questions and share with the group.

Alternative Approach:

1. Select three questions from the list provided or develop your own.
2. Ask team members to partner up and use the questions to "interview" each other.
3. Return to the group and allow the team members to introduce the team member they interviewed, and vice versa. Allow time for individuals to fill in any gaps for the team.
4. Encourage team members to explore and discuss what they learned about one another that they did not know previously, or would like to discuss in more depth.

Sample Questions:

- What deployment was most significant from a personal or professional development standpoint?
- What challenges have you overcome professionally?
- What challenges have you overcome personally?
- What is something others may find surprising about you?
- Where did you grow up? Where have you lived?
- How many siblings do you have and where do you fall in the lineup?
- What has been one of your greatest accomplishments?