



## **POWER TOOLS**

City Year's civic "power tools" are techniques for mobilization, communication, inspiration and critical thinking, as well as for reflection, team building and "breaking the ice" for small, medium and large groups. These techniques also help to build leadership skills, instill confidence and empower staff and City Year AmeriCorps members.

To be effective, a civic power tool must be an "inclusive, accountable structure" and have a name easy for all to remember.

- Being **inclusive** means that a power tool is easily accessible for a diverse group of people of all ages and backgrounds. There should be nothing elitist or technical about a power tool.
- Being **accountable** means that the power tool technique holds an entire group accountable to a desired outcome, thereby distributing accountability across an entire group, rather than to just one leader.
- Being a **structure** means that the power tool has a clear set of steps to it, such that success can be achieved by following these steps. A power tool should never just be a mere hope, command or exhortation, such as "Hey everyone, be quiet!" When naming a power tool, try to think of a name which describes the tool or its purpose and is fun and easy to remember.

City Year's tool box of civic power tools has been developing since the organization's inception, from the creativity of staff and City Year AmeriCorps members and collected from other sources. New power tools should be developed all the time. As a member of the City Year community, you are encouraged to design and popularize inclusive, accountable structures for mobilization, communication, inspiration and critical thinking. Below are a few of our many power tools:

### **ADVANCE LOGISTICS—"AD-LO"**

**What is it?** Over the years, City Year has created an efficient, productive way to plan events, known as "Advance Logistics," or more commonly "Ad-Lo." The basic goal of Ad-Lo is to make sure every conceivable logistics issue is covered before an event begins.

**How do you use it?** Ad-Lo accounts for questions such as: Where is the food coming from and when will it be delivered? Where will cars be parked and is there a fee? What is

the program order and has a script been written? Who will greet and brief any external speakers? What if it rains? Where will the media sit?

One of City Year's best Ad-Lo tools is the "Q2Q." Similar to cue-to-cues in theatre productions, a Q2Q is a minute-by-minute breakdown of a specific City Year event, from preparation to clean-up. Each task on the Q2Q has a specific point person who oversees that activity. The Q2Q not only centralizes all event information in one easy-to-access document, but also allows someone who may not have been intricately involved in all aspects of planning to understand all of the moving parts at an event.

## BRAINSTORM

**What is it?** A tool for quickly stimulating the creative ideas of a group on a particular topic. It is an easy, fun and inclusive way for all members of a group or team to participate in a planning process. It requires minimal facilitation and can rapidly produce a useful catalogue of ideas for further refinement, development and discussion.

**How do you use it?** To begin, briefly introduce a topic and then tell the group that they are going to have a brainstorm. Use a whiteboard or easel and a large marker to capture every idea so everyone can read every idea generated. Tape filled sheets to the wall. Enlist helpers if necessary. Before beginning, always review and explain the "rules of brainstorming" (see below), then grab your writing utensil and start writing any idea that is introduced. Record every idea verbatim, avoiding interpretation, editing and rewording. After the list is finalized, work with the group to find themes and to determine which ideas should be discussed further.

### The rules of brainstorming:

- Every idea gets written down, just as it was said, with no discussion, commentary or censorship—no put downs.
- Repeats are OK. Repeats are OK.
- The goal is quantity, not quality.

## COMMUNITY MEETING

**What is it?** Community Meetings bring together City Year AmeriCorps members, staff and champions for community building, sharing information, reflecting, celebrating and learning new skills. Sites typically have Community Meetings twice a month. The meetings are centered on specific themes and always begin with Ripples, Sharing the Joy and a warm-up. Following these standard elements, meetings consist of a variety of segments, such as a Founding Story, an AmeriCorps or staff member personal story (Life's Work) and a service impact story (Starfish Story.) An AmeriCorps or staff member introduces each meeting segment, shares something about himself or herself and then opens the discussion to the entire community. Each Community Meeting closes with a reinforcement of the overall theme and connections made to hands-on service experiences.

**How do you use it?** The meetings are designed to allow participants to reflect on their accomplishments, hear what others are doing, inspire each other despite challenges and to foster and strengthen our community. It also provides an opportunity to slow down for a moment, reflect on our work and restore our energy.

## DAILY (WEEKLY, MONTHLY) BRIEFING

**What is it?** Often referred to as the DB, the Daily Briefing serves as a tool to communicate any relevant, pertinent and timely information to the entire site—it is our newspaper—keeping us, literally, on the same page. It is both an internal and external tool. It is a tool to

announce events, share ideas, communicate site activities and introduce visitors. It also serves as an engagement tool because external people can obtain a copy and learn more about service, culture and events.

**How do you use it?** During your morning Unity Rally, parts of the Daily Briefing will be shared with the group. The Daily Briefing can be implemented successfully by having a member of the Unity Rally team lead City Year AmeriCorps members, staff and visitors in different sections of the Daily Briefing, enforcing programmatic elements of the DB while remaining uniform and powerful.

## DEBRIEF

**What is it?** Debriefs allow groups to reflect, after an activity or event, on what went well, what could have gone better and how to improve the next time around. Debriefs are a good way for team members to give each other constructive feedback on a regular basis. It is a proven way to build a strong team and consistently improve our program models.

**How do you use it?** After a major task, activity or event, gather the group together and select an appropriate debrief activity. The most popular debrief is called "Pluses and Deltas." Have a flip chart, write two columns on the paper—one for pluses (good things), symbolized with a "+," and one for "deltas" (things that should be changed), symbolized with a "Δ"—write down all ideas so there is a record that the team can revisit.

## FRONT MOST, CENTER MOST

**What is it?** A tool for ensuring that an audience fills a hall from front and center. Instead of sitting in the back of a room or on the sides, we demonstrate courtesy, engagement and attentiveness by sitting as close to the front of the room as possible.

**How do you use it?** The "front most, center most" power tool works as follows: The audience should enter through a center aisle and start filling in the front row. As each row is filled, audience members sit in the next "front most" and "center most" seat. In general, even if other members of the community do not practice this power tool, members of the City Year community should always take the front most, center most seat.

## HANDS UP

**What is it?** A tool for quieting a large, loud group, in order to begin a meeting or event, by raising one's hand, signaling all group members to respond with their hands raised and voices silent. With this simple "hands up" gesture, one person can powerfully—and quietly—signal that a presenter or program is about to begin. The Hands Up power tool allows for a facilitator to quickly get the group's attention.

**How do you use it?** Hands Up can be used at any time in any group setting, large or small, including throughout a session, helping the facilitator to keep the meeting or event on time. The beauty of this tool is that it can be used even if there is not a microphone or loudspeaker. If you have effectively introduced the tool, once the group sees the Hands Up, silence should soon follow. Facilitators should not try to supplement the power tool with verbal communication of "hands up," because over a period of time it lessens the effectiveness of the tool.

**Tip:** A fun way to introduce the power tool is to explain the power tool and ask that everyone try it out by talking amongst themselves loudly. After a few seconds, put your hand up and watch as people enjoy seeing the effectiveness of the attention focusing device. Be sure to be respectful to your audience and do not use this tool in a demeaning or condescending way. **Remember:** be slow to raise your hand but quick to end your conversation.

## LEAVE IT BETTER THAN WE FOUND IT (CAMPFIRE)

**What is it?** A tool for ensuring that a team or group takes responsibility for cleaning up and straightening a room or facility that it has just used. An essential quality of leadership is to take responsibility for your actions and leaving a space worse off than we found it is insensitive to the next user of the space, the people who would have to clear it and the people who allowed us to use the space.

**How do you use it?** Teams and groups can quickly make a clean room messy, or worse. Before leaving a space, a captain should volunteer or be named. Everything should be thrown away, put back in its place or returned to the owner. Even if we did not create the mess or use anything in the room, we should take responsibility for leaving it better than we found it. The captain will give the “all clear” once the space is better than we found it.

## NOSTUESO

**What is it?** Pronounced “No-stew-ess-oh,” it’s an acronym for a group discussion facilitation technique: “No One Speaks Twice Until Everyone Speaks Once.” To value inclusive input from a diverse team, we must ensure that one or a few people do not dominate a discussion and that the ideas, questions and concerns of all people are heard. When used as a ground rule for group interaction, NOSTUESO is a powerful tool for communication in team and group settings.

**How do you use it?** This technique is particularly effective when the group is discussing a “hot” topic—one that many people are passionate about. When employing NOSTUESO, be careful that it does not stifle conversation (certainly not its purpose). Not everyone in the room needs to speak, but everyone should have the opportunity to do so. After everyone has had the chance to speak, feel free to open the discussion back up so that people can talk for a second time. NOSTUESO should be used like a light switch, toggled on and off by a team leader as necessary and appropriate.

## POWER GREETING

**What is it?** A tool used at all major events for setting the tone, making participants feel welcome and ushering them quickly to their seats.

**How do you use it?** There may be as few as two or three power greeters, or as many as hundreds, with the entire organization turning out to welcome people to a very special occasion. Creativity is encouraged in power greeting, as is unity and a purposeful message. To be effective, power greeting must be enthusiastic and sincere. Modifications can be and should be made for more serious occasions that require a more solemn tone and spirit.

## PHYSICAL TRAINING—“PT”

**What is it?** A tool for uniting as a City Year community, getting our minds and bodies ready for a great day of service and for engaging the community, PT consists of traditional exercises like jumping jacks and push ups, but can also include City Year exercises like Front Side, Back Side, Front and City Year Slap Happies.

**How do you use it?** PT is performed at City Year events—from annual dinners to service projects—and often used as a power tool to exhibit City Year’s spirit, discipline, purpose and pride. It is most commonly part of Unity Rally.

**...At schools:** An energetic morning greeting by a team at the school at which they serve is a great way to fire up the team and rally the students. City Year AmeriCorps members and students can get the day off to a good, high-energy start with group PT.

**...At events:** PT should be demonstrated first to audiences by a diverse group of City Year AmeriCorps members, the PT Crew. After the demonstration, audiences should often be asked to stand up and participate in the exercise with the PT Crew. Front Side, Back Side, Front is a crowd favorite.

**...At Unity Rally:** PT is performed at Unity Rally. The PT Crew should select five or six exercises to get the corps ready to serve. City Year AmeriCorps members should be trained and certified in PT during BTA.

## ripples and joy

**What is it?** A “ripple” is the telling of a brief, inspiring anecdote about an act of idealism, courage and belief (from the Ripples Founding Story) and a “joy” is the sharing of joyful news or information. Sharing of ripples and joys puts us in an inspired, positive frame of mind before tackling difficult work, helps us make a direct connection between our work and positive outcomes and reminds us that small acts of idealism can have a powerful cumulative effect.

**How do you use it?** The very first agenda item of every meeting or gathering should always be “ripples and joy”—even when other matters seem so very pressing. The leader of the meeting should ask all present to share any “ripples”—acts of courage and belief—or share joyous news, explaining the terms if necessary. If you have a ripple or joy and do not share it, then you are holding on to someone else’s inspiration and perhaps preventing other people from being fueled by your ripple to do more good work. In this way, sharing ripples and joy is a force multiplier.

## Silent Applause

**What is it?** A time-saving tool, borrowed from American Sign Language, that allows a speaker to continue their presentation while the audience applauds in silence.

**How do you use it?** The American Sign Language (ASL) sign for applause is putting both hands in the air by your ears and fluttering them. This power tool can also be used to express appreciation and joy in response to a speaker’s point.

## SKIT

**What is it?** A tool for communicating an idea, theme or key message through a short sketch that involves creativity, critical thinking and teamwork.

**How do you use it?** Skits can be used in a variety of ways—as a warm up, a team building activity, an inclusivity activity—to put emphasis on a specific topic. The very process of having to create a skit forces a group to think clearly about the information being presented and how to effectively present that information to a specific audience. The best skits are informative and creative.

## Spirit Break

**What is it?** A “Spirit Break” is a simple power tool that connects people, for a brief moment, through a symbolic physical gesture and a focused thought. At the end of any City Year meeting, check-in, or event, a word or phrase is chosen, generally related to the topic, bringing the team together for a moment of energy and unity. Borrowed from the world of team sports, the spirit break puts an inspirational and meaningful closure on a meeting, gathering or event and gives everyone an inspirational charge. If there have been difficult things discussed, or tension in the meeting, the spirit break also clears the air and reunifies the group.

**How do you use it?** Just as all City Year meetings and gatherings should begin with “ripples,” so should they always end with a “spirit break” marking the official close of the meeting. Everyone puts their hand into the center, hand upon hand, arms like spokes on a wheel. The leader asks the group to suggest an inspirational word or phrase that sums up the meeting.

**Tip:** To ensure the spirit break is powerful, the leader should first demonstrate the counting and the rhythm of the word or phrase broken into clear syllables. Then, at the leader’s mark, everyone counts to three and says the word or phrase very loudly while raising their hands to the sky. If the spirit break comes out garbled or disjointed, it should be repeated. **Remember:** Whenever there are too many people for everyone to gather in a circle, a person can simply put their hand on a shoulder of another person to participate.

## STAND AND DECLARE

**What is it?** A tool for effective and courteous public speaking, “Stand and Declare” refers to the practice of standing up and introducing oneself before one speaks to a group. Standing to speak and introducing yourself is highly respectful to your audience and the person or people you are addressing, as it ensures that eye contact is made, that the audience, speaker or panelist knows who is speaking and that we project our voice for all to hear. Stand and Declare also demonstrates pride and confidence. Knowing that you will stand before you speak also has the tendency to ensure that we are thoughtful before we speak, as we are literally “standing by our words.” Stand and Declare is also an effective way for everyone in a community and for external guests to learn everyone’s name, which helps make a community more trusting and unified.

**How do you use it?** The idea is simple: when you are in a medium to large group and want to share a comment or ask a question, you should always stand, declare your name, position and organization, make your comment or question and then sit down. Always “stand and declare,” and gently remind seated speakers to please “stand and declare” as well.

## STRONG CIRCLE

**What is it?** A tool for mobilizing small- and medium-sized groups, a “Strong Circle” is formed when participants are standing shoulder-to-shoulder in a tight, perfectly-formed circle, with “no one inside the circle and no one outside the circle.” The Strong Circle provides a virtual “room” from which information can be shared. Because everyone is fully included in the circle, each person should be able to easily make eye contact and interact with everyone else in the circle, providing an equal forum for people to participate fully and to take in and share information attentively.

**How do you use it?** At City Year, we use Strong Circles in many different settings. It is effective for any time that a team needs to check in. If the team is a new one, the Strong Circle creates an immediate sense of belonging for everyone in the group and allows team members to see each other and introduce themselves in a comfortable, easy setting. For a check-in, the Strong Circle is ideal because you can go around the circle and each person can update the group on what they have accomplished, what still needs to be done and any questions he or she may have.

During a Strong Circle, team members should leave backpacks, bags, food, drinks and any other distractions outside of the circle. Each member should have a writing utensil and something to write on in case any notes need to be taken. A team that easily executes a strong circle demonstrates its discipline, competence and unity.

## UNITY RALLY

**What is it?** City Year AmeriCorps members and staff members gather together for Unity Rallies to provide a powerful start to the day. A Unity Rally includes a “readiness check” to ensure everyone is prepared both mentally and physically for the day ahead and it includes PT and a Daily Briefing.

**How do you use it?** Unity Rallies (which take place most Fridays throughout the network and on other days on a site-by-site basis) help City Year prepare for a powerful day of service. Also, to help demonstrate that young people are not only proud, positive and powerful but also ready to serve and lead, Unity Rallies are held at highly visible public locations, schools and landmarks, including Copley Square in Boston, the Alamo in San Antonio, Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C., City Hall Plaza in Philadelphia and Federal Plaza in Chicago.

## WARM-UPS AND ICE BREAKERS

**What is it and how do you use it?** A tool to begin meetings or activities to help participants focus on the topic at hand or simply put them at ease (“breaking the ice”) prior to delving into the issues, warm-ups can take literally thousands of forms, from everyone going around the room and telling the group what their favorite musical group is to people sharing why they came to City Year. Often you can select a warm-up that relates in some way to the meeting topic. For example, if your meeting is about planning service, ask people to share their favorite service experience.

Learn lots of warm-ups! Listed below are some favorites, including an array of warm-ups for learning names. Also, ask City Year veterans, research cyconnect resources and check out team activities binders. You will never lead a bland meeting if you have a steady flow of warm-ups ready.

- **Battle Scar Galactica:** Each person in the group needs to tell a story about him/herself through a scar—explain the story behind one scar on their body. This can get very personal and/or very gross. If you’re working with a large group, break them into smaller groups and have each smaller group report back with the best story.
- **Captain’s Coming:** This is a group game with a facilitator calling out commands for the group. Anyone who is not in one of these groups when called is then out. The commands are:
  - » Row Boat: Four people sitting in line and rowing
  - » Life Boat: Three people in circle together
  - » Ballroom Dancing: Two people dance
  - » Lookout: One person kneeling on floor; one person with foot on kneeler looking out
  - » Captain’s Coming: Stand at attention motionless (While people are standing at attention, people in the group who are now out can try to make them laugh—if they do laugh they are out.)
- **Human Knot:** The team forms a circle and everyone reaches into the middle with their right hand. Each person should grab someone else’s hand. Next the team sticks out their left hand and holds someone else’s hand. No one should be holding the same person’s hands. Now you have a human knot. What does the team do to solve the problem? Solutions are a circle and a figure eight.
- **Life Maps:** For this one, you need pieces of paper and markers/crayons, etc. Spend about 15–30 minutes letting participants draw their life maps. This is basically whatever they want it to be, kind of like a visual Life’s Work, usually describing how they got to be where they are and who they are. Then go around and let people share

them. This is a longer activity, but it can be really powerful if participants are focused and interested in learning about each other.

- **Magic Wand:** You have just found a magic wand that allows you to change three work-related activities. You can change anything you want. How would you change yourself, your job, your boss, coworkers, an important project, etc.? Have them discuss why it is important to make the change. Another variation is to have them discuss what they would change if they became the boss for a month. This activity helps them to learn about others' desires and frustrations.
- **Snap Debate:** The "snap debate" is a quick and easy way to generate arguments on both sides of an issue in a way that is not only non-emotional but also fun and informative. To begin, simply divide the group in half and ask them to stand and face each other. Announce a statement, such as "The country should have a large national service program" and assign one group the "pro" (for) position and one group the "con" (against) position. Then alternately point to members of each side, asking them to make a fast, brief statement in favor of their position. At some point, tell the two sides to switch the pro and con positions. Afterwards, process the snap debate by asking for observations, what information or ideas people may have learned and what arguments they thought were most effective.
  - » A variation on the snap debate is "**switch swatch**" in which two volunteers sit facing each other in front of the group. They are given a subject to debate and each assigned a position by the facilitator. They are told that they should argue their position loudly at the other person and not listen to the other person as he or she does the same, and that when the facilitator says "switch" the participants should suddenly switch arguments and loudly espouse the opposite view. This exercise always elicits laughter. It should be processed with questions to the audience about what they observed and the importance of listening to others, even those with whom we disagree.
- **Stand Up/Sit Down:** Write a series of questions or statements that relate to the topic being discussed or taught in the event or activity. Questions/statements can be serious and/or humorous when appropriate. A facilitator will read these questions/statements and the participants should stand up (or raise hands if standing is not possible) if the statement applies to them. Once everyone has the opportunity to see who is in the room, the facilitator should ask the participants to be seated. Limit conversation and encourage participants to look around the room while each statement is being read.
- **Two Truths and a Lie:** Each person thinks of two statements that are true about themselves and one lie. One person at a time says three statements and everyone else tries to guess which one is the lie. (**Hint:** it's more interesting if you try to think of amazing things that happened to you rather than something mundane such as, "I don't like Brussels sprouts.")
- **Zen Counting:** Get everyone into a circle. The goal for the group is to count to 10 (or higher if you are up to the challenge). The rules are that you cannot say two consecutive numbers and you cannot talk at all except to say numbers. The trick is that whenever more than one person says a number at the same time, you must all start over. This game requires a lot of patience and persistence to get it right. If the group does really well, try it with eyes closed, or increase the number you need to reach.
- **Zoom:** Sit in a circle. The leader says "zoom" to the person to their right, who has to pass it on. Time how long it takes to get the zoom around the circle, then see if the group can do it twice as fast. Then, pass a "zap" the other way and do the same. As



they get better, try passing the zoom one-way and the zap the other at the same time. This is a nice, easy one to start with and gets people feeling comfortable. Groups get a sense of accomplishment out of doing something a lot faster a second and third time around.

- **Virtual Pictionary:** Many team builders and ice breakers can be easily adapted to the virtual space, but here's one that specifically takes advantage of the whiteboard or draw functions in remote meeting software. The team facilitator brainstorms a variety of words, and then privately chats one to the artist. The artist's team then has one minute to guess correctly, either aloud or in chat. If the artist's team does not get the answer the opposing team has 30 seconds to discuss and try and "steal" the point. Be sure to test out the virtual interface before starting your virtual game, as technology may vary.

## NAME GAMES

- **Adjective Name Game:** While sitting in a circle, the leader explains that each person in the group should think of an adjective that describes an aspect of their personality. The adjective must begin with the same letter as their first initial. Go around until everyone has said their name.
- **Ball Toss:** Everyone stands in a circle and begins by saying their name. Then, people in the group throw a ball around, but before they can throw the ball they need to say the name of the person they will throw it to. The person who receives the ball must thank the person who throws it to them by name. In the first round, the same person should not get the ball twice. A person can ask someone their name again if they forget it. Eventually, you can throw in two or three or more balls (or other objects). At the end, see if anyone can name everyone's name. You can also have each person say their name as fast as they can and see how quickly you can go around the circle with each person saying their name.
- **Group Name Juggle:** Stand in a circle facing inward. Facilitator starts by saying their own name and then tossing the ball to someone. That person says their name then passes the ball (remembering whom they threw the ball to). Each person only gets the ball once. Pass the ball around the entire circle until everyone gets it.
- **Movement Name Game:** Group stands in a circle. The first person says their name and puts a movement with it. The next person says the first person's name and replays their movement and then adds their own. The third person repeats the names and movements of the first two, then adds their own. Continue around the circle until everyone has gone.
- **Name Game #304:** Say your own name, the name of the person to your left and the name of the person to your right. Go around the circle. Say the above to a rhythm set up by clicking fingers. Shout somebody's name and go and take their place in the circle—as you cross the circle they have to shout somebody's name so that they have a place to go to. In a big circle you can have more than one person crossing the circle at one time. This gets nice and chaotic.

City Year AmeriCorps members and staff are encouraged to develop new or modified civic power tools at any point they desire.



Devion  
Rockwell  
Automation  
TEAM