



25 Ideas to Build Community and Not Be Cheesy

A friend of mine tells a story about a meeting his team had on campus. He and his staff had gathered early and began setting up the meeting. As he worked on the finishing touches and students began to trickle in, two new girls caught his attention. He watched from the back of the room as they walked in the doors of the meeting, looked around for a second, and then turned around and walked back out.

Disclaimer

To start, I want to be clear about one thing. As campus ministries, we are not on campus to be cool. Our goal isn't to be the biggest, most popular, or the most social group on campus. We want to see people come to know Christ, be built up to make disciples, and be sent out to live life on mission.

But if we are not aware of how students perceive our teams and our events, we will continue to miss significant opportunities for life change on campus. An attitude that doesn't care about perception results in poor stewardship of the opportunity we have on campus.



Here Is Why.

Now more than ever college students are insecure and anxious about their social status. The individualistic identity narrative has taken root in this generation. We are the furthest removed from the group values of community, teams, organizations, and many other important institutions that shape our identity.

This shift is important because it directly shapes how a student makes a decision about campus organizations. At a heart level, college students today are wondering constantly about who they are. They are told they have to look inside themselves to see who they truly are. They take a guess at the person they want to be and then began to test that identity. How they test it is by putting themselves out there. Social media, friendships, organizations, etc all are ways in which students do this. When they receive positive feedback, they take this as a clue about who they truly are and double down. When they receive negative feedback they look to move in a different direction.

So when a college student takes a step to meet with you, come to your community group or another campus event, they are wondering in their heart, 'what does this say about my identity'? Who will see me here and what will they think about who I am? Is this going to further my identity narrative or cause a credibility hit?



Goal

Our goal is to understand this struggle in the hearts of students. Our spaces are always going to carry some risk, but how can we combat this risk? In particular, can we introduce this risk in bite-sized steps so that a student can stick around, learn more about God's character, have their hearts softened, and follow Jesus for the first time?

To think through how much social risk we are creating, we often use the campus leader question to help us consider this. What would campus leaders like SGA presidents, fraternity or sorority presidents, the QB of the football team, or the point guard of the women's basketball team think about our events? If we can create spaces that are not socially risky for those people, we are going to have a better chance of seeing more people get involved and in turn, see more life change across campus.



Ideas

Here are some ideas that have worked over the years. Each idea is broken down into different categories that could help across different parts of your organization/campus.

Community Group Ideas

1. The Hot Seat

- Taken from Dabo Swinney, Clemson's Head Football coach
 - This series of questions is designed to connect, laugh, cultivate vulnerability and get to know the people in your group
- Have one person a week share and start with the leaders
 - Ask everyone in the group to share
- You can get the questions I have used here:



2. Share Testimonies

- Hearing people's stories breeds vulnerability
 - Vulnerability creates connection and community
- Have your leaders share first and train others in the group to share
 - Bring in other people from your campus org

3. Facilitate Good Discussion Groups

- Discussion breaks down walls
 - Many women's community groups have seen this be a key to helping women get to know each other
- Each week for part of the time, they break into smaller groups of 3-5 and talk about the content
- KEY: You have to have good conversational questions
 - Write them ahead of time and pass them out

4. Eat Meals Together

- One of the best things is to eat a meal together before the group
 - Or go get dessert after the group is over

5. Food Taste-Off

- Get the top three donuts, burgers, tacos, or pizza in the city
 - Bring them to the community group
 - Have the members try them, discuss them and score them
- We have seen this work as a welcome week event, in a dorm community group, and in a fraternity community group

All Campus Ideas

6. Basketball at the Rec Center
 - Have a standing appointment (Friday at 3)
 - Staff plays basketball with students
 - Invite the students you are connecting with to join you
7. Afternoon Ultimate Frisbee Games
 - Nothing is better than playing ultimate
 - On a beautiful fall day on campus
 - This is also a great way to meet new students
8. Sporting Event Watch Parties
 - When your campus team has a road game,
 - Host a watch party and invite people to come over and join you
 - You can do this in a home or at a restaurant, either way, it's a big win
9. Group Pro Sports Event
 - Many college campuses are blessed to have a professional sports team nearby
 - If you have a pro sports team close, they typically offer a group ticket rate

These are great ways to connect. Or go get dessert after the group is over
10. Sporting Event Brackets
 - Leverage big events in culture to build community
 - Some great ways we have seen this done are...
 - CFB Pickem
 - March Madness Brackets
 - Masters Tournament Pick Em
11. Movie Premieres
 - Go see a new movie together the night of the premier
12. Putt-Putt/Top Golf/Go Carts
 - Go play top golf, putt-putt, go-carts, or other fun events in the area
13. Camping
 - An overnight camping trip is always a great way to connect. Find a local state park and some local donors to join you and to help cook/set up



Men's Ideas

14. Hunting and Fishing Outings
 - Many guys would love the chance to do outdoor activities but don't know where to start
 - Teach them or find a donor or friend in the community to help teach them
15. Golf Scrambles
 - Set up a golf scramble at a local course
 - Talk to the pro shop and see if they can help you out on the rate
 - This is good for 3-4 guys or up to 15-20
16. Manhood Content Series
 - Set up a 3-4 week series talking about things that guys need to hear; we have used Robert Lewis content from Men's Fraternity in the past and it works great

Women's Ideas

17. Try a New Fun Local Restaurant
 - On a Saturday, gather up the girls in your group and try a fun new place in town
18. Go on Walks Together
 - Find a local trail or walk on campus; either spot can be a great way to connect
19. Workout Together
 - This is a great way to connect with women and get some exercise at the same time
20. Galentines Event
 - Leslie Knope gives the gift of Galentines and it's a fun event each year for our women

Strategic Ideas

21. Do Ministry Together
 - Doing ministry alongside each other is a key way to build community; having your students join you on a follow-up, sharing the gospel, or leading a community group together is a great way to grow community
22. Fall Retreat
 - A great fall retreat will be a catalyst to cement the growing community in your organization
23. Winter Conference
 - This 4-day conference is a highlight of mine each year, you can spend many nights up late eating tacos, playing cards, and who knows what else
24. Summer Mission
 - Getting your disciples to join you on a summer mission may be the most strategic thing you can do; each year, our students come back from the summer mission with memories and community and look to build it on our campus
25. Leaders Overnight
 - In the Fall, gathering your disciples and leaders together overnight is a fun, way to align students but also make great connections

If we can avoid being a socially risky place for our students, we can build connections and camaraderie that will lead to more students getting involved. This leads to life change and the chance for more laborers to be sent to the harvest. To steward the Great Commission well, we have to be aware of the social risk that we create and work lower that risk as much as we can.