togetthere

FORMING

I Want / I Offer

How might we help students reflect on their own strengths and identify what others bring to group projects?

Overview: Selecting teammates for complex group projects is challenging, particularly when you are unfamiliar with others' skills. This activity uses reflection as a tool to scaffold these forming conversations while also asking students to be introspective about their own strengths and where they could use additional support.

Time Required: 20+ minutes (depending on group size)

Materials: None required, although students may want to have notecards or paper to make notes.

Details: After you have thoroughly explained the group project, explain that students are going to be allowed to select their own groups. Share that since it can be challenging to know who to work with, you are going to lead them in an activity to help them get to know themselves, their strengths, and what others might contribute to their group. If time allows, give students time to think about their responses to the answers to the questions in the next paragraph.

Have students stand in a circle and explain that this activity will have two rounds. In the first round, we will go around the circle and each student will complete the sentence: "I'd like to work with someone who has expertise with ..." In the second round (and once all students have answered the first question), go around the circle again and ask students to complete the sentence: "I offer expertise with ..."

To be mindful of time and the volume of responses, ask that students limit themselves to one or two items per response. Encourage students to identify *relevant expertise* rather than *nonspecific characteristics*. For example, in a history project that requires students to create a skit about the American Revolution, here are examples of an ideal and less helpful response:

Ideal responses	Less helpful responses
I'd like to work with someone who has expertise with writing scripts.	I'd like to work with someone who is fun.
I offer expertise with acting and directing.	I offer expertise with delivering projects on time.

Adaptation: For teacher-assigned groups, this approach can be adapted to help instructors better understand students' preferences. Students can respond to these questions on index cards which the teacher can use as another data point in assembling groups. Alternately, students can share in the circle and then indicate three to five students they feel would be a good fit by writing their names on an index card and sharing it with the instructor.

Suggested reading:

Chapman, K. J., Meuter, M., Toy, D., & Wright, L. (2006). Can't we pick our own groups? The influence of group selection method on group dynamics and outcomes. Journal of Management Education, 30(4), 557-569.

Borges, J., Dias, T. G., & Cunha, J. F. E. (2009). A new group-formation method for student projects. European Journal of Engineering Education, 34(6), 573-585.

Hansen, R. S., & Hansen, K. (2011). The student experience in speed teaming: A new approach to team formation. Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC), 4(7).

Bacon, D. R., Stewart, K. A., & Silver, W. S. (1999). Lessons from the best and worst student team experiences: How a teacher can make the difference. Journal of Management Education, 23(5), 467-488