

# Alternatives to Promote Group Bonding

Some students who haze contend that hazing results in positive outcomes for:

- the group (e.g., increased closeness)
- the individuals who are hazed (e.g., personal growth from overcoming challenges), and
- individuals who engage in hazing (e.g., pride in continuing traditions)

However, hazing rarely—if ever—achieves these outcomes without contributing to negative consequences such as physical or mental distress. As a result, those consequences can undermine the supposed positive goals of hazing. By contrast, non-hazing activities exist that do achieve the positive outcomes while avoiding the risks of hazing.

## Positive strategies for achieving group unity

Strong group unity and a sense of individual accomplishment are important for groups to achieve throughout society. Many businesses, for example, invest considerable resources to foster effective group processes and enhance individual motivation. And they generally do so through positive, encouraging strategies that build people up rather than tearing them down.

### Try on this perspective

Let's say you believed there were positive outcomes from hazing in your organization. Now imagine that you have graduated and are in your first job as a sales representative for a major corporation. At a staff meeting, your new boss asks for your suggestions on how to strengthen the functioning of the sales team. What would you suggest?

- Would the strategies you experienced joining a group/organization/team at Cornell be something you would be proud to share?  
If you had only engaged in group-bonding activities through hazing, you may find yourself stumped by the request.
- Would you feel comfortable telling your new boss that in order to create a stronger sense of group cohesion you should consider hazing everyone in the organization?
- Wouldn't it be better if you could suggest a set of constructive, group-building strategies that you learned as a member or leader of a group while in school?



*How can you create the most positive outcomes for your group, team, or organization?*

## Failure to change ... a failure of imagination

Some members belonging to groups that haze say one of the biggest barriers to changing current practices is that they don't know what else they could do to accomplish their goals.

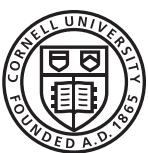
However, if their goals are to increase group unity, promote individual growth, instill positive values, and foster an identity within the group, there are plenty of alternative options.

Additionally, organizations at Cornell are known as "values-based organizations." This speaks to the notion that most university-recognized organizations are founded upon a specific set of values or morals that speak to positivity, betterment, and support. It's worth considering then is whether one's actions (and the group's actions) align with the values or morals upon which the organization was founded.

A program of activities aimed at replacing hazing will likely need to incorporate some level of challenge or intensity. It may also need to incorporate non-hazing mechanisms of self-governance for holding new members accountable to the expectations of the group.

## Is this hazing? A case study

Context matters. Some group activities can be considered hazing depending on the context in which they occur. Take a road trip for example.



Road trips can be a fun way to promote group bonding and are not inherently a form of hazing. However they could certainly become hazing if they were conducted in certain ways. Therefore, any organization taking new members on a road trip should consider the following:

- **Do the participants know they are going on a road trip?** If the answer is no, something is wrong. New members should have ample notice to prepare for a trip. They also should be able to opt out if they are unable to attend.
- **Do participants know where they are going?** If the answer is no, that's a problem; they must be told the destination. No blindfolds should be involved. Everyone should have a comfortable seat in the vehicle – (i.e., not in the trunk).
- **What's the feeling among the participants?** Strive to cultivate a respectful dynamic that includes all new members. Consider the difference between yelling or barking orders at participants and singing as a group to fun throw-backs.

It is important to remember that people are unique individuals. Everyone perceives and interprets things differently. Therefore, an activity that is fun for one person could be experienced negatively by another. It is important to consider multiple stakeholders when designing activities for your new members.

## What are the goals for new members?

Use the list of non-hazing alternatives below to help achieve the desired outcomes for new members. Remember to keep the ideas of both context and being thoughtful of how activities are actually implemented as you read through the following examples of non-hazing activities.

### Important considerations

- No one strategy works for every group. Some of the activities listed below may be more relevant to groups of a particular gender or to a particular kind of group.
- Activities cannot include consumption of alcohol or other drugs by new members.

- Traditions can be created as well as inherited. While the first year of an activity doesn't constitute a tradition, future cohorts of members will see it that way.
- Having current members participate along with new members in certain activities, such as cleaning, can shift the activity from a form of hazing (i.e., servitude) to non-hazing.
- Sorority & Fraternity Life has a fund established by Tony Cashen '57 which provides grants of up to \$300 for chapters to use for non-hazing group-building activities.

### Group bonding

- Provide the group with discussion questions. Though questions can be challenging, they should not be embarrassing or humiliating, nor should people be forced to answer. Start with simple questions or incomplete statements (e.g., "Would you rather...") and end with more probing ones (e.g., "I'm afraid that..." or "If I could start life over I would...").
- Have current members go with new members to Lake Placid for a weekend of skiing or travel to New York for a networking meeting with alumni. Rent a bus for the trip.
- Sit (comfortably) in a circle and talk (freely) by candlelight.
- Host a talent show where members from each year participate.
- Hold a movie night for all members.
- Have new members compete against older members in a "Chopped" style competition.
- Host a cooking class led by Anabel's Grocery.
- Have new members compete in basketball, volleyball, softball, or bowling against current members or other groups.
- Have new and current members compete in laser tag or paint ball.
- Host a 'TED Talks' evening, where members give TED Talks for one another.
- Hold a cookie decorating/baking night for all members.

### Instill a sense of membership

- Have new members join older members for meals 2-3 times a week. Have new members sit together and talk freely with each other. As

initiation day approaches, invite them to sit with current members once a week symbolizing their gradual entry into full membership.

- Hold study hours in which new members are expected to be present and studying with current members.
- Have new members plan an event for the entire organization. Put each new member in charge of a different task.

### Overcoming challenges as a group

- Have Cornell Outdoor Education (COE) staff lead new members through exercises at the university's state-of-the-art challenge course (or indoors at the climbing wall).
- Take new members winter camping. Plan the event with guidance and equipment from COE to ensure safety.
- Have a group of new members and current members navigate through an Escape Room.
- Organize a relay race for new and current members with different challenges (leap frog, three legged race, etc.).

### Community service & philanthropy

- Divide the new members into two groups with current members as team leaders and conduct a Collegetown clean-up.
- Serve meals once a week to homeless community members at Loaves and Fishes, or distribute food through the local food pantry.
- Require new members to perform a set amount of community service hours in support of community agencies.
- Ask members to collect money on Ho Plaza to give to a local charity.
- Have new members and selected current members spend spring break working in an underserved community building a home with Habitat for Humanity. Use the first half of the spring semester to plan the trip and learn about the community you will be serving. Have current members with construction skills conduct workshops for new members to enhance their abilities.
- Work with Cornell's Einhorn Center for Community Engagement to explore community service opportunities.

### Appreciation for history & values

- Have new members learn about the history underlying values of the organization. Divide them into groups and have them prepare presentations about the organization.
- Have new members conduct brief interviews with subsets of current members to learn about them.
- Hold new member meetings in which each new member delivers a report on his/her interviews in order to “introduce” the members who have been interviewed.
- Have current members speak about the values of the group and what they hope the new members will contribute and receive as part their experience.
- Host a “Jeopardy” night to review knowledge about the shared values and history of a group, organization, or team.

### Mentorship

Set up a “big brother/big sister” mentoring program. Assign the mentor responsibility for teaching about the values of the organization and monitoring the new member’s participation and academic performance (to ensure expectations are met). Have the mentor take the new member out to dinner or to an athletic, entertainment, or cultural event.

### Accountability practices

- Have each new member meet with his or her mentor weekly to review the new member’s knowledge of the group and its members.
- Provide written guidelines for new members outlining the expectations of the group.
- Hold new member review panels periodically in which a small group of members discusses the new member’s progress with them. If deficiencies or a lack of commitment is noted, the panel places the new member on probation.
- In serious situations, the organization determines whether or not to terminate the relationship with the new member.

### Respect for ritual and traditions

- Hold formal initiation rites that have a quality of solemnity. Formal attire, candlelight, and symbolic actions (e.g., taking an oath or signing a document) may be integrated into the ritual.
- Have current members address the new member group as part of the initiation. Have representatives from the new member group speak about the meaning of their experience.

### Resources

- **Campus Activities**  
*scl.cornell.edu/get-involved/campus-activities; activities@cornell.edu*
- **Cornell’s Hazing Website**  
*hazing.cornell.edu*
- **Cornell Outdoor Education (COE)**  
*scl.cornell.edu/coe*
- **Cornell Team and Leadership Center**  
*scl.cornell.edu/coe/ctlc*
- **Skorton Center for Health Initiatives**  
*health.cornell.edu/skortoncenter; 607-255-4782*
- **Sorority & Fraternity Life**  
*greeks@cornell.edu; sfl@cornell.edu*