



Facilitation Techniques

Get the Most Out of Brainstorming

"If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it." – Albert Einstein

Brainstorming can be used as a motivational tool that gives our young people access and input into the decision-making process, while generating new ideas and solving problems. These basic guidelines will help you use it effectively for all three.

Establish the Purpose of the Session

- Why do you want to run a brainstorming? Remember that the primary purpose of any brainstorming should be to generate many new ideas, *not* to choose a course of action.
- Keep your brainstorming session tightly focused on one clearly defined topic.
- While maintaining your focus, be sure that the discussion remains free flowing in the types of ideas (concrete and abstract) and activities (substantive and fun).
- Write down the problem or the opportunity on a flipchart and post it so it will be clear to participants.

Recognize the Importance of the Setting

- Be certain that youth and adults jointly determine the location, date and time. Youth empowerment must be built upon a foundation of respect for their schedules and other commitments.
- Choose a room where the participants will be comfortable and able to focus.
- Seats should be in a circle or a horseshoe without a head of the table.
- Provide notepads and pens for everyone, so they can write down their thoughts when others are speaking.
- Make refreshments available at a separate table. (Keep this simple and fun, and don't become so focused on refreshments and related costs that the intent of the gathering is lost.)
- The group should neither be too far from one another, nor on top of one another.

Set Ground Rules

A version of these rules should be posted in the room:

- There are no bad ideas.
- Every single idea, no matter how wild, will be considered.
- Focus only on generating ideas until the facilitator begins the evaluating phase.
- Focus on the big idea; don't worry about the details at this stage.
- Really listen to the ideas put forward by others and build on them.
- Ideas belong to the group, not to the individual.
- Respect the group and the facilitator.
- If ideas pop up while someone is speaking, write them down.

Kick off with a Warm-Up

Begin the session by brainstorming about a topic not related to the task. Have a good time with it, and encourage everyone to loosen up.

Foster Discussion

The discussion will begin with a generating phase followed by an expanding phase.

- Open the discussion by asking for as many ideas and suggestions as they can think of.
- Have one volunteer write down every single idea.
- Encourage radical ideas and any ideas that just spring to mind for no apparent reason.
- Do not panic if there is an awkward, silent period. That silence will signal that you should move back to the ideas already suggested, pick an interesting one and ask them to expand, modify or remodel it.
- When the ideas slow down, read the suggestions and begin expanding on them.

Expand Ideas

Below are different techniques for generating even more ideas once the discussion winds down.

- Break into small groups around different lists of suggestions and brainstorm around the ideas. Rotate groups to each of the lists.



- Have everyone write down an idea on a piece of paper and pass it to another person in the group to build on it. Passing should be done randomly to reduce any inhibitions.
- As facilitator, mention one idea from the list and go around the circle getting associated ideas.

Conduct Post-Session Work and Idea Analysis

The post-session work begins immediately after the “expand ideas” session.

- Collect all notes and flipcharts from the participants
- One person can conduct the analysis or it can be done in a group.
- Even if a group will analyze the ideas, one person should do an initial sorting of the ideas to remove duplicates or any ideas that are totally impractical.
- Begin the analysis process by making a comprehensive list of every idea suggested.
- Work through the long list of possible ideas, and arrange them into three lists:
 - **Excellent:** Definitely will work and can be implemented immediately.
 - **Interesting:** Could possibly work or may require more time to decide if it will work. Needs more investigating. May work in the future.
 - **Not practical:** Definitely will not work based on valid criteria such as cost, time or other constraints.
- The facilitator should be the last person to leave the room. The facilitator should take some time to collect their own thoughts on the session and make notes.

When you have the lists, the brainstorming is officially complete. Plan to implement the **excellent** ideas and to investigate the **interesting** ones.