



## Generating Ideas

### Brainstorming

“The best way to get good ideas is to have lots of ideas.” Brainstorming operates on this principle. Use brainstorming to:

- Generate many ideas in a short time.
- Encourage creative, spontaneous thinking.
- Help people temporarily suspend judgment.
- Expand or piggy-back on ideas.

Procedure:

1. Develop a problem/opportunity statement.
2. Select a group of between six and 12 participants.
3. Brief them on the nature of the problem/opportunity
4. Conduct a “warming up activity”, such as “how to get more angles to dance on the head of a pin.
5. Reinforce the rules of brainstorming:
  - Quantity is the goal.* More ideas mean more likelihood of winners.
  - Defer judgment.* Do not criticize. Evaluation comes later.
  - Be creative.* Wild ideas are great because they can lead to wilder ideas.
  - Combine and amend ideas.* Expand, consolidate, reverse.
6. Write the problem/opportunity on a chart visible to all.
7. Brainstorm solutions to the problem/opportunity, writing down all ideas.
8. After 30 minutes, stop.
9. Analyze. Establish criteria for selecting the best ideas, then evaluate each idea against those criteria.

This technique works with best with relatively simple, non-emotional issues and expressive participants.

### Brainwriting – Nominal Group Process

The purpose of the Nominal Group Process (NGP) is to generate ideas, promote participation, clarify ideas and establish group priorities.

Preparation

Assemble index cards, newsprint pads, markers, tape (for posting newsprint). Develop problem/opportunity statement or develop a question to be answered. For example, “The biggest problems facing our business are...” or “We’d be a lot better off if...”

### Nominal Phase

1. Have members work independently to generate answers to an assigned question or to complete a statement. No discussion allowed.
2. Select a person to record (on newsprint) one idea from each group member, in round-robin fashion, until all members have finished their lists.

### Open phase

3. Discuss; clarify; elaborate; add new ideas.
4. Condense or categorize.

(At this point many ideas have been generated)

### Voting phase

5. Have each member select five items (more or less, depending on time available) from the master list that they consider most critical.
6. Weight priorities, for example:
  - 5 points for most important
  - 4 points for 2<sup>nd</sup> most important
  - 3 points for 3<sup>rd</sup> most important
  - 2 points for 4<sup>th</sup> most important
  - 1 point for 5<sup>th</sup> most important

### Consensus phase

7. Have individuals vote.
8. Total scores.
9. Consensus (if possible) on priorities.
10. Further discussion if needed.

Brainwriting can be used to generate ideas as well as select the most important/feasible ideas.

### **Pin cards**

This method is a simple alternative to brainstorming. It is useful whenever a skilled leader is not available, group members are experienced in brainstorming, one member dominates the discussion, or conflict exists between two or more members. It also will help ensure equal participation in idea generation.

The basic steps:

- Five to eight people are seated around a small table.
- Each person is given a stack of large cards and a pen or marker.
- One idea is silently written on each card and passed to the right.
- The person receiving the card reads it and tries to think of any new ideas stimulated by the idea or ways to modify it.
- New ideas are written down on another card and passed to the right.
- This process of reading cards, writing down new ideas, and passing cards to the right is repeated until sufficient time has expired.
- The cards are collected and “pinned” to a wall or spread out on a large table. Categories can be used to organize the cards, such as by types of ideas or functional areas affected.
- Group members look over the cards and silently write down any new ideas that come to mind.