

Handout 2: Guide to Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be an effective way to generate lots of ideas on a specific issue and then determine which idea – or ideas – is the best solution. Brainstorming is most effective with groups of 8-12 people and should be performed in a relaxed environment. If participants feel free to relax and joke around, they'll stretch their minds further and therefore produce more creative ideas. Everyone in the group should contribute ideas.

A brainstorming session requires a facilitator, a brainstorming space and something on which to write ideas, such as a white-board a flip chart or software tool. The facilitator's responsibilities include guiding the session, encouraging participation and writing ideas down.

Brainstorming works best with a varied group of people. Participants should come from various departments across the organization and have different backgrounds. Even in specialist areas, outsiders can bring fresh ideas that can inspire the experts.

Creativity exercises, relaxation exercises or other fun activities before the session can help participants relax their minds so that they will be more creative during the brainstorming session.

Step by Step

1. Define your problem or issue as a creative challenge. Creative challenges typically start with: "In what ways might we...?" or "How could we...?"
2. Give yourselves a time limit. We recommend around 25 minutes. Larger groups may need more time to get everyone's ideas out. Alternatively, give yourself an idea limit. At minimum, push for 50 ideas. But 100 ideas is even better.
3. Once the brainstorming starts, participants shout out solutions to the problem while the facilitator writes them down – usually on a white board or flip-chart for all to see. There must be absolutely no criticizing of ideas. No matter how daft, how impossible or how silly an idea is, it must be written down. Laughing is to be encouraged. Criticism is not.
4. Once your time is up, select the five ideas which you like best. Make sure everyone involved in the brainstorming session is in agreement.
5. Write down five criteria for judging which ideas best solve your problem. Criteria should start with the word "should", for example, "it should be cost effective", "it should be legal", "it should be possible to finish before July 15".
6. Give each idea a score of 0 to 5 points depending on how well it meets each criterion. Once all of the ideas have been scored for each criterion, add up the scores.
7. The idea with the highest score will best solve your problem. But you should keep a record of all of your best ideas and their scores in case your best idea turns out not to be workable.

The Step by Step Guide to Brainstorming by Jeffrey Baumgartner. Retrieved from <http://www.jpjb.com/creative/brainstorming.php>