

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an activity designed to help groups generate many ideas and suggestions in a short time. You can use brainstorming to identify program ideas, group slogans, develop publicity, group goals, or to problem solve. The purpose is to get your members thinking creatively, in order to identify some new and innovative ideas. Brainstorming is a great way to get your members more involved in the decision making process.

First – Set the Stage...

1. Set a time limit - 10 to 30 minutes, depending upon the size of your group and the complexity of the issue. Some groups require more time while other groups require less time.
2. The ideal group size is 3 - 15 people. If you have more, think about breaking into two or more smaller groups and brainstorming simultaneously.
3. The question, problem, idea or issue must be one to which all participants can freely speak. Also, focus on one issue per brainstorming session only.
4. Record all responses on a blackboard or on big sheets of newsprint so that everyone can see them. Don't record the name of the person suggesting an idea, but instead record what they are actually saying. Remember to record key words, ideas and phrases only. Do not record word for word.

Second – Explain the “Rules of Brainstorming”...

1. List ideas rather than discussing them.
2. Don't criticize, praise, or judge. Brainstorming is meant to be a non-judgmental technique.
3. Be spontaneous - no hand raising, just call out. Brainstorming is controlled chaos.
4. Repetitions are OK.
5. Quantity counts and is more important than quality in this instance.
6. Build on each other's ideas.
7. Enjoy the silences - often the best ideas come out of them because more reflection is used.
8. It's OK to be outrageous, even silly. Brainstorming is meant to be an enjoyable experience.

Third – Make Good Use of Your Members' Creativity...

1. Let everyone read each other's ideas, especially if several groups were used to brainstorm the same idea.
2. Group ideas into related categories for review.
3. Let the group decide which ideas are most promising and which can be eliminated.
4. Rank in order the most promising.
5. Select those with the greatest potential and high-ranking priority for either implementation or refinement by committee.
6. Be sure to utilize the ideas generated. It is extremely demoralizing for a group to invest its time, energy, and creativity only to have its ideas disappear. However, if your group

members see their ideas implemented it will be an extremely rewarding and motivating experience for them.

Helpful Hints

Using brainstorming with a group that is unfamiliar with the concept can be difficult. To help break the ice, form a circle and have each person very quickly name something in a category like “the most unusual names to describe basic colors.” This should get your group ready to brainstorm. Other types of brainstorming come in the form of ‘break the ice ’ in an effort to get ideas and energy flowing in groups.