

Effective Engagement: building relationships
with community and other stakeholders

Book 3 the engagement toolkit



3.2 Brainstorming

Description:

Brainstorming is a method for developing creative solutions to problems. It works by focusing on a problem, and then having participants come up with as many deliberately unusual solutions as possible and by pushing the ideas as far as possible. During the brainstorming session there is no criticism of ideas – the idea is to open up as many possibilities as possible, and break down preconceptions about the limits of the problem. Once this has been done the results of the brainstorming session can be analysed and the best solutions can be explored either using further brainstorming or more conventional solutions.

Brainstorming is useful in warming up a workshop and creating a sense of unity between workshop participants by 'breaking the ice' between them.⁴

Objectives:

Brainstorming aims to develop the broadest possible range of creative options, to evaluate these, and to select the best.

Outcomes:

Brainstorming will offer better solutions to a community issue or proposal because a wider range of options has been canvassed.

Uses/strengths:

- Can encourage creative solutions.
- Can serve as a warm-up exercise.
- Can replace conventional participation tools where such tools are inappropriate.
- Can assist in developing unity between participants.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- Ideas are unrestrained and may not be achievable.
- Sessions may be difficult to record.

- Realistic outcomes are not guaranteed.
- Allow time to engage jury and facilitator, put together briefing papers and contact 'experts'.
- Jury can take up to four days to consider its 'verdict'.

Resources required:

- Whiteboard, butchers paper or projector
- Pens, markers
- Venue large enough for comfort
- Facilitator

Can be used for:

- Engage community
- Discover community issues

Number of people required to help organise:

- Large (> 12 people)
- Medium (2–12 people)
- Individual

Audience size:

- Large (> 30)
- Medium (11–30)
- Small (≤ 10)

Time required:

- Short (< 6 weeks)

Skill level/support required:

- Low (No special skills)

Cost:

- Low (< AUD\$1,000)

Participation level:

- High (Stakeholders participate in decision)

Innovation level:

- Low (Traditional)

Method:

1. Select participants from as wide a range of disciplines with as broad a range of experience as possible. This brings many more creative ideas to the session.

2. Select a leader for the session, who can:
 - 2.1. Outline any criteria that must be met.
 - 2.2. Keep the session on course.
 - 2.3. Encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among brainstormers.
 - 2.4. Encourage participation by all.
3. Set times for the whole brainstorming session, and for generating ideas.
4. Keep fresh ideas coming, and welcome creativity.
5. Do not allow any one train of thought to dominate for too long.
6. Do not criticise or evaluate during the brainstorming session (criticism stifles creativity and spoils the fun).
7. Record ideas no matter how unrealistic, until there are no more ideas, or the time allocated for generating ideas is up.
8. Record all ideas on a whiteboard or projector so that all participants can see all the ideas.
9. Encourage 'spark off' associations from other people's ideas, or combinations of ideas.
10. Either evaluate solutions at the end of the brainstorming session to agree on the most practical way forward, or record the session either as notes, tape recording or video for later evaluation.

References:

- De Bono, E (1992) *Serious creativity*, Harper Business, New York
- <http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html> [accessed 07/06/2005]

⁴ <http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html> [accessed 07/06/2005].