



BRAINSTORMING

The most frequently used technique for group decision-making is *Brainstorming*. It is the foundation for many other techniques and the basis for creative problem-solving. In brainstorming, people in the group freely exchange ideas and generate lists in response to an open-ended question. An example of a question that might be used in brainstorming is, “What are possible ways we might raise money to support the 4-H awards program?” Participants try to generate as many ideas as possible, often building or piggybacking on a comment or idea from another participant. This supports creativity and leads to expanded possibilities. This is a fast way of getting ideas on the table (or flip chart) in a short period of time.

When To Use *Brainstorming*:

- When you want to generate a larger number of ideas or gather a lot of information for decision-making, priority setting or planning.
- When you want all participants to contribute freely.
- When you want to inspire creativity.

Guidelines for Conducting the *Brainstorming* Activity:

1. ***Clearly Frame an Open-ended Question.*** Design the question to generate a lot of ideas. Make sure participants understand the question being addressed and the purpose and background of the activity.

For example: “The 4-H program needs \$1500 to purchase ribbons, pins, trophies, etc., and to cover the costs of other expenses associated with their awards program. Tonight we are going to explore possible fund raising activities or events that we might conduct to raise this money. **What are your ideas for possible ways we might raise money to support the 4-H awards program?**”

2. ***Do Not Censure or Make Judgments About Any Ideas.*** State to the group in the very beginning that all ideas are welcome, including those we might consider outlandish or off-the-wall. These often stimulate the best contributions from the group. The major no-no in brainstorming is making judgments about ideas as they are shared. Such comments as, “That won’t work” or “We tried that five years ago and lost money,” will stifle creativity and discourage participation.

3. **List All Ideas Generated on a Flip Chart.** Ideas listed should be in view of all participants. List as rapidly as possible. Encourage all participants to call out ideas without being called upon. Write down every idea, no matter how wild or ridiculous.
4. **Encourage Hitchhiking.** Tell participants to build on other ideas that are suggested. Hitchhiking often results in the best ideas. Think outside the box and draw ideas from literature, science, or yesterday's breakfast. Connect ideas that are seemingly unrelated.
5. **Focus on Quantity.** The more ideas the better chance of generating creative, workable ideas. Go to a new sheet of flip chart paper before the page is completely full. A full page indicates the end of the task and stifles contributions.
6. **Stay Loose.** Don't force people to contribute. A free and open environment supports creativity and leads to the best outcome.
7. **The Best Comes Last.** Often the best, most creative ideas come at the end of the *brainstorming* session. Frequently, after an initial burst of ideas there will be a time of silence. Allow the group to be silent for a moment. Most of the time additional ideas will begin flowing and this will generate the eventual solution to the question.

~Adapted from A.F. Osborn, *Applied Imagination*. Old Tappan, NJ: Scribner's, 1963.