

Brainstorming Techniques

Brainstorming is a team-based tool for quickly capturing diverse information, ideas, and perspectives.

For a problem solving project, brainstorming is used to identify possible contributors or causes of a problem and to identify possible solutions to the problem. When brainstorming use methods that balance contributions from introverts and extroverts, that make sense for the group you are with, and topic you are discussing.

Introduction: What kind of brainstorming techniques have you experienced before?

There are many types of brainstorming! Here are just a few examples:

Technique	Description	How it's used
<i>Silent</i>	<i>Write down ideas first, then share</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives everyone the opportunity to think over ideas • Helpful when there are introverted participants • Works best for teams who seem to be greatly influenced by the first ideas presented to them
<i>Open/Popcorn</i>	<i>Call out ideas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates lots of ideas quickly • Allows for fast collaboration • Favors extroverts
<i>Structured</i>	<i>Provide themes for brainstormed ideas (e.g. equipment/tools, communications, procedures, environment, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates a collection of ideas with regards to a particular issue or problem • Helps to come up with ideas to achieve a certain topic/goal at hand
<i>Reverse</i>	<i>Brainstorm how to make matters worse</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful when it is difficult to identify solutions to the problem directly • Good for creative problem solving and can lead to robust solutions
<i>Analogy</i>	<i>Relate a story to the issue(s) at hand, draw on parallels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to generate solutions that may not have been otherwise thought of • Good for discovering things you had not realized about your own situation and thus enables you to develop solutions based upon them

No matter what style of brainstorming you do, there should always be ground rules established before starting. Here are some general brainstorming rules:

- Rapid generation is the aim — strive for quantity
- Be creative — there is no such thing as “wild” or “bad” idea²
- Defer judgement
- Clarify, combine, and build on ideas

Brainstorming Practice:

Method 1: Silent

Topic: What are all of the uses for a 2-liter bottle?

Method 2: Popcorn

Topic: What would your agency’s Mascot be?

Method 3: Reverse

Topic: A restaurant wants to improve their customer’s experience. What are all the ways we could make their experience worse?

- Example: We want to improve a patient’s office experience. Here are some reverse ideas:
 - Double book appointments.
 - Remove the chairs from the waiting room.
 - Put patients who phone on hold (and forget about them).
 - Have patients wait outside in the car park.
 - Discuss patient's problems in public.

Discussion: When would it be good to use these methods and when not?

Your Challenge:

- Try one of these techniques with your team/unit to generate ideas or solve a problem.
- Report back to us on how it went!
- We can showcase your improvement activity in our CI Newsletter!

Session Notes:

Continuous Improvement Training, Resources, and Newsletter:

- Go to the Department of Administration website and click on Continuous Improvement at the bottom of the page:

<http://mn.gov/admin/government/continuous-improvement/>

- Go to Resources:

<http://mn.gov/admin/continuous-improvement/resources/>

- See the Training that's available!

<http://mn.gov/admin/continuous-improvement/skills-development/>

We offer three standard courses: Introduction to CI, Problem Solving, and Process Improvement Measurement. Our training programs equip Minnesota's state government workforce with the tools of continuous improvement. Courses are offered for public sector employees only and are **free** of charge. Sign-up through Self-Service.

We also offer CI training to your project teams and work units. Contact us for details!

- Sign-up for our CI Newsletter:

<http://mn.gov/admin/continuous-improvement/resources/newsletter/>