

## Brainstorming – but not as you know it!

Most facilitated sessions/ meetings aim to gather and organise information to help a group get to the heart of a particular issue. Tools and techniques can be invaluable in helping you to achieve your objective and supporting the process. However, it is important that you are clear about what the group are trying to achieve, the stages they will need to go through to get there and the kind of information that needs to be discussed at each stage.

Remember that *asking the right question* can be your most powerful tool.

***Do consider the tip about allowing thinking time first – it can create more ideas, focus and energy!***

### How to use

- Identify the question relating to the topic & note on a flip chart (so that everyone can see)
- Encourage group to generate ideas quickly by
  - First spending a minute or so jotting down their ideas on a piece of paper – encourage them to go for as many ideas as they can and include seemingly wild or crazy thoughts. The emphasis is on ideas generation. Take an idea from each person in turn and note it on the flip chart until you have the full list
- Check for additional thoughts and ideas
- Facilitator should be neutral and should focus on:
  - Setting and keeping to time
  - Ensuring that the group avoids evaluating ideas (this comes later) – all ideas are good ideas
  - Encouraging the group – (e.g. “what else?” “Good! – some more?”)
  - Writing up what the person says accurately (not what you think!)
  - Asking questions to clarify what they mean, note additional information
- Group size 5-11 is best

### Useful for:

- Capturing lots of ideas quickly
- Can generate creative ideas that would otherwise be dismissed
- Opening up discussion in early stages
- Involving the group

### Watch out for:

- Any evaluation during the ideas generation stage – keep the focus on coming up with ideas rather than commenting on each other’s ideas which can stop the flow of ideas
- Breadth/ creativity of ideas (people can tend to ‘piggyback’)
- Involving everyone (even the quiet people)
- Dismissing off the wall ideas (could these be modified?)
- Allowing enough time to categorise/ sort the ideas

### *Tips and Alternative approaches*

- Brainstorm using post-it notes to give people more time to reflect/think - though this can then be difficult for others to see.
- ***Pose the question and allow people thinking time in pairs. Ask them to take 2 minutes each way. Note that this isn't a discussion, one person talks (even if they are silent for a while they have uninterrupted time to think through their ideas) and the other person gives them their full attention, keeping their eyes on their eyes and staying focussed on and interested in their partner's thinking. After 2 minutes they swap. You can then move to gathering ideas.***

### *Why give people time to brainstorm on their own first?*

- It's a speedy way of generating lots of ideas and our experience you get both greater quantity and range of ideas. It also avoids piggy backing – the situation that occurs when peoples' thinking is influenced by what someone else has said and goes along the same lines.

[alyse@eye2eyedev.com](mailto:alyse@eye2eyedev.com)

07760 176777

[uk.linkedin.com/in/alyseashtoneye2eye](https://uk.linkedin.com/in/alyseashtoneye2eye)

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