

4 Better Brainstorming Techniques

BRAINSTORMING IN A BOX

Used extensively by the social design firm ThinkPlace, this method is often more productive than convention open-ended brainstorming because it applies *more* constraints on ideas, not fewer. If your group wants to generate great ideas fast, try adding some constraints and giving people a short amount of time.

“Working in groups of 3, you have 10 minutes to generate 10 high-quality ideas. Every idea must:

1. Be “prototype-able” within 6 months
2. Have a measurable impact
3. Make a BIG difference
4. Require NO resources beyond what we have

BRAINWRITING

Developed in the last 1960’s by Bernd Rohrbach, brainwriting engages all participants more fully in the brainstorming process. Brainwriting combines the benefits of quiet reflection AND building on others’ ideas, which can produce better-quality ideas, especially in groups with many introverts or people not used to brainstorming.

Here’s our version: Begin with each participant or small groups of participants in front of flip chart paper on the wall. Have everyone silently add their ideas to the sheet in front of them. After a few minutes, have the individual or small groups shift to the next sheet, read the ideas there, and add to these. After 10 to 15 minutes, walk the whole group around the room, and have the group “harvest” their favorite ideas from the long lists.

CONSTELLATION MAPPING

Developed by CoCreative, this process is a powerful way to analyze a problem and generate feasible solutions simultaneously. The technique uses three colors of Post-it notes (we like the large hexagonal notes from Thinkintools.net). While considering the challenge at hand, each participant writes down one item per note:

- Each red note should have a specific *Problem* related to the larger challenge,
 - Each green note should have a specific *Opportunity* for addressing the issue are put on green notes,
 - Each blue note should have a specific *Resource* that the participant can mobilize to positively affect the issue.
- Each participant generates as many of each type of note as possible and posts it on the wall. Once people post all their resources, problems and opportunities, we then collaboratively connect the notes into clusters and stories.

BRAINSWARMING

Developed by Dr. Tony McCaffrey, this simple technique appeals to different thinking styles and creates very feasible ideas by connecting problems to solutions. Write a goal or problem at the top of a large sheet, then write the major resources available to meet these problems at the bottom, and then invite participants to add ideas for tackling the problem from either end, making relevant connections between problems and resources as you go.

