

4 Brainstorming Techniques

BRAINSTORMING IN A BOX

Used extensively by CoCreative's partner 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 is looking for quick wins, for example, try a variation on the following instructions for Brainstorming in a Box:

“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 is a simple technique to engage all participants more fully in the brainstorming process. Brainwriting has the benefits of quiet reflection while also building on others' ideas, which can produce better-quality ideas for groups with many introverts or non-professionals.

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 Thinkingtools.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 have posted all their resources, problems and opportunities, we then start to connect the notes into clusters.

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.

