

Brainstorming Techniques



a program of the Jane Goodall Institute

There are many ways to get group members to share their ideas with each other. The following brainstorm techniques will help you create a list of problem areas/project ideas in order to select the project(s) your group will conduct. Remember to always include the Rules of Brainstorming before starting the discussion:

Rules of Brainstorming

- No idea is too big, too small, too silly or too strange.
- Make no comments on others' ideas or your own, just share them. There will be time for opinions later.
- Everyone deserves a chance to say something. Please pay attention to others' ideas.

Materials to Have on Hand for Brainstorming

- Chart paper or other large paper
- Markers
- Smaller pieces of paper for small groups (8.5 x 11 or smaller)
- Tape
- Guiding questions

Full Group Brainstorm

1. Gather everyone into a big circle or in one space. Explain that the group will be coming up with a list of possible projects to do in the community.
2. Guiding questions to ask:
 - What bothered you as you were learning about our community? What can we do about it?
 - What problems do you see in our community that you would like to do something about?
 - What kind of projects do you see other groups/organizations doing that you would like to help with?
3. As the group members say their ideas, write them all down on the board or on a sheet of paper big enough for them all to see. Depending upon the size of your group, you may need to have them raise their hands. You can also have a group member do this scribing if s/he would like.

Small Group Brainstorm

1. Gather the group together and explain that you are going to be coming up with a list of project ideas to implement in your community.
2. Divide the group into smaller groups of four or less. Give each small group a piece of paper and have members record their ideas.
Possible guided questions:
 - What are some things our group can do to help the community?
 - If you could do anything to help the local environment/animals/human community what would it be?
3. Give them about 15 minutes to write down all their ideas. Travel around among the groups to see how they are doing and ask a few more guiding questions if it looks like they are getting stuck. Remind them to think about the surveys, studies and interviews they did.
4. Gather all the small groups back together into a big group and have each group read back what it came up with. Write all of the ideas down on a big piece of paper or the board.

Carousel Brainstorm

1. Gather the group together and explain that you are going to be coming up with a list of project ideas to implement in your community.
2. Put three big pieces of paper around the room. Label each one with a different project area—Animals, Environment, Human Community for example. Give everyone in the group a marker or other writing utensil. Have them go around the room and write their project ideas on the appropriate sheets of paper. Give them about 20 minutes to do this. Encourage them to go to all of the different areas so that all of their ideas get written down. If someone has already written down his/her idea, tell him/her to place a star next to it as a way to say, "I agree."
3. Gather the group members back together and read the papers out loud so that all have a chance to hear the different ideas. Ask the group for clarification if something listed is a bit unclear.

Popcorn Brainstorm

1. Gather the group together and explain that you are going to be coming up with a list of project ideas to implement in your community.
2. Give everyone a few pieces of paper and have him/her write a project idea on each one. Pass around a hat or bowl and have everyone crumple or fold the papers and put them in the bowl. After everyone has put them in, bring the bowl back and read the ideas one at a time. Write them up on the board or a big piece of paper so that everyone can see.

Sample Project Brainstorm—5th grade

Local Issues Brainstorm Results: students being mean to each other, messy school grounds, graffiti on school walls and in bathrooms, kids being rude to teachers, teachers not listening to kids, teachers not treating kids fairly, cheating, feeling left out of other kids' plans (cliques), wearing the "right" clothes

Project Topic: Increase Sense of School Community

Project Idea Brainstorm Results: make a school garden, leader of the month program, classroom buddy program, monthly pizza parties, school carnival

Project Implementation Steps:

- Decide what Classroom Buddy Program will look like
- Give presentations to classrooms to explain program
- Get classrooms to sign up and match them with their buddies
- Hold an assembly where buddy classrooms sit together and talk about what they want to do together
- Check in on buddy classrooms monthly
- Have a pizza/ice cream party at the end of the year to celebrate with all the participating classrooms