

ToP Brainstorming Design Pattern

The Big Picture	
Name	Brainstorming
Overview	Individuals brainstorm in response to a focus question and small groups select key ideas to bring to the whole group.
Metaphor	Harvesting Ideas It's like bending wild rice stems over the canoe and shaking them to release the ripe grain. (Direct translation from a Cree name for the pattern.)
Graphic	
Level of thinking	Objective level
Pattern of Collaboration	Generative thinking
Role	Individual brainstorming enables each person to begin the group process with some ideas. It makes for more even participation. The group brainstorm processes the ideas at a very basic level focused on basic understanding and elimination of overlap.
Best uses	This initiates and elicits participation from every member of the group.. The brainstorm provides the foundation for the workshop. It gets out a broad spectrum of the thoughts of the group.
Do not use	When participants' ideas are not wanted or respected, or only a few people are seen to be capable of answers.
Group size	Up to 40 participants without modification
Space needs	
Timeframe	About 20 minutes. It can be extended. It should not be extended to more than 30 minutes total.

Objectives	
Rational Aim	The group will create a list of responses to the focus question to be used in subsequent stages of the workshop.
Experiential Aim	I can get my real ideas into this process. This is getting me reved up to participate more deeply.
Product	A list of 35 - 60 brainstormed ideas written on cards in preparation for the next step in the process.

Script	
Context	<p>(See the context design pattern.)</p> <p>In this step, will do 3 things. Brainstorm our own ideas individually Highlight our best ideas Brainstorm in small groups</p> <p>We will then, in the whole group, cluster all the ideas, name each cluster and discuss the results.</p> <p>Provide sub-questions, examples, etc. as appropriate to catalyze richer brainstorming.</p>
Procedures	<p>Individual Brainstorm Our first step in brainstorming will be to work individually. Please make a list of all your ideas in response to this question. You will have 5 minutes for this step. Let us do this work in silence.</p> <p>Select Now we will select our top ideas. Please put a star * beside your 3 best ideas. You will have 2 minutes for this step.</p> <p>Group Brainstorm We will now move into groups of 2-4 people and capture our brainstorm.</p> <p>In your groups: Going around the group, share one idea at a time. Clarify the ideas if necessary. It is not necessary that group members agree with each idea. Honour the diversity of ideas. Eliminate overlap – if you have exactly the same idea, you need only write it once. Write each idea on a card using large block letters. You will have 10 minutes for this step.</p>
Groundrules	<p>Individual brainstorming needs to be done in silence Group brainstorming needs to preserve the diversity of thought in the group Group members need not agree on each idea Maintain specificity – do not combine ideas to create a larger concept</p>

Using this design pattern in a face to face environment	
Materials	Note paper, pencils, non-toxic broad-nib markers, 5” by 8” markers, possibly flipchart
Atmosphere	Silence for individual thinking, followed by busy small group talking.
Preparation	<p>Do the math to ensure 35-60 cards from the whole group.</p> <p>To determine the number of cards from each small group: Decide the total number of ideas you want in the workshop – between 35-60. Divide the total number of cards by the number of small groups (2-4 people each) to determine the number of ideas from each small group. For example: I want 60 ideas. The group is 24 people I will divide them into 8 groups of 3. $60 \text{ divided by } 8 = 7\text{-}8 \text{ ideas per group.}$</p> <p>Count out cards.</p>
Challenges	<p>Do not use this form of brainstorming if the ideas will not be discussed and processed by the group. Modify this approach to brainstorming with very large groups of over 40 members.</p> <p>In some groups, participants tend to want to think together. They may not be confident in coming up with ideas without some immediate feedback. Encourage at least 2 minutes of silence before talking with others.</p>
Tips	<p>Providing participants with a few examples of appropriate responses at the beginning, or a few sub-questions, will help them develop quality ideas. It gives the participants an image of the level of specificity.</p> <p>Use cue cards for guiding writing on cards: One Idea per Card, Large Block Letters, 3-5 Words per Card, Concrete / Specific, Preserve the diversity of your ideas; only eliminate overlap</p>
Modifications	<p>If a group is too small to sub-divide (i.e. under 6 people), eliminate the “group brainstorm” step. Ask individuals to brainstorm a substantial number of ideas, select their best ideas and write them on cards.</p> <p>If the group is larger than 40 people, have small groups of 5 or larger, and have them go round the group and get a flipchart list of each person’s brainstormed ideas one at a time. Then discuss and cluster just enough to pick the required number of unique ideas to write on cards.</p>
Example	<p>A group of 20 mental health professionals wanted to determine what to include in mental health programming. The focus question was, “What elements do we need to include in our programs in order to serve the needs of our clients?”</p> <p>For this workshop, it was determined that the maximum brainstorm of 60 ideas was needed. The group was divided into 5 groups of 4 people. Each group was asked to present 12 ideas to the whole group.</p>

	<p>The context for this workshop included presentations on program consolidation by the ministry of health as well as conversations about the clientele and their mental health situation and needs.</p> <p>Individuals then brainstormed program elements they felt were necessary. They selected their best ideas and shared them in small groups. In practice, some of the groups brainstormed more than 12 ideas and one group brainstormed less. The result was a good spectrum of their thought in relation to the essential elements of mental health programming for the area.</p>
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Using this design pattern in a virtual environment	
Virtual Tools	
Modifications	
Preparation	
Challenges	
Tips	
Example	

Virtual Script	
Pre-event preparation	

Technology introduction	
Context	
Instructions	
Ground Rules	