

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a way to generate new ideas and to encourage all members to contribute to the direction of the group. It's a process that builds members' investment and participation in the organization.

The key to successful brainstorming is to suspend judgment when gathering ideas. All ideas are welcomed and recorded. No questioning or criticism takes place. Once all ideas are gathered, the group can discuss, prioritize, and consider taking action.

Gathering Ideas

- The group agrees on a question or topic that would benefit from everyone's input. It could be, "What kind of Fall Reception do we want to have?" or "What is our assessment of the campus climate?"
- Write the question or topic on the board or flipchart paper so it's visible to everyone.
- A facilitator invites everybody to voice their opinions.
- As each idea is spoken, the facilitator writes it on the board/paper. The response should be written to match the person's words as closely as possible.
- If necessary, the facilitator can ask questions to clarify, but without any judgment.
- If someone else makes a discouraging remark or questions the idea, the facilitator can remind the group that in this round there are no critiques.
- The facilitator keeps encouraging and inviting each person to participate. When the group agrees that all ideas have been spoken, the list is closed.

Discussion

- The group is invited to read over the list.
- The facilitator encourages members to ask questions of any idea that is not clear to them so that the group can vote on the list.

Voting

- The facilitator lets the group know that if some are not chosen or prioritized, they may be considered in the future. (The list should be kept with the group's minutes.)
- The ideas are counted and each member gets a certain number of votes. A good formula is to take the total number of ideas and divide it by three. (If there are 30 ideas, each member gets 10 votes.) This formula was developed by a non-profit; see *The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making* on the Reference page.
- The facilitator gives members time to decide. Members can then mark their choices on the board/paper.
- *Optional:* The group may agree on criteria for members to consider when voting. For example, the group may be asked to consider how much money a Fall Reception idea could cost.

Prioritizing

- The votes are counted and marked with the number of votes received.
- The group now has a list of ideas in order of importance or preference by the group.
- The next step is to discuss the ideas with the most votes and whether or not the group wants to take action on any of the ideas.

This Activity Sheet was written by staff and student leaders of SOMeCA. The concepts and tips have been developed through application and reflection.