



How To Brainstorm Apart

The following is an overview of the process, including tips about how to make each step work effectively.

1. It all starts with a **problem you need to solve**. Identify the problem before you take any additional steps.
2. **Identify 5-7 people who would like to help solve the problem.**
 - Get people from all parts of the process so that you get various perspectives.
 - It can also be helpful to include people from outside the process who might have a completely fresh take on the topic.
 - This group will be referred to as 'the team' from here forward.
3. **Educate the team on the problem from various perspectives.**
 - Identify what you want the team to know about this problem.
 - This might mean inviting someone outside the team to attend and provide their perspective.
 - You do not want this to be an in-depth analysis of current state. The idea here is to give everyone on the team an understanding of the process, its challenges, and its value without making them an expert of getting bogged down in details.
 - Each person should be limited to 15-20 minutes.
 - Each person who presents should have a unique perspective on the process.
4. As the presentations are being made, the team should **write down the interesting questions or ideas they have about what is being presented**. The idea here is that, as the team listens to the presenter, each member will have thoughts or questions come to mind that they'll want to capture.
5. Once the presentations are finished, **the questions from the team are put in front of the team and voted on**. Based on the votes, the team decides which question is going to be tackled by the group.
6. The team disbands with homework. The homework is to **draw out your individual solution to the question**.
 - Each person on the team works alone.
 - Each person is going to have their own approach to the problem and it gets drawn in a manner that will help the rest of the team understand it.
 - The solution should be at a high level; no need to try and address the tactical items
7. The team comes back together and **each person presents their drawing**, representing their solution to the question.
8. Once all the drawings have been presented, **the team votes** so that one or two of the drawings float to the top as a potential solution to the problem.
9. The group **decides next steps** and carries out whatever steps are required to implement the solution selected.

As the organizer of the brainstorming session, you have some additional responsibilities. The following are some tactical tips and activities that you will need to complete in addition to the process outlined above:

1. Make sure you are clear about the problem you want help solving. As you go through the process, it is likely that people will have questions or that the team will have a tendency to wonder off into other topics. Being clear in your own mind will help you manage through the process.
2. As you identify the 5-7 people who will make up the brainstorming team, you'll need to reach out to each of them to validate that they are interested in participating. This will require about 8-10 hours of their time, so you want to make sure that you have their buy-in before you consider them part of the team.
3. You'll need to identify the topics for the presentations that will help educate the project team, and then identify the best person to deliver each presentation. As with above, you'll need to reach out to the presenters and ask them to participate. In this case, they will need time to prepare their presentation in advance of the brainstorming session, so ensure that you do this far enough in advance. Note: it is ok to have a project team member also present. However, you may have some presenters who are not part of the project team.
4. Once you have your list of presenters, determine the best order for them to be presented. This becomes your agenda for the 1st part of the brainstorming session.
5. When you are scheduling the session, you'll need to schedule 3 meetings. The first should be a 2-3 hour block for introducing the project, listening to the presentations, and voting on the question the team will tackle. The second should be 90-120 minutes for homework. Although the homework will be done apart, if you don't block the time on the team's calendar, they may struggle to find time to complete the homework within the timeline. The third invite is for the final presentations of homework, and voting on the solution that the team feels should move forward.
6. Determine how you will logistically accumulate questions and vote on them. If you will meet in person, you just need to have sticky notes to pass out to everyone. You can use an empty wall to organize the questions into categories. You also need to determine how people will vote. A set of multi-colored round stickers can work, or you can have everyone add a star to the sticky notes. If you are doing it virtually, you'll need to consider what tools you have available to you.
7. You will be responsible for leading the team through the voting process. You are looking to gain consensus on which question the team will work on solving. If there is not an obvious winner from the initial vote, it may make sense to look at the top 2-3 vote getters and either conduct another vote or discuss among the group to see if there is a topic that, if solved, would make the greatest impact on the problem.
8. As the team disbands for the individual homework, you should give them guidelines. Drawing their solution is not an art contest. People do not need to worry about their artistic ability. The drawing should be at a high enough level that it conveys the solution, but does not go into tactical detail. If this is being done virtually, you will need to give the team instructions about where to post their picture once it is complete. If this is being done in person, they will bring the picture with them, and you'll need a method of posting it on a wall for everyone to see.
9. As the pictures are presented, you will serve as a time keeper to ensure that each person has time to present their drawing. There is a tendency for the team to want to deep dive and solve the problem, and it is your job to keep them from doing this—at least until everyone's ideas have been shared.
10. When it comes time to vote on the solutions, give people the option to vote on a full solution or parts of the solution that they particularly liked.
11. You brought this group together to help you brainstorm ideas for solving a problem. At the end of this process, you will have a candidate for solving that problem. It is now your responsibility to figure out what next steps will be needed in order to implement the solution. It may or may not involve people from this team.