Brainstorm

Energize your team and drum up a staggering amount of innovative ideas.

At IDEO.org, we use Brainstorms to tap into a broad body of knowledge and creativity. Over the course of your project you should do them not only with your design team, but also with partners and the people you're designing for. Refer to Brainstorm Rules (p. 95) for the specifics of what makes for a fruitful brainstorm, but remember that the best policy is to promote openness, lots of ideas, and creativity over immediate feasibility. Brainstorms work best when the group is positive, optimistic, and focused on generating as many ideas as possible.

STEPS

TIME
30-60 minutes

DIFFICULTY
Moderate

WHAT YOU'LL NEED
Pens, Post-its, a large sheet of paper or whiteboard

PARTICIPANTS
Design team, partners, community members

01 | Pass out pens and Post-its to everyone and have a large piece of paper, wall, or whiteboard on which to stick them.

02 | Review the Brainstorm Rules before you start.

03 | Pose the question or prompt you want the group to answer. Even better if you write it down and put it at the top of the paper, wall, or whiteboard.

04 | As each person has an idea, have her describe to the group as she puts her Post-it on the wall or board.

05 | Generate as many ideas as possible.

Brainstorm Rules

At IDEO.org we have seven little rules that unlock the creative power of a brainstorming session.

We've all been in Brainstorms (p. 94) that went nowhere. At IDEO.org, the goal isn't a perfect idea, it's lots of ideas, collaboration, and openness to wild solutions. The last thing you want in a Brainstorm is someone who, instead of coming up with ideas, only talks about why the ones already mentioned won't work. Not only does that kill creativity, but it shifts the group's mindset from a generative one to a critical one. The only way to get to good ideas is to have lots to choose from.

STEPS

TIME
5 minutes for review before a Brainstorm

DIFFICULTY
Easy

WHAT YOU'LL NEED
Print out the Brainstorm Rules

PARTICIPANTS
Design team, any partners or people you're designing for who are relevant

01 | **Defer judgement.** You never know where a good idea is going to come from. The key is to make everyone feel like they can say the idea on their mind and allow others to build on it.

02 | **Encourage wild ideas.** Wild ideas can often give rise to creative leaps. When devising ideas that are wacky or out there, we tend to imagine what we want without the constraints of technology or materials.

03 | **Build on the ideas of others.** Being positive and building on the ideas of others take some skill. In conversation, we try to use " yes, and…" instead of "but."

04 | **Stay focused on the topic.** Try to keep the discussion on target, otherwise you may diverge beyond the scope of what you're trying to design for.

05 | **One conversation at a time.** Your team is far more likely to build on an idea and make a creative leap if everyone is paying full attention.

06 | **Be visual.** In Brainstorms we put our ideas on Post-its and then put them on a wall. Nothing gets an idea across faster than a sketch.

07 | **Go for quantity.** Aim for as many new ideas as possible. In a good session, up to 100 ideas are generated in 60 minutes. Crank the ideas out quickly and build on the best ones.