

Brainstorming Guidelines

Brainstorming has very few rules, but those few are absolute.

1. **Gate keeping:** The facilitator should ask for contributions from each team member to ensure everyone with a thought is heard. It is not necessary to ask each person on each issue, just make sure that throughout the entire session, everyone has contributed.

2. **Neutral Words of Encouragement:** When an idea is given, the facilitator should say something to the effect, "That's an idea, what's another one?" To something off the wall and said in obvious jest, you might respond with: "That would be an interesting approach, who has another idea?" And so on, continuing to elicit ideas from the team.

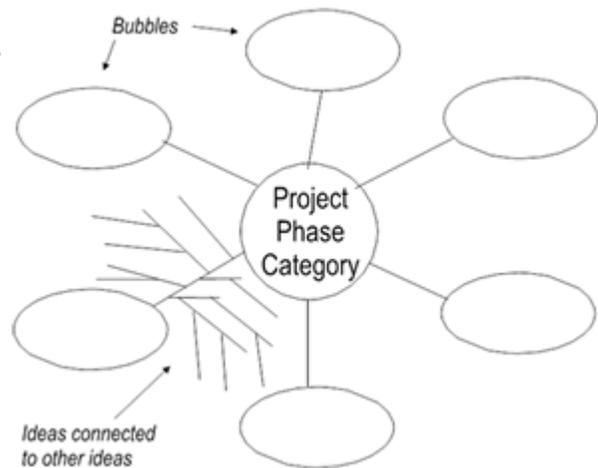
3. **No Criticism Rule:** Whenever someone is offering an idea **absolutely no criticism**, direct or implied is tolerable. To do so is to punish idea giving. This is the quickest way to get potential contributors to clam up. It is permissible to ask clarifying questions in order to fully understand what is being offered.

Also note, that the person receiving the ideas should never say, "I've already tried that." Or, "That won't work." Maybe so, however, there are other people listening and the idea given may trigger another thought. Outlandish ideas are encouraged. These become stepping stones to build into functional ideas. Very often the most successful adaptation comes from a moment of inspiration and equally as often it will come from experience.

4. **Stimulate Ideas:** The **facilitator is not allowed to participate in idea giving**, except to stimulate others to contribute. For example, a facilitator might address one of the participants and say, "Steve, you encountered something similar on the WWW project last year, how did you handle it?" Or, "Greg, I know it's not the same situation, but I think the way you handled, AAA company when they called to cancel was really powerful, why don't you tell us what you did at the end to turn it around because I think we might be able to build off of that idea."

5. **Reduce Mental Blocks:** Take the pressure off by using the "conditional question" structure: "If you did know, what would that be?" "There is really not a way to know for sure, but if you were to guess, what do you feel that would look like?" "The future can be fuzzy at times, but if you were to describe what you'd really like to see, what would it look like?" "If you could, what would you imagine it to be?"

6. Use Mind Mapping: Draw a circle in the center of the flip chart and write the topic in it. When an unrelated idea comes draw another circle or bubble on the edge of the paper (anywhere) and put the idea in it. Connect the two circles (bubbles) with a line. When another idea comes do the same, make a circle on the edge of the paper put the topic in it and connect it to the center circle with a line. When another idea comes that is a subset of one of the outer circles, draw a short line off the line that connects that circle to the center circle and write that idea there.



If needed, each outer bubble can then be put in the middle of another page, with the connected topics and ideas put in outer bubbles and the process continued. This is a great way to refine and uncover the details.

- Use different color markers for each of the bubbles and their connected lines.
- You can interconnect one subset idea to another on a different bubble show how they are interrelated.

7. Idea Selection: The critique of the ideas comes after they have all been discussed and is based on certain criteria related to capabilities, constraints, expectations and requirements.

Once you've created a list of ideas, use the "Consensus Building" technique to narrow down and prioritize the ideas according to the criteria for selection and then use it to make the final selections.

8. Time Monitoring: The facilitator or assigned "time-keeper" is responsible for keeping the discussion moving, the ideas flowing and for watching the time.