JEWELL
FACILITATION

TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE BRAINSTORMING

1) Try to encourage people to avoid "editing" their ideas by letting them know that there are no wrong answers, only ideas. Do not dismiss anything that is said even if it might not be what you were expecting. Often unexpected answers and quirky ideas can be good platforms for further discussions.

2) If you are recording people's ideas, make sure you check that you have written them down correctly and that you understand what they mean. Unless you are doing a rapid brainstorm as a quick exercise, you may want to delve into this information further and reflect on what has been said. This will be hard if you have not grasped what was meant correctly.

3) Try to avoid "groupthink". This is where everyone thinks collectively as they are swayed by what others say. If this happens fewer original ideas emerge. You could try:

   a. Asking participants to do an individual, silent brainstorm before sharing their ideas. Give them a minute or two to write down their ideas by themselves in silence before sharing in either small groups or the whole room.

   b. Asking participants to write down some of their ideas on card or post it notes, and stick them up on a wall to share. Ask for one ideas per post it note/card. Once they have been put up on the wall then you can invite discussion.

4) Brainstorming opens up discussions and so is not something to be used to end a workshop with. Opening up discussions at the end of a workshop often leaves people with a feeling of incompleteness and can be disconcerting.

5) Make sure you are clear what you are brainstorming about. Ask a specific question at the start and write it down so that people will remember easily and refer to it. You can ask further questions to clarify and draw out ideas as the brainstorm progresses.

6) You can get small groups to brainstorm and then ask one person to feedback to the larger group. This is good to do if you are working with a very large group. You can ask each group to decide on their top three ideas to share. Once each group has shared their top 3, you can go back and ask for more. This gives everyone an opportunity to contribute so that the discussion can continue after all the more obvious answers have been offered.

7) You don't have to brainstorm answers, you could brainstorm questions too. For example "What kind of questions might you ask a candidate at a job interview?". In this case you are probably looking for some more precise wording so take time to clarify and make sure you have written down what was said and not edited it yourself.

8) Some alternatives to a standard brainstorm are:

   a. Perspectives – asking people to brainstorm as if they were "the client" or "a famous figure" to try to think about the topic from a different perspective.

   b. Rapid brainstorming – aims to get people's answers quickly so that they don't think too hard about the answers and "editing" what they say. Also useful if you don't have much time.

   c. Using a piece of magic white board or flip chart paper/butchers paper on the wall ask people to write on it all at once (if you have a small group you could try this with a flip chart).

   d. Reverse brainstorming – where you ask participants to come up with the opposite of what they are really thinking. This can be fun and thought pro-voking and may be useful in a situation where there have been a lot of problems so that participants don't get dragged down by negatives.

9. Think carefully about what you are going to do with the information you have just collected. You may just want to do a brainstorm as an opening up activity, or to get some discussion flowing. But you can also build on that information to get much more out of it, to dig deep and gather some really valuable information.

10) Try to inject a bit of fun into your brainstorm. When people are enjoying themselves they are often more creative and more likely to come up with a wider variety of ideas. New and unusual ideas often lead to great discussions and far better engagement than churning out a list of safe and anticipated suggestions.