

Working with Groups:

Brain Drain

This is a quick and fun way to get a significant number of ideas. It is especially useful in a large setting where you can cluster people into smaller groups so that they can compete with each other as well as the clock.

The first step is to write the goal or problem clearly on a flip chart or white board so everyone can read it. Break people into small groups with no more than seven per group.

1. Each group should identify a recorder. Markers and plenty of paper should be available.
2. State that each group will have three minutes, and encourage members to write down as many ideas as they can.
3. Stop them after the three minutes. Ask each group how many ideas were generated. Keep a tally of ideas generated by each group. Find out which group has the most ideas and encourage every group to beat that record.
4. Encourage them to build on their ideas.
5. Give them two more minutes, and then stop and ask for the number of ideas from each group. Acknowledge the record, and then go for one final minute.
6. At the end of the third countdown, add up all the ideas and get a final total. Some of the ideas will be duplicated, and that is OK because each group generated the ideas.

7. Ask for an oral report of three ideas from each small group. After the first report, have subsequent groups report on just two or three ideas not previously mentioned. (*Note: If the initial groups share all of their ideas during the report, the last group probably will have nothing to share.*)
8. A variation might be to give all participants an index card. Have them write their ideas down for a limited time, then divide them into groups to share their ideas while someone writes them on flip chart paper. Ask the small groups to identify their top five or so ideas to be presented to the entire group.

Reference: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Family Community Leadership Handbook. (2004). University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension.

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