

Working with Groups:

Nominal Group Technique

Nominal group technique (NGT) is a good tool to consider when the group of participants may not know each other very well but still need to come to an agreement on priorities. The best size for NGT often is a group from five to 12 people. Larger groups can be divided into multiple smaller groups.

Variations may be used, but the basic steps follow.

1. First, establish a question or issue to discuss. Each person should silently write down ideas independently. This gives everyone time to think and then say that they mean.
2. Ask each person, one at a time, to give ideas with little discussion. Have a co-facilitator write down exactly what is said on a flip chart or white board. Using colored markers can help participants see where one idea ends and another begins. After everyone has participated, ask if there are statements that need more explanation. Clarification is important. After everyone has participated, the list can be consolidated if there are several ideas that are the same and everyone agrees that they are similar.
3. The next step is to vote on the ideas with dots. Before voting, number the suggestions and explain that they will be voting on the idea beside the number of the idea. Listed below are some common guidelines for distributing dots.
 - If there are one to 15 ideas, have them vote for the top three best choices.
 - If there are 16 to 25 ideas, have them vote for the top five choices.
 - If there are more than 26 ideas, have them vote for their top seven choices.

4. Participants have flexibility in voting. For instance, if someone thinks one idea is obviously the best, all the dots or votes can be placed near that number.
5. The actual placing of the dots can be done in two ways: a) by everyone in the group at the same time, or if you think people might be influenced by others, b) the final list of ideas can be placed on a flip chart and the chart turned away from the group. Individuals come up one at a time and vote. The chart is turned back for viewing after everyone has voted.

NGT is a way to help a group feel productive in a short period of time. Ideas are generated by individuals and later voted on as the group's top three to seven options. This process also allows participants time to think before they have to speak, the opportunity to take turns in sharing ideas, a way to record them on a flip chart, a method to clarify, and encouragement to share ideas before discussing them.

Variation: Use of Colored Dots

Rather than using just one color of dots, several colors can be used to differentiate first, second, and third choices. Ask each person to write down the number of their idea as the top choice on a blue dot, their second choice on a green dot, and the third choice on a red dot. By writing the choice directly on the dot, they are less likely to change their minds when they come up to the flip chart to place their dots during the voting process. In this situation each person can only use one dot per idea.

Tell the group that each color of dots will have a different weighted value. For example, the first choice (blue dot) will count three points; the green dot, which

is the second choice, will have a value of two points; and the last choice (red dot) will only count one point. Explain to them that after they vote using the dots with different weighted values, the ideas listed will be scored by counting the dots. Two different ideas may each get 10 dots. However, using the dots with different values will show a true indication of the group's priority.

Reference: <http://www.communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/sp/Step5/Nominal%20Group%20Technique.pdf>

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