

Function Based Brainstorming

What is Function Based Brainstorming?

A brainstorming technique used to generate as many ideas as possible in a short period of time on how to achieve a function. Participants are asked questions based on the function. For example, a function might be “inform public” and the team will be asked to brainstorm on the question “how can we inform public”?

Why is Function Based Brainstorming important?

Using Function-based Brainstorming ensures that many ideas are generated based on the project needs or functions, rather than the currently proposed solution.

When would you use function based brainstorming?

Function based brainstorming is a useful technique to focus the attention of a group on generating creative ideas in situations such as:

- Projects or problems with an impasse or when stuck on a problem.
- Where the same solution has always been used and something new is needed. For example, developing new or intriguing questions for a selection panel.
- Generating creative approaches to stakeholder consultation.
- When ranking alone and there is a need to challenge your ideas.
- Problem solving.
- Identifying alternatives.
- Identifying ideas to reduce cost.
- Generate ideas to streamline a process.

Who is involved?

All participants are involved. Everyone can contribute ideas, no matter their background. Typically one person serves as the team leader or facilitator. It is useful if participants have different backgrounds and levels of experience.

What is the difference between Function Based Brainstorming and Brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a group creativity technique designed to generate a large number of ideas. A Brainstorming facilitator may ask for ideas for a new chair and the participants will suggest chair improvements. In a Function-based session, the facilitator may ask for ideas on some of the functions of a chair such as support weight and participants may suggest a swing and other ways of supporting weight.

Function Based Brainstorming Objectives:

- Generate as many alternative ideas as possible.
- Focus on key functions.
- Generate ideas without reference to the current solution.

Key questions to ask:

- What else will perform the function?
- How can we achieve this “function”?

Function-Based Brainstorming Rules:

- Quantity counts. The more ideas generated the better.
- Be Positive. Do not criticize or judge ideas.
- Welcome Unusual Ideas. Imaginative ideas can lead to new approaches.
- Piggy-back or Combine ideas. Good ideas may be combined to form a single better idea.

Facilitator Hints:

- Have confidence in the process. Function based brainstorming is a reliable and efficient approach to generating creative ideas.
- Explain the brainstorming rules.
- Identify the key functions of the project or process. Start with the need or problem the project or process is addressing.
- Select a function to brainstorm where there are alternative ideas.
- Contribute your own ideas if ideas are not forthcoming.
- If you need help with the session, ask your VE coordinator for help.