

Quick as a Storm Brainstorm

How to run an effective engaging brainstorm



Introduction

Brainstorming can effectively generate new ideas from your teens for projects for the year or new solutions to problems. However traditional brainstorming plays to the strengths of extroverts (those willing to speak up during a meeting), only engages one person at a time, and leads to groupthink since only one idea is proposed at a time and participants will create new ideas in response to that idea rather than come up with their own or something radically different. Sometimes ideas also get shot down right after they are proposed with no time to breathe or consider them in depth.

Quick as a Storm Brainstorm

In this post you will learn a methodology that:

- 1) Guarantees 100% participation
- 2) Creates a culture of optimism and “How do we make this work?”
- 3) Generates more specific ideas in less time than a traditional brainstorm
- 4) Works in large or small groups

Step 1: Setting the stage

What essential question do you want help from your team to answer? Write that on a piece of posterboard and place it in front of the room (How can we improve our JSU Clubs? How can we recruit more teens from Public High School? How can we make our chapter more welcoming/exciting/etc). For a larger group you can break up the room into different sections and allow the participants to select which question they are most passionate about. You can even ask them in advance to generate the different questions. For example, the room can be divided up into 6 sections including Israel Advocacy, Life After High School, Education, Student Leadership, Social Action, and Personal Growth.

PRO TIP: The more focused the question the more focused the responses. “How can we make our organization better?” will generate much more bland and vague responses than “How can we improve our educational events?”

Step 2: Writing it Down

Every student receives one index card on which they write a program idea to answer the question. For example, “More relevant educational topics” or “more exciting events.” They should be as specific as possible. After they are done they pass the card to the person on their left who has 30 seconds to contribute a *clarifying question* (How do we find out what is relevant?) and/or a *constructive comment* (Here are the topics I would enjoy hearing). At the end of the round everyone will review their index cards with all the new feedback and questions.

PRO TIP: Emphasize before hand the role in constructive feedback to move ideas forward and the mindset of “Why can this work?” and letting ideas breathe before coming up with reasons why an idea might fail.

PRO TIP: Since everyone is writing to themselves people who are less comfortable speaking up still have an opportunity to share their thoughts and feedback.

PRO TIP: This activity also builds a positive group dynamic of collaboration and constructive feedback. Make this point explicit to the students.

Step 3: Revise and Discuss

Students should receive their original cards back and read the comments of the group. They should then present their idea to the group along with the relevant feedback. Now when you have a group discussion about these ideas every participant has contributed an idea, feedback on everyone else’s ideas, and an environment of building upon ideas and collaboration has already been created.

PRO TIP: This also creates a space for students to practice their public speaking skills.

Alternative Program: Gallery Walk

If you want to keep the essence of the activity but generate even more ideas then give the students a pile of index cards/posterboard and ask them to generate as many ideas as possible in 2 minutes. Afterwards post the results around the room and give everyone post-it notes (Green for constructive comment and Yellow for clarifying question) and let them walk around the room commenting on every proposal. This provides more physical activity and a visual element to the program. As a variation, you can even give students starts to vote for their preferred proposals. After the time is up continue from step 3 above.

PRO TIP: A “gallery walk” just means that you post items around the room (like an art gallery) and allow the participants to view and interact with them. As a methodology it gets people out of their seats, tends to be visually oriented, and can vary the energy of your program.