Transportation Outreach Planner

Public Outreach Strategies

Brainstorming and Visioning Meetings

Quick Links
Toolbox Navigation
- Recommended Target Groups
- Strategy Class
- Strategy Types
- Description
- Special Uses
- When to Use
- Cost
- Time
- Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions
- Lesson Learned/Challenges
- Case Studies
- For Further Information
- Sources
- Provide Feedback

Recommended Target Groups

Education
College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language
Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability
Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income
Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership
Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity
Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Educational

Description

Brainstorming and visioning meetings are used to generate ideas, identify creative solutions, and establish planning direction. In such meetings participants are presented with a problem or issue, asked to provide ideas, and guided by a facilitator through a process of evaluating and prioritizing the ideas. Brainstorming techniques can be applied any time organizations want to encourage creative thinking.[1] Visioning is a more formal application of brainstorming, often used by organizations for long-term and planning.[2]

Special Uses

Brainstorming and visioning can be used to: [3]

- Encourage new ideas and creative solutions
- Demonstrate openness to different points of view and opinions
- Identify new policy direction
- Set the foundation for long-term planning

When to Use

Most agencies use brainstorming and visioning at the start of a project or planning process in order to establish policy direction or planning priorities. Through the use of brainstorming and visioning techniques agencies are able to obtain useful feedback on issues, problems, and competing demands. It is also useful to use such techniques to reassess projects that are not performing as intended. In addition, brainstorming and visioning can be used to re-evaluate the direction of existing transportation plans. [4]

Cost

* * Moderate ($1000 to $9999)

Brainstorming and visioning costs can be moderate depending on how many persons participate and if an outside consultant is hired to facilitate the process. The expenses include staff time, location rental, displays, and other equipment and materials needed to set up the program. Meeting materials generally include newsprint pads and markers to record ideas, boards to display relevant data, large maps, and overlays to allow sketching of maps. These costs can be kept to a minimum if an agency seeks free meeting space and requests a facilitator to provide services pro-bono. [11]

Low (up to $999)	*	*Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.
Moderate ($1,000 to $9,999)	* *	
High ($10,000 to $50,000)	* * *	
Very High (Above $50,000)	* * * *	

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Preparation for a brainstorming or visioning meeting will require several months, particularly if participants are going to be presented with forecasts and research information. Staff will require time to conduct research, prepare materials, develop the program, invite participants, and identify an appropriate venue. [12]

1 to 3 months	*	
6 months to a year	* *	
Multiyear	* * *	

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for organizing a brainstorming or visioning meeting:

- **Determine the topic of discussion for the brainstorming or visioning session, and have a clear understanding that the purpose of the session is to generate as many ideas and solutions as possible with respect to the topic.** A brainstorming or visioning session should not be held if an agency already has identified possible solutions to an issue and is trying to determine which one to use. Brainstorming and visioning sessions should only be held to generate new ideas or to develop a new direction.[5]
- **Determine the size of the group that will participate.** Although brainstorming and visioning sessions are generally more effective when conducted among small groups, it is possible to apply such techniques in large meetings by dividing the participants into small groups of six to ten people. The smaller groups are more conducive to creative discussions and enable all participants to express their ideas more freely. The ideas expressed by the small groups can later be presented to the full group for further discussion.[6]
- **Assign a skilled facilitator to lead the process and an assistant to record the proceedings. Brainstorming and visioning require skilled facilitation to ensure that participants get an opportunity to express their ideas.** The role of the facilitator is to maintain a sense of civility and create an atmosphere where all ideas are welcome without judgment. Specifically, the facilitator is responsible for the following: [7]
  - Introducing the session
  - Monitoring time
  - Stimulating discussion and making sure that participants join the process
  - Ensuring that the rules are followed

In addition to the facilitator, an assistant is needed to record ideas and help with the physical set-up of the room. Ideas should be recorded on a flip chart, whiteboard, or other format that all participants can see.

- **Ensure that no one person dominates the discussion.** If the participants will be divided into smaller groups, agencies may consider assigning a person to each group to ensure that no one person dominates that discussion and that everyone has an opportunity to express their ideas.
- **Organize the event around the needs of the participants.** It is important to be mindful of the needs of the participants. Their input in determining the time, date, location, and duration of the event will help to prevent potential conflicts or problems.
- **Identify the location for the event.** The location should comfortably accommodate all of the participants and the equipment needed for the presentations. If there will be group breakout sessions, special displays, or arrangements, organizers should ensure that the meeting location can meet those needs.
- **If possible, a few days prior to the meeting, participants should receive a copy of the agenda, the meeting rules, and any other information that may help them to prepare for the session.** Prior to the meeting, participants should receive information explaining why they were invited to attend, the purpose of the meeting, and what the agency intends to do with the results of the meeting. The more participants know ahead of time regarding the rules of engagement and the topic of discussion, the more effective their participation will be.
- **On the day of the event the meeting rules for the brainstorming or visioning session should be clearly posted in the meeting room for all participants to see.** The facilitator should review the rules with all the participants at the start of the meeting. Below is sample list of meeting rules:[8]
  - Withhold judgment of ideas
  - Encourage wild ideas
  - Seek quantity
  - Build on the ideas
  - Every person and every idea has equal worth

- **Set aside sufficient time for the brainstorming or visioning process.** Most brainstorming or visioning meetings last approximately four hours. However, more time may be required for more complex issues. Because these meetings are long in duration, it is important to maintain momentum and to have a clear process. Below are the recommended steps for running an effective brainstorming session:[9]
  - Define the problem or issue and explain the brainstorming/visioning process
  - Review the meeting rules and make sure everyone understands that the objective is to generate ideas
  - Ask people to give as many ideas as possible within a specified time limit, encouraging participants not to be

critical
- Have participants categorize, condense, and combine the ideas
- Review and analyze the ideas
- Ask participants to prioritize the options
- Develop recommendations for action

Although the visioning process is similar to the steps listed above, the focus is not on generating random ideas but on developing a vision statement and goal setting. In such meetings participants generally are asked to: [10]

- Identify potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis)
- Generate planning recommendations or goals based on the SWOT analysis
- Prioritize the planning alternatives or goals
- Develop a recommended vision statement based on the priorities

While it is possible to have a visioning meeting in one day, some agencies may opt to divide the visioning process into several days and create special committees and task forces to assess specific issues. This is done to allow for more in-depth discussion and analysis. However, such a process can be expensive and may require extensive staff resources.

- **Follow up after the event in order to maintain momentum and continuity.** Soon after the event participants should receive a summary of the meeting proceedings and recommendations. The information should outline next steps, proposed timelines, future tasks, and assignments, if any.

Recommended Target Demographics

Brainstorming and visioning sessions can be effective tools in public participation efforts. These types of meetings can be used among all demographics; however, their effectiveness depends on how accessible the meetings are to the target demographic in terms of location and time of the event. The persons generally attend these type of events tend to be professionals in the field, community leaders, activists, or persons with flexible schedules. In order for ensure greater participation from a broader demographic, such meetings should be scheduled during evening and weekend hours in central locations that are accessible through various modes of transportation.

Lessons Learned/Challenges
Below are key points to keep in mind when holding a brainstorming or visioning session: [13]

- **Ensure that those invited represent a broad mix of people and interests.** Special attention should be given to ensure that a wide mix of interests is represented in the brainstorming or visioning session. This will encourage a broader outlook and will help to generate more diverse ideas.
- **The support from key stakeholders, elected officials and agency leaders is important for the success of the brainstorming/visioning project.** Without such support, the recommendations of the brainstorming/visioning session may not be fully accepted or implemented.
- **It is important to select a facilitator who can encourage discussion but control disruptions.** The facilitator must be able to prevent vocal participants from disrupting proceedings or taking over discussion. The facilitator must also be able to encourage unassertive participants to express their ideas and address any potential conflict among participants that may arise.
- **Participants must have a clear understanding of the purpose of the brainstorming/visioning session in order to maintain interest.** Unless people understand what the purpose of the meeting will be and what will be done with the results, they may feel that participation will be a waste of time. During the discussion, it is also essential to keep the conversation focused; otherwise participants may lose interest.
- **Using visioning for transportation planning helps stakeholders get a better understanding of the various planning choices that are available and the potential impacts of each solution.** Through the visioning process, participants also have the ability to provide meaningful input and explore new solutions.

Case Studies
The Gateway Route 1 initiative in Maine used visioning to develop a comprehensive corridor strategy for addressing land use, transportation, environmental, and economic issues. This large-scale initiative shows how visioning can be used for complex, multi-jurisdictional projects (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/case_studies/guidebook/chap02.cfm).
14

The New Mexico DOT (NMDOT) initiated a Value Engineering Workshop in order to brainstorm creative and innovative recommendations for optimizing multi-modal transportation design and efficient construction. The participants included highway engineers, consultants, contractors, and community stakeholders. The results of the workshop were presented to the NMDOT Executive Management and have become a "toolbox" for all New Mexico multimodal projects (http://www.nmshtd.state.nm.us/upload/images/Value_Engineering/VE_WORKSHOP_DESIGN-CONSTRUCTION_REPORT42005.pdf). [15]

Richmond Brainstorm provides an example of how the internet can be used to conduct community brainstorming. Through richmondbrainstorm.com, community members are able to submit ideas for making Richmond a better place to live. The ideas are posted for viewing, and people can provide comments and vote on the ideas that are submitted. The ideas that receive the most votes are featured in a special section. Community leaders use this website to help to connect with others who have similar interests and to generate new ideas for improving the community (http://www.richmondbrainstorm.com/Transportation). [16]

For Further Information

Livability in Transportation Guidebook, Visioning: This guidebook, developed by the Federal Highway Administration, provides information on how to use visioning techniques in transportation. The guidebook also includes helpful case studies (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/case_studies/guidebook/chap02.cfm). [17]

Planning for the Future: A Handbook on Community Visioning, 3rd Edition: This handbook provides information on the basic principles for organizing a community visioning process. The focus is on a multi-faceted visioning processes with numerous community workshops and committees (http://conservationtools.org/libraries/1/library_items/697-Planning-for-the-Future-A-Handbook-on-Community-Visioning-3rd-Edition). [18]

Preparing for a Successful Brainstorming Session: This site provides information on how to conduct a brainstorming session and links to stimulate creative thinking (http://www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/preparingforbrainstorming.html). [19]

Sources

1 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Brainstorming," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 August 2011 (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm).
2 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Visioning," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 August 2011 (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm).
3 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
4 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
5 Infinite Innovations Ltd., "Traditional Brainstorming: Preparing for a Successful Brainstorming Session," 5 December 2011, (http://www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/preparingforbrainstorming.html).
6 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
7 Infinite Innovations Ltd., "Preparing for a Successful Brainstorming Session."
8 Infinite Innovations Ltd., "Preparing for a Successful Brainstorming Session."
9 Mind Tools, "Brainstorming: Generating Many Radical, Creative Ideas," 5 December 2011, (http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html).
10 "Planning for the Future: A Handbook on Community Visioning, 3rd Edition," 2006, Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 5 December 2011, (http://conservationtools.org/libraries/1/library_items/697-Planning-for-the-Future-A-Handbook-on-Community-Visioning-3rd-Edition).
11 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
12 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
13 FHWA, "Brainstorming."
14 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Livability in Transportation Guidebook, Visioning," 27 October 2011, FHWA, 5 December2011, (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/case_studies/guidebook/chap02.cfm).
15 New Mexico DOT (NMDOT), Value Engineering Workshop for Optimizing Roadway Resources: Workshop Report," 5 December 2011, (http://www.nmshtd.state.nm.us/upload/images/Value_Engineering/VE_WORKSHOP_DESIGN-CONSTRUCTION_REPORT42005.pdf).
16 Richmondbrainstorm.com, 5 December 2011, (http://www.richmondbrainstorm.com/Transportation).

17 FHWA, "Livability in Transportation Guidebook, Visioning."

18 Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, "Planning for the Future: A Handbook on Community Visioning, 3rd Edition," 2006, ConservationTools.org, 5 December 2011, (http://conservationtools.org/libraries/1/library_items/697-Planning-for-the-Future-A-Handbook-on-Community-Visioning-3rd-Edition).

19 Infinite Innovations Ltd., "Preparing for a Successful Brainstorming Session."