

# Facilitation guide: Structured physician brainstorming session

## Customizable exercises and discussion prompts

Use the techniques in this guide to engage physicians in divergent thinking and creative problem-solving.

### Preparing for an effective input session

Input is a top physician driver, but a poorly run meeting can frustrate participants and make it less likely that they'll attend the next one. Before you put a meeting on the calendar, consider the following questions.

#### 1. Confirm it will be a good use of physician time. Ask yourself:

- Will this change impact physicians directly—either immediately or in the long-term?
- Has this issue been resolved already? Will I be able to act on the feedback I receive during this session?
- Is there a specific aspect of this change that I want to focus feedback on in particular?
- Is there a specific aspect of this change that I anticipate will be met with outsized physician pushback that I should proactively address?

#### 2. Make sure your participant list includes impacted groups. Ask yourself:

- Which physicians will be most impacted by this change?
- Which physicians are in formal or informal leadership roles, whose buy-in will be particularly influential?
- Which physicians have demonstrated interest in the organization's strategy and/or have given thoughtful input in the past?
- Does the group represent a cross-section of our medical staff?
- Does the group represent both inpatient and ambulatory physicians who will be impacted?
- Does the group include physicians you don't regularly work with or hear from?
- Are there groups or physicians who have historically felt left out of change initiatives and should be included?

*Once you finalize your list, send a calendar hold and agenda at least 2 weeks in advance to ensure physicians can attend, and know what to expect. For ways to boost attendance, see [How to get physicians to your next meeting](#).*

#### 3. Define clear goals and anti-goals to guide the session. Ask yourself:

- Goals: What do I need from this session? E.g., generate new ideas, refine a list of existing ideas, take an idea from concept to action, or solve for a specific implementation challenge
- Anti-goals: What rabbit holes do I want to avoid during this session? E.g., specific implementation steps, costs, communication strategy, or other departments.

*Share your goals and anti-goals at the start of the meeting—and refer back them if the conversation is going off track. If a topic is out of scope, use a “parking lot” to track ideas to come back to at a future session.*

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## Facilitated brainstorming exercises

Interactive exercises can be a powerful way to promote two-way dialogue with physicians, surface new ideas, solicit actionable feedback, and boost creativity. Review to this list of exercises and choose one to plug into an upcoming physician input session.

You can adjust these exercises based on the time you have available. We recommend dedicating at least 45 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion.



### “Crazy 8s” brainstorm

**Description:** Participants come up with 8 ideas in 8 minutes

**Best for:** Creative ideation on an initial concept or question, out of the box thinking

**You’ll need:** Blank pieces of paper (one sheet per participant), pens

#### Instructions:

##### Activity

- Ask the group to take a piece of paper and fold it in half vertically, then twice horizontally, to create 8 boxes
- Set a timer for 8 minutes.
- Ask each participant to put one idea in each box.
- They have one minute per box and they can use the time to: draw a concept, write out an idea, or expand on a concept in a previous box.
- Warn participants when they have 15 seconds left in each square.

##### Discussion

- Ask participants to circle 1-2 of their favorite ideas from their list of 8.
- Ask volunteers to share their top ideas with the group.
- As volunteers share their ideas, top line them on a running list.
- Open it up to the group for any thoughts or reactions they have to their colleague’s idea.
- Collect everyone’s sheet of paper at the end of the session to review in follow-up.



## Structured flip-chart brainstorm

**Description:** Participants brainstorm responses to a set list of questions

**Best for:** Quickly coming up with a long list of targeted ideas or potential solutions to a problem

**You'll need:** Flip chart or white board, markers

### Instructions:

#### Activity

- Pick 2-3 questions from the brainstorming questions pick list below.
- Pose your first question to the group. We recommend doing one question and discussion at a time.
- Give participants 1-2 minutes to jot down their thoughts individually.

#### Discussion

- Ask for volunteers to share their response with the group.
- Document responses on a flip chart or white board.
- When similar responses arise, put a check mark or +1 next to common responses.
- As you reflect on the list, consider asking the group:
  - *Is there anything missing from this list that we would add?*
  - *Are there any themes or trends jumping out at you from this list?*
  - *How might we apply this idea to our day to day? What would we need to make it happen?*
- Repeat until you get through all of the brainstorming questions you wanted to pose to the group.

### Brainstorming question picklist

#### **Historical best**

- Can you think of a time when we solved problems like this in the past? How did we do it?
- When this works flawlessly at our organization, what happens? How could that happen all the time?
- What works elsewhere within our organization that we can replicate?

#### **Industry best practice**

- What are best practices in health care to solve this problem?
- What does health care literature suggest for solving similar problems?
- What is the proposed industry standard?
- What are our competitors doing to solve this problem?

#### **Cross-industry practice**

- What industries have faced similar challenges?
- What are best practices across industries?

#### **Cross industry practice (continued)**

- What does business and management literature suggest for solving similar problems?

#### **Enhanced performance**

- What would be a better way of doing what we already do?
- Is there something we can add to what we already do?
- What can we eliminate that is unnecessary, duplicative, or not worth the effort?

#### **Perfect world**

- What would the ideal outcome or result look like? How could we achieve that outcome?
- Finish this sentence: "Wouldn't it be nice if..."
- Suggest a truly impossible proposition. What about that could be made reality?
- State the opposite of the current reality. What about that could be made true?



## Start/stop/continue brainstorm

**Description:** Participants collectively identify and prioritize tasks they want their group or organization to start doing, stop doing and continue doing

**Best for:** Making tradeoffs to workflow in light of a new change or initiative

**You'll need:** 3 sheets of flipchart paper or a whiteboard with three sections labelled "Start," "Stop," and "Continue;" blank paper (one sheet per participant)

### Instructions:

#### Activity

- Prime the group: Top line the change or initiative for the group and outline the impact it will have on their workflow
- Set a timer for 2 minutes. Ask participants to write down anything they think they or the organization should start doing that isn't happening today.
- Set a timer for 2 minutes. Ask participants to write down anything they think they or the organization should stop doing to allow capacity for the new change.
- Set a timer for 2 minutes. Ask participants to write down anything they think they or the organization should continue doing.

#### Discussion

- Ask volunteers to share the tasks on their "start" list.
- Write each idea down on a flip-chart or whiteboard. As you document each idea, ask the group if there's anything they would add or if anyone had a similar task on their list.
- Pause to reflect on the group's start list. Ask participants to consider:
  - *What are the 'quick wins' we can start doing today?*
  - *If we had to prioritize what to start on this list, what 2-3 would you put at the top of the list?*
- Repeat report out with the "stop list."
- Pause to reflect on the group's stop list. Ask participants to consider:
  - *Have we been aggressive enough with our stop list? Do we feel these cuts would actually free up the capacity we need to absorb this change?*
  - *Do any of the "stop doing" tasks give you pause because they'll impact patients/other departments/your team? Why?*
- Repeat report out with the "continue" list
- Pause to reflect on the group's "continue" list. Ask participants to consider:
  - *If we had to pick the most important items to continue doing from this list, what 2-3 would you choose? Why?*
  - *If we had to move one item from this list to the "stop" list, what would it be? Why?*



## Simplified scenario planning

**Description:** Participants predict ways future organizational initiatives could either fail or succeed

**Best for:** Soliciting input about physicians' biggest concerns on a given initiative and surfacing targeted solutions to get ahead of potential failures.

**You'll need:** Flip chart or white board, markers

### Instructions:

#### Activity

- Split participants into two groups—a “best case” and “worst case” group.
- Give each group a scenario: in one scenario the initiative is a huge success, in the other it fails terribly.
  - Example “worst case” scenario: “Fast-forward two years from now, the medical director role turned out to be a complete sham. Speak to us in the future tense and tell us everything that went wrong.”
  - Example “best case” scenario: “Fast-forward two years from now, the initiative has been wildly successful. Speak to us in the future tense about everything that enabled it to be so successful.”

#### Discussion

- Ask the “best case” group to share all the reasons why the project succeeded. As they share, jot down the reasons on white board or flip chart.
- Ask the larger group if there are any success factors they would like to add.
- As you reflect on the “best case” list, consider asking the group:
  - Are there any key success factors on this list that we don't have in place today?
  - If we had to pick three “must dos” from this list what would they be?
  - If we had to take one item off this list that we think is the least critical to the project's success, what would it be?
- Ask the “worst case” group to share all the reasons why the project failed. As the “worst case” group outlines their list, log them on a flip chart or white board.
- Ask the larger group if there are any barriers missing that they would like to add.
- As you reflect on the “worst case” list, consider asking the group:
  - Which of these barriers are most prominent in our organization today?
  - If we had to pick the three most significant barriers, what would they be?
  - Which of these barriers do we think would be the most difficult to overcome? What would we need to do to overcome it?
- Recap your list of the top three success factors and barriers. Set expectations about which you can immediately prioritize, and where you'll need their support.



## Dot-voting exercise

**Description:** Participants vote on a set of ideas or changes

**Best for:** Comparing different approaches to a change and evaluating buy-in across different options; narrowing down many options and building group consensus

**You'll need:** Dot stickers or post-it notes, flip chart

### Instructions:

#### Activity

- Present a set of options to the group (e.g. different solutions the organization is weighing to solve a common challenge; competing initiatives, etc). This may be the first time the group is seeing the options, or you can use the exercise to prioritize ideas from a previous brainstorming session.
- Before beginning the activity, ask participants to take a minute to review the existing options individually and mentally rank them.
- In the meantime, pass out 2-3 dot stickers or post-it notes to each participant.
- Invite the group to come up to the flipchart and place one sticker or post-it by each of the top three options whenever they are ready. Alternatively, you can allow participants to allocate their stickers however they want. For example, placing all three next to an option they feel strongly about.
- Depending on the goal of the session, you can ask them to:
  - *Vote on the idea that they think is most important to move forward.*
  - *Vote on the idea they think will be the most difficult to implement.*
  - *Vote on the idea they think will have the greatest impact on [metric], regardless of difficulty.*

#### Discussion

- Review the dots and encourage outliers to share the reasoning behind their votes.
- If there is a consensus on one idea, ask someone to expand on why they feel it's a good option.
- If you're narrowing options, highlight the top 2-3 options and ask the group to do a second round of votes.

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## Meeting management: Introductions and next steps

As you design a brainstorming session, it can be easy to overlook how you open and close the meeting. But the 5 minutes at the beginning and end of a meeting can have a big impact on whether participants perceive it to be a valuable use of time. Before your next brainstorming session, make sure you're prepared to start with a clear purpose and end with a list of concrete next steps.

### Opening the meeting

Start your meeting with a clear, scoped purpose for your time together. Take a moment to share:

- The purpose of the meeting
- The decision or change that's up for discussion
- Why it's so important (e.g., for quality or patient safety)
- How the group can influence leaders' thinking by identifying their preferences among existing options
- Who you'll share the group's input with (e.g., with senior leaders, with a specific committee, with another department)

### Closing the meeting

End the meeting with gratitude and immediate next steps. More specifically:

- Thank everyone for their input and creativity
- Share your personal takeaways from the session
- Outline where you'll go from here, including:
  - Who you'll share the takeaways with
  - When they can expect to hear/see if their ideas go into effect
- Let participants know how they can get a hold of you if they have questions or other ideas to share
- E-mail the group in follow up with a thank you and any notes and your takeaways from the session

### A note on virtual meetings

Any of the exercises in this guide can be adapted to a virtual setting. To make it interactive:

- Experiment with annotation functionality for dot voting or anonymous feedback
- Use the chat box for questions and comments
- Launch a poll to quickly vote on ideas
- Share your screen and use a blank word doc or Powerpoint slide to capture ideas
- Use your web camera if you can and encourage others to do the same