

Brainstorming Session Tools

In order to make your brainstorming session as effective and productive as possible, you should consider a few basic guidelines, or tools, that can help keep you on track.

Before the Meeting:

- Make sure you invite all the people who have shown dedicated interest to being part of the garden. If you are hoping to serve a particular community, invite at least one representative of that community to your meeting. For example, if you are working in a certain neighborhood, invite the leader of the neighborhood association.
- Ask people to organize and prioritize their thoughts beforehand. If everyone present at your meeting has already thought ahead of time about what they are going to want to contribute, your meeting will run more efficiently.
- Create an agenda. An agenda is a framework for how a meeting will be run, and will help you make sure that you do not run out of time and that all issues are addressed. E-mail it to people before hand, print out the agenda to pass out at the meeting, or write it on a large piece of paper and post it on the wall.
- Choose your meeting site carefully. You want to make sure that everyone at the meeting feels comfortable in the space, and that it is accessible to everyone.
- Choose a meeting facilitator and a notetaker – this can also be done informally at the beginning of the meeting, if you do not yet have roles established. A facilitator will help keep the meeting structured and effective, and the notetaker will create a record of what happens at the meeting. Other roles to consider are:
 - *Scribe*
Writes ideas on a board or flipchart as they are expressed. Can also be completed by the facilitator.
 - *Timekeeper*
Watches the clock to make sure the meeting is on schedule. Can also be completed by the facilitator.

- *Greeter*
Meets people, provides them with handouts, etc.

At the Meeting:

- Review the agenda
- At the beginning of the meeting, define what is meant by the terms: mission, goal, and objective. During the brainstorming session, the facilitator may need to revisit these definitions again – people sometimes think of goals as objectives, missions as goals, etc.
- Brainstorm about the broader mission of the garden. Keep a list of everyone's suggestions (preferably on a blackboard or flip chart so that everyone can see it) and then once everyone has contributed work through these to prioritize them. Choose one or a combination to determine your mission. Make sure everyone is at a consensus before moving on.
- Brainstorm a list of potential goals as a group. Choose from this list those the group would most like to work on. Prioritize these. This is when good record-keeping will be critical – goals that are determined not to be current priorities may be worth revisiting later.
- Determine objectives that will help you meet your goals. You do not have to determine objectives for every single goal at this meeting – you can just work on the high-priority ones, and set up a later meeting to focus on other goals.
- Develop an "action plan" to help get your objectives accomplished. The action plan should include:
 - *What needs to be done (specific tasks)*
 - *How it will be done*
 - *What resources do you need to get it done (people, money, materials)*
 - *Who will work on each task*
 - *When the objective should be accomplished*

- *How you know it has been accomplished (i.e., how you will measure results)*
- The facilitator should summarize what was accomplished at the meeting, and determine when the next meeting should take place.
- If you have not already done so, choose roles for the next meeting.

After the Meeting:

- Meeting minutes should be typed up and sent to participants, as well as those who may have been unable to make it to the meeting.
- Begin to plan the agenda for your next meeting.