Time:

15 minutes, or longer

Goal or purpose:

Brainstorming is a group technique designed to generate a large number of ideas in a limited amount of time.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

The facilitator gives the group a question (for example, 'what is nonviolence?') or an issue you want to come up with more ideas ('developing a fund-raising strategy'), then asks the group to come up with as many ideas and responses as possible. The following guidelines will help produce an effective brainstorm.

- Focus on quantity: The more ideas generated, the more to pick from.
- No criticism: Criticism, challenges and discussion should be put 'on hold' until the brainstorming is done.
- Unusual ideas are welcome: To get a good and long list of ideas, encourage creative responses to a problem.
- Combine and improve ideas: Good ideas can be combined to form a single very good idea.
- The facilitator should be aware that a brainstorm usually starts slowly, picks up speed as ideas are sparking other ideas, and then slows down again.

Wrapping up

After all the ideas are up on the wall, ask if there is anything that people have a question about, or that they disagree with. Open this up for discussion. You don't always need to come to consensus following a brainstorming session. Or you may want to sort out the answers for further discussion.

Nonviolence brainstorm

Try coming up with a single definition to answer 'What is nonviolence?' Through the brainstorm the participants can share many answers to that question – try to find enough commonality to reach a final definition that everyone can agree on. It can be enlightening to do a 'What is violence' brainstorm at the same time, again, trying to reach a definition. The facilitator should pay attention to key words, and check to make sure that words like 'power' and 'anger' don't only appear in the violence brainstorm. This can be used to support and inform other exercises, such as the spectrum game.

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