YMCA OF GREATER SEATTLE

Sample Strategies Used During Community Building Focus Groups

TALLEST TOWER

- Equally divided teams are given 5 minutes to build the tallest tower possible with the materials they are provided (each team should have the same materials). At the end of 5 minutes the team with the tallest tower that remains standing wins.
- “Unpack” the activity with open ended questions to promote thought and discussion. Examples include: What was that like for you? What did you notice? How did you make the decisions you made? What did it take to be successful in this? Why this activity?
- We used this activity during focus groups to build community and have participants start thinking about what mindsets and skills they value.
- Take it one step further by asking for 2-4 volunteers to observe for evidence of specific behaviors. In our parent focus groups observers looked for evidence of communication, collaboration, problem solving, and leadership. This was to deepen the mindset around intentional outcomes for their children through youth programming.

PAIR SHARING AND TABLE DISCUSSION

- Provide participants with 2-3 questions for consideration.
- Ask participants in pairs or groups of 3 to take a few minutes to discuss. 6 minutes is usually enough.
- After the pair share, if the group is large, then ask the participants to share with others at their table highlights of what was discussed during the pair share. If the group is smaller come together and share highlights with the entire group.
- This strategy allows participants to continue to build a comfort level working together and sharing with each other. Combining the pair share and table discussion gives everyone in the room an opportunity to share- no matter what the group dynamics are.
**ROTATION BRAINSTORM** (Adapted from David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of The Forum for Youth Investment, Youth Work Method Series Planning & Reflection.)

Other names for this strategy include Carousel Brainstorming, Round Robin Brainstorming, and Classroom Gallery Walk.

- Set up around the room are large sheets of paper with different topics/questions/prompts on each.
- In small groups, youth spend a few minutes at each station—brainstorming, discussing, and writing their responses on the large paper.
- After a few minutes all the groups rotate to the next station. This continues until all the groups have an opportunity to spend time at each station.
- Be sure to allow time at the end for youth to go back and read the responses at all the stations. In our youth focus groups, at the very end we rotated together as a large group to each station and asked for volunteers to share what they wrote or to read aloud something that resonated with them.

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**BRAINSTORM FREE WRITE WITH GUIDING PROMPTS**

- Create a series of prompts that address your guiding research questions.
- All participants have a pen and paper and are asked for one minute to write down whatever comes to mind for them after a given prompt. Participants do not see all the prompts at once, just one at a time is read out loud and put up to be seen, and for one minute they write their thoughts until the next prompt is read. The point of a free write is to get thoughts on paper without concerning oneself with how a statement is crafted.
- Once participants have addressed all the prompts, they are asked to go back and silently read what they wrote, circling words or phrases that stand out to them.
- The final step is sharing out. Using flip chart paper and addressing one prompt at a time, participants share out the relevant words and phrases they circled as the facilitator scribes their responses. This often leads to continued discussion and brainstorming with participants building off of each other’s ideas. You can take it one step further by asking participants to determine/vote on priorities by using a pre-determined number of sticky dots at the end of this activity.
- This strategy gives all participants the opportunity to simultaneously internally reflect, allows all voices to be heard (even those who are not as comfortable speaking in public because they can share out a word or phrase), provides opportunity for participants to hear everyone’s thoughts, and to see that the facilitator is capturing their voices accurately.