

SNOWBALL FIGHT

This is the core activity to jumpstart a research process. Participants write up their key questions or ideas on paper which they crumple up into “snowballs” and throw at each other in a “snowball fight”. The papers are then read out loud and organized into themes. It can be used for all kinds of situations as a fun and anonymous alternative to brainstorming.

PURPOSE

To identify what the group needs to learn in order to achieve its goals.

To begin developing a research design.

OUTCOMES

Main research questions and preliminary research themes are identified.

Preliminary research sample is determined.

TIME

20-60 minutes

MATERIALS

Small pieces of white paper

Pens for each participant

Colored Post-its

Big paper clips

Flipchart paper

Markers

SOURCE

Exercise developed by Levana Saxon of Partners for Collaborative Change, inspired by an activity by the same name written by Youth in Focus.

PREPARATION

Cut up enough small pieces of white paper for each participant to have 3 to 5 pieces.

Optional Create a version of the sample poster below with instructions for small groups.

PROCESS

1. Develop Snowballs.

- Provide each participant a few slips of paper, depending on how much time you have to spend on this activity.
- Once you have your research goal identified, you can use the prompt: “What do we need to know in order to reach our goal?”
- Ask them write down their questions on the paper – one question per slip of paper. Unless you have a group that is bigger than 20 - there is no need to limit how many individual questions people write down.

2. Scatter and anonymize the snowballs. You can simply ask folks to turn in the slips of paper and then you redistribute them. However a process that is much more fun is to invite everyone to close their eyes and imagine that they are having a freak indoor snowstorm. If you want to amplify the visualization, you can ask them to pull on their boots, hat and jacket and then tell them to open their eyes and crumple their papers to have a snowball fight!

- Encourage them to pick them up and throw them again and again. It won't hurt and can re-energize a group that has been sitting for a while.
- Ask them to collect the “snowballs” (so that each person has at least 2-5 questions) and form a circle.

3. Organize snowballs into themes.

- Invite a volunteer to read their question out loud and place it on the ground in the middle of the circle.
- Ask participants who have a similar question to walk into the middle and silently place their question in the same place to create a pile. After all the related, similar or identical snowballs have been placed, ask participants to come up with a title for that cluster that captures the theme. As they do this, write the title on a colored Post-it and stick it to the cluster.
- Ask for someone to read off a new snowball to start off a new cluster and repeat step B. If someone is unsure where to place their question (which cluster or a new cluster) invite them to read it out loud and get advice from the group.
- Allow for some discussion and exploration of the different themes. Ask people to move questions around, create new themes or group them differently until the clusters all make sense to them. Add or remove the Post-its while they are doing this.
- Write the final theme titles on the wall.

4. Develop your main research question. Have the group look at the clustered themes to see if there are any obvious “umbrella questions” that all of the other questions fall under, or ask if someone can think of a question that addresses all of the different themes. For example, if the themes relate to the causes, effects and solutions to a problem, your question can be, “What are the causes and effects of X and what can we do to change it?” Or it can be more directly about what the community wants, such as “What opportunities exist for community input, and what input does the community have regarding (theme X,Y & Z)?” You can also split the group into smaller groups of 2-4 participants and take 10 minutes to come up with an umbrella question and share them with the whole group to discuss and decide.

5. Secure the clusters. Using paper clips or another device, secure all of the snowballs in their theme groups with the colorful Post-it and theme title on top. You will use them in the rest of the activity, and may come back to these stacks of snowballs throughout the project.

6. Optional Begin to think about who can answer which questions. Identify areas of the room where each theme will be discussed and ask people to choose where they want to go. Recommend that each group choose a facilitator and scribe and take time to talk about each question. The task for each group is to read through each “snowball” in their theme, and identify who holds a possible answer for each question. Have them develop a poster with the theme title at the top, the questions listed and grouped by potential audiences, research subjects or people who can answer those questions. See Sample Poster.

Note

Keep these posters for the next step of the research process.

Sample Poster

GROUP INSTRUCTIONS:

1. CHOOSE FACILITATOR
2. CHOOSE SCRIBE
3. READ EACH QUESTION AND DISCUSS:
 - A. WHAT IS THIS QUESTION TRYING TO DETERMINE?
 - B. IS IT REDUNDANT? (IF SO, COMBINE)
 - C. WHO SHOULD WE ASK THIS QUESTION OF?
4. DEVELOP A POSTER LIKE THIS:

THEME

COMMUNITY:

- QUESTION.....?
- QUESTION.....?

YOUNG PEOPLE:

- QUESTION.....?

CITY PLANNERS:

- QUESTION....?

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

- QUESTION...?