Brainstorming is a well-known and widely used problem-solving tool, and it can help rejuvenate your organization and get everyone excited and involved. The purpose of this method is to get out as many ideas as possible. You can use brainstorming for almost anything: program ideas, themes, slogans, publicity, group goals, and problem solving. Here are a few simple guidelines that will help facilitate the process:

- No evaluating of any kind is allowed. Do not discuss an idea, just go on to the next one. When ideas are judged, members will feel the need to defend themselves and may not wish to participate. Without full participation from all members, the creative process is hindered. Also, when members feel they are being judged, they will censor their ideas to conform to the group. You do not want conformity. You want the wild, spontaneous, and even the ridiculous. Wild and crazy ideas can be a springboard for more sensible ones or can be tamed down later in the process. The goal at this stage is QUANTITY not QUALITY!
- Limit discussion to one issue or program type. Brainstorming needs a goal or something to focus on. It would be too confusing and distracting to try to solve all your problems at once. Pick an issue or topic that all members can speak on.
- Set a time limit. This will encourage spontaneity and quick thinking.
- Encourage members to build on what has been said and modify the ideas of others. This reduces the need for people to find the “right” idea and helps keep the session more stimulating and fun.
- Write down every idea. Use two or three people to record if necessary. You do not have to write down the ideas verbatim, but enough of the concept and key words to be able to remember the idea later. Record all responses on a whiteboard or big sheets of paper so everyone can see them; do not record the name of the person suggesting.

Checking For Possibilities
After the brainstorming session is over, make good use of the members' creativity. Before ranking or evaluating ideas, group them into related categories for review. This will make it easier to combine similar ideas and weed out duplication. Decide which ideas are possible and which can be eliminated; this can be done by putting pluses or minuses next to each item.

Ranking of Ideas
Now it is time to rank the most promising ideas. Write all the possible ideas somewhere where every member can see what is being ranked. You may want to use a rating system such as 1 being lowest and 5 being highest. Use cost of the program, popularity of an idea, and access to facilities or equipment for the program when rating the ideas. Select those with greatest potential and high-ranking priority for either implementation or refinement by committee or the group. You may need to have members do some research on costs and logistics before the group can pick a top idea to implement.

Follow-Up
If the ideas are to be implemented successfully by the group or committee, ask for updates on a regular basis. Review and evaluate your ideas as they are being implemented. Make any changes deemed necessary by the group. Be sure to utilize the ideas generated. It is extremely demoralizing for a group to invest its time, energy and creativity and have the idea disappear. Seeing your ideas come to fruition however, is extremely rewarding.

Revised May 11, 2015