

▶ Activity: Brainstorm Solutions and Refine Ideas

Ideate a range of potential solutions to your problem



Framing

Once you have defined an important problem to address, it's time for your design team to creatively brainstorm tons of potential solutions – including the innovative, nontraditional ideas that are especially important for districts trying to approach teaching and learning differently. A brainstorm's success is judged by the quantity and range of the solutions generated.

As you brainstorm potential solutions, consider the range of teaching and learning-related “levers” you can push and pull on (in other words, the parts of a school system that you can change). Our [Innovative Learning Implementation Framework](#) may help you spark thinking about the various places within your district where you can push and pull. For example, to increase student engagement, one district might consider exploring changes in their “community and culture,” another might revisit their use of “learning materials and tools,” and still another might play around with use of “time” in their district.

Ensuring Equity & Resiliency

Equity looks like bringing a diverse group together for brainstorming, including people whose perspectives and identities differ from members of your design team (alternatively, you could brainstorm with your design team and then get feedback from students, families teachers, and classified staff). Equity in this activity also looks like intentionally brainstorming solutions that address the barriers to equity that your team has identified. For example, for a problem of practice related to increasing student engagement, revisiting your data – say, a major trend showing that Black and Latino/a/x students were less likely to see connections between what they are learning and their real-world experiences and goals – should lead you to brainstorm ways to make learning more relevant, especially for these student groups.

Resiliency looks like intentionally brainstorming solutions that fall outside the bounds of your district's current constraints. Ditch the assumptions you have about what “cannot change” about school schedules, the role of the teacher and the student, and others. Consider pain points to address as well as successes to build on. The more wildly creative your ideas are, the more likely your solution will improve your ability to respond and adapt to changes in the environment and/or to individual student's needs.

Steps to Implementation

Suggested time: 1-2 hours

1. Before coming together, conduct external research around your problem of practice. Consider promising strategies you might draw upon from other districts or disciplines.
Note: See TLA's [Getting Started Guides](#) for inspiration related to some common problems of practice. (see Appendix: Resources)
2. Gather your team in a room (in-person or virtual) with access to sticky notes or a digital alternative, such as [Google Jamboard](#); make sure your team has defined a clear problem of practice aligned to your district's most pressing needs.
3. Review IDEO's [7 Simple Rules of Brainstorming](#) to set the stage.
4. Reground your team in your problem statement (i.e., your "how might we?" question). This is the question for which you'll be brainstorming solutions.
5. Have each member of your design team spend about 5 minutes individually putting as many potential solutions as possible on the Jamboard; put one solution per sticky note and encourage quantity over quality.
6. Come back together as a group, read through each sticky note, and cluster together similar solutions.
7. Give members of your team a chance to explain their ideas so that everyone is on the same page about what each set of solutions means. Document explanations to come back to when you select from your list.
8. Summarize your brainstorm by documenting the list of potential solutions your team has developed.

Potential solutions

9. Next, you will narrow down the options to one solution.

This activity was inspired by [IDEO's Brainstorm Rules](#).

Note: Some teams may choose to replace this activity or supplement it with alternative exercises; see below for examples.

**Cedar Rapids: Brainstorming Ideas for Student Goal-Setting and Feedback**

Cedar Rapids identified four categories of solutions: Connecting feedback and grades explicitly to profile of a graduate; Get community involved in assessing students' progress towards profile of a graduate; Building space and structures for students to reflect; Explore other ways to gauge student progress.

Mastery Charter Schools: Brainstorming Ideas for Blended Learning that Foster Independence

Mastery Charter identified three categories of solutions, to adopt practices that focus on: teacher moves; systems and processes; students.

Monterey Peninsula: Brainstorming Ideas for Flexibility, Personalization, and Student Sense of Belonging

Monterey Peninsula identified six categories of solutions: Engage students and teachers to design new systems; Revise policies; Focus on staff members' sense of belonging; Revise grading to be mastery-based; Regroup students by academic need and/or interest; Build social-emotional activities into academic courses and set aside time for intentional community building.

See Appendix: Case Studies for more details

Additional Resources

- The Learning Accelerator: [Getting Started Guides](#)
- IDEO U: [7 Simple Rules of Brainstorming](#)
- I am Not My Pixels: [How to Run a Crazy Eights exercise](#)
- [IDEO Design Kit: Get Visual](#)