

Ideas Fair Technique

How is this technique described?

This engagement technique is intended to bring together large groups of participants to generate and explore a wide diversity of perspectives and ideas. Most effectively hosted as a drop-in style event, its key focus is to draw on the wisdom of many and gather lots and lots of data and insight in creative ways. It can be held as an individual event or series of face-to-face events. In a nutshell, a number of “Discussion Stations” are created to support discussion questions that builds on itself. Embedded within each station is a unique conversation technique or method that appeals to a variety of learners (visual, auditory, tactile).

Project Example

Dialogue Partners worked with the City of Edmonton on the [Evolving Infill Project](#). It was a conversation about infill development and neighbourhood change in established communities. Our project focus was:

Creating positive change through new housing in established neighbourhoods that reflects our values and contributes to a vibrant Edmonton.

Step 1 of the project aimed at providing participants with the opportunity to share their experiences with infill, understand the current opportunities and challenges as well as gather creative, innovative ideas to move infill forward. In addition to providing stakeholders with the opportunity to share what was important to them we also wanted to create the space for them to understand what was important to others, creating a shared journey and common experience.

As one of a number of engagement methods, we used “Infill Talks”, an ideas fair concept.

The event was set up in the following way:

	Station Topic	Conversation Technique
Station A	Hopes & Expectations	Six Word Story technique based on: http://blog.ted.com/2013/01/16/life-in-six-words-highlights-from-our-chat-with-larry-smith/
Station B	Tell Us Your Infill Story	Speakers Corner & facilitated discussion

Station C	Considerations for Infill Development	Prioritization exercise utilizing infill pictures and images
Station D	Opportunities & Challenges associated with Infill	Mind mapping exercise
Station E	Pulling it all together & Moving forward	Photobooth and chalk thought bubbles

Each station also incorporated facilitated discussion and recording templates. Upon arriving participants were provided a Participant Guide and evaluation form.

When is this technique most effective? (situation/ context)

This technique could be used in a variety of situations and projects but needs to be used EARLY on in an engagement process or conversation. It is not intended to synthesize, analyze or make choices but instead is most effective as an input generator tool.

What needs to be considered when implementing this approach?

Venue

- Large open space with lots of room at stations as well as space in the center of the room for informal conversations and community interaction
- Lots of wall space to display ideas and input so that participants can see and build on each others input

Timing

- This is a drop in style event needing approximately 2-2.5 hours. Participants should be encouraged to spend as long or as little time as they see valuable

Attendance

- This event can host a large number of people and would be most effective with more than 40 participants

Resources

- This is a resource-intensive process that requires a significant number of materials, props and supporting documents. It also requires a 8-10 team members to support facilitated conversation and recording of participant input.

If there is one thing we could leave you with to remember when implementing this technique it would be...

This could be quite different for some participants who attend expecting a traditional “town hall” or open house with a formal presentation and question and answer period. We noted in our experience with the Evolving Infill project that a number of participants needed additional support to “get going” but most of whom were pleasantly surprised and satisfied with this different approach.

This technique is ALL ABOUT LISTENING. Project team members or proponents need to prepare to take on a different role of asking and listening. If needs be...wear a name badge that says “I’m here to listen.”

Good luck and we look forward to hearing your experience with this technique!

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