

# **Decision Making Tools:**

**Clustering the Options**

# ***CLUSTERING THE OPTIONS***

DoDEA School Improvement Module: Decision-Making Tools

## **I. Purpose/Overview:**

Clustering is a decision-making tool which allows a group to identify possible solutions, interventions and/or causes to a concern or problem.

## **II. Key Ideas and Concepts:**

- Clustering the Options allows a group to brainstorm possible causes of problems, possible interventions or possible solutions to a problem.
- Categories are created as the group proceeds and the labels are given to the categories afterwards.
- Categorizing is a very important step to make the brainstorming useful. This step is often overlooked.
- This process is a powerful tool to identify the areas which have the greatest impact on a problem or which areas have the greatest possibilities for interventions.

## **III. Outcomes:**

- identify areas having impact on a problem
- identify areas having the greatest possibilities for interventions
- identify causes of a problem and/or possible solutions
- categorize causes or solutions
- label the categories

## **IV. Time: 60-75 minutes**

## **V. Materials:**

### **A. Handouts:**

- Clustering the Options
- Clustering the Options (Facilitator's Copy)
- Weighted Voting
- Weighted Voting (Facilitator's Copy)
- Brainstorming Rules

### **B. Overheads:**

- Brainstorming Rules
- Weighted Voting
- Clustering the Options

**C. Charts:**

- chart paper
- chart stand (optional)

**D. Other**

- masking tape
- markers
- “post-it” notes
- overhead transparencies
- overhead projector

**VI. Bibliography**

Champion, Robby H. *Tools for Change Workshops*. Columbus, OH: NSDC. 1993

Hirsh, Stephanie et al. *Keys to Successful Meetings*. Dallas, TX: NSDC. 1994

# *Clustering the Options*

## **Facilitation Directions**

DoDEA School Improvement Module: Decision-Making Tools

### **I. Key Ideas and Concepts:**

- Clustering the Options allows a group to brainstorm possible causes of problems, possible interventions or possible solutions to a problem.
- Categories are created as the group goes along and the labels are given to the categories afterwards.
- Categorizing is a very important step to make the brainstorming useful. This step is often overlooked.
- This process is a powerful tool to identify the areas which have the greatest impact on a problem or which areas have the greatest possibilities for interventions.

### **II. Outcomes:**

- identify areas having impact on a problem
- identify areas having the greatest possibility for interventions
- identify causes of a problem and/or possible solutions
- categorize causes or solutions
- label the categories

### **III. Agenda:**

- Activator
- Clustering Activity
- Workshop Report Card

### **IV. Facilitation Directions:**

#### **A. Activities:**

##### **1. Activator: (5 minutes)**

- How many of you have ever tried to show someone how to sort clothes to wash? (It may have been a significant other.)
- They watch you sort and put the clothes that have things in common together. It could be the color, texture, temperature, spinning cycle, material, etc.
- At the end, they want to know how you decided what clothes to put in what pile and which group to wash first.
- You say, "Well these are delicate and light and so on."
- You also tell them you made decisions on what action to take next according to the amount in each group, immediate need, biggest possibility of taking the least time.

- I could have stuffed all the clothes together in the washer like someone I know who does not wash clothes because he says he just can't do this sorting thing. He looks at the wash as one big mound of clothes and does not know where to start!! haha
- My problem was how to go about washing the clothes. Our problems in education are not as simple as washing clothes but we can use the same idea of sorting to help us to examine problems and get started.

**B. Explain the process steps for *Clustering the Options (OH)*: (5 minutes)**

- Explain the steps for *Clustering the Options (OH)*
- Divide the groups into teams of 3-4.

**C. Options for Clustering: (35 minutes)**

Choose one of the following activities based upon your purpose for the activity.

- Option 1: Assign the following problem to the team/s- Students are scoring low on the maps and graphs portion of the CTBS test in science. What are possible solutions? (40 minutes)
- Option 2: Assign the following problem to the team/s- Students are scoring low on maps and graphs portion of the CTBS test in science. What are possible causes?
- Option 3: Assign a problem identified by the school and follow the process.

**D. Explain the *Weighted Voting (OH)* process to the group: (20 minutes)**

- Explain the process of *Weighted Voting*.
- Tell the members to go through this process to identify the solutions which could have the greatest impact. (This is for Option 1 Activity above.)
- Tell the members to go through this process and identify the possible causes. (This is for Option 2 Activity above.)

Note to facilitator: If the group is identifying causes, then they need to use another strategy, such as Nominal Group Technique to generate solutions the problem. This will require another session if you only have 60-75 minutes for this session.

## **V. Review, Summary, Questions**

- a. What insights did you have about the process or the information as a result of using this technique?
- b. What questions or concerns do you have?
- c. How and where might you plan to use “Clustering the Options” in the School Improvement Process?

## **VI. Suggestions for Practice or Implementation**

- Once your group has identified some possible solutions to the problem, it is important to determine a plan of action. Often good ideas never become a reality because they are never implemented.
- Set a date for the next meeting
- Assign the members the SIP Module- Action Plan to read before the next meeting.
- Develop a plan at the next meeting.

# CLUSTERING the OPTIONS

## Facilitator's Copy

### Process Steps:

1. Volunteer for meeting roles: facilitator, timekeeper, process observer, reporter
2. Provide all group members with a stack of adhesive post-it notes for writing ideas (ways to solve problem, achieve the goal, etc.) One idea per card.
4. Allow 4-5 minutes for individuals to write their ideas on the post-it notes.
5. Gather group around a piece of chart paper or easel. Write goal or problem in the center of the paper.
6. Invite members to take turns placing their ideas (slips of paper or cards) on the chart beside similar ideas, forming clusters (or categories around the words in the center.
  - (If time and group size invite participants to briefly explain the idea as it is placed on the paper.)
7. Group determines the best "label" to describe the cluster.
8. Have group members analyze each cluster's strengths, weaknesses and acknowledge repetitions by stacking "repeats."
9. Use a decision-making process, such as *Weighted Voting (HO)* to eliminate or reduce the number of options.

#### Note to the Facilitator:

- Differences in wording on the slips of paper may make clustering confusing at first.
- Some people are anxious to campaign for the selection of their own ideas. This will slow down the process.
- This works best when you are searching, open for ideas, and are not closed to a decision.

## **CLUSTERING the OPTIONS**

### **Process Steps:**

- 1. Volunteer for meeting roles: facilitator, timekeeper, process observer, reporter**
- 2. Provide all group members with a stack of adhesive post-it notes for writing ideas (ways to solve problem, achieve the goal, etc.) One idea per card.**
- 4. Allow 4-5 minutes for individuals to write their ideas on the post-it notes.**
- 5. Gather group around a piece of chart paper or easel. Write goal or problem in the center of the paper.**
- 6. Invite members to take turns placing their ideas (slips of paper) on the chart beside similar ideas, forming clusters (or categories around the words in the center.**
  - (If time and group size permits, invite participants to briefly explain the idea as it is placed on the paper.)**
- 7. Group determines the best "label" to describe the cluster.**
- 8. Have group members analyze each cluster's strengths, weaknesses and acknowledge repetitions by stacking "repeats."**
- 9. Use a decision-making process, such as *Weighted Voting (HO)* to eliminate or reduce the number of options.**

Adapted from Champion Training & Consulting  
RHC 1995

# Weighted Voting

## FACILITATOR'S COPY ONLY

### PROCESS STEPS:

1. Review procedure and describe product
2. Group generates or reviews a list of potential choices or options which are posted on chart paper
3. Agree on the criteria for voting. ( e.g. needs to be within our control, does not cost money.)
4. Group members cast their votes for the options. (If there are 10 options, each member is given 4-6 votes)
5. Members may write or announce their choices. The choices are recorded for public view using checkmarks, colored filing dots, etc.
6. Members are allowed to divide their votes or place all votes on one option. (For example, given 10 options and 5 votes, a member may put all 5 votes on one option, distribute the 5 votes among 5 options or even cast the 5 votes among 2 options.
7. Once votes are cast, the facilitator helps the group to tally the votes. (Typically, a list of 10 options can be reduced but no one solution or option will emerge as the winner. It often requires another round of voting if one option is required.

#### Note to the Facilitator:

- Make sure to establish the criteria for voting because members may use different rationale for their selections.
- A discussion may be necessary to clarify the options.
- Try to avoid situations where members cast their votes while colleagues watch.
- Be alert for a small but organized clique which can pool their votes and skew the results.
- People feel empowered when they have more than one vote.
- The process is fast and does not require a mee.

Adapted from Champion Training & Consulting RHC 1995

## **WEIGHTED VOTING**

### **PROCESS STEPS:**

- 1. Review procedure and describe product**
- 2. Group generates or reviews a list of potential choices or options which are posted on chart paper**
- 3. Agree on the criteria for voting. (e.g. needs to be within our control, does not cost money)**
- 4. Group members cast their votes for the options. (If there are 10 options, each member is given 4-6 votes.)**
- 5. Members may write or announce their choices. The choices are recorded for public view using checkmarks, colored filing dots, etc.**
- 6. Members are allowed to divide their votes or place all votes on one option. (For example, given 10 options and 5 votes, a member may put all 5 votes on one option, distribute the 5 votes among 5 options or even cast the 5 votes among 2 options.)**
- 7. Once votes are cast, the facilitator helps the group to tally the votes. (Typically, a list of 10 options can be reduced but no one solution or option will emerge as the winner. It often requires another round of voting if one option is required.)**

Adapted from Champion Training & Consulting  
RHC 1995

## ***BRAINSTORMING RULES***

- 1. All ideas accepted**
- 2. Each person has equal opportunity to express ideas**
- 3. Strive for quantity over quality**
- 4. Piggybacking or hitchhiking is encouraged. (Team members get ideas from other members or one member's idea will trigger another slightly different idea.)**
- 5. Record all ideas**
- 6. Turn off the censor in your brain.**
- 7. Say each idea out loud as it occurs to you.**

Adapted from *Keys to Successful Meetings*  
by Stephanie Hirsh