Nominal Groups

Engagement range	Consult/Partnership
Difficulty level	Medium to Hard
Cost	Medium ($1,000 to $10,000)
When might you use it	To communicate an issue To build alliances, consensus To develop community capacity To develop action plan
Number of people required to help to organise	One-three, depends on the audience size and level of complexity
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Medium (11-30) to Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Publicity; Venue; Catering; Staffing; Facilitator; Audio and visual recording and amplification; Artists; Photographer; Overhead projectors, screens etc; A flip chart or newsprint for each group; masking tape; Pack of three x five cards for each table; Felt pens for each table; Paper and pencil for each participant; Response sheets
Innovation level	Medium to high

Description

Nominal group technique is a process in which a group of people become a group in name only. This technique aims to eliminate social and psychological dynamics of group behaviour which can inhibit individual creativity and participation in group decisions. Everyone is given a structured opportunity to participate.

Nominal group technique is a way of organising a meeting to enhance its productivity. Its purpose is to balance and increase participation, to use different processes for different phases of creative problem solving and to reduce the errors in aggregating individual judgments into group decisions. It is especially useful for problem identification, problem solving and program planning.

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Objective

- To increase participation in problem identification, problem solving and program planning, and to make sure that participants represent a balance of the range of opinions available within a community or group.

Desired Outcome

- Creative problem solving and group decisions that incorporate individual judgments with greater accuracy.

Uses/Strengths

- Highly effective workshop activity.
- Ensures input from all participants.
- Elicits a wide range of responses.
- Useful for determining democratically derived outcomes.
- Useful for fact-finding, idea generation, or solutions.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Good facilitators are required.
- Rules need to be clear at outset.
- The wording of questions must be unambiguous and clear.
- Not for routine business, bargaining, predetermined outcome, or groups requiring consensus.
- Can be difficult to convince people to use nominal groups for the first time.
- Explanations help to overcome this resistance, but a successful experience helps much more.

Step by Step Guide

1. Advertise group meeting of three - four hours.

2. Select participants to ensure a mix of interests/community groups/social levels/age/gender, etc.

3.   Hire facilitator skilled in nominal group meeting process. Success of the process depends on thorough preparation by the facilitator.

4. Leaders should clarify the questions to be asked, considering what key information they need. Pre-test the question before the meeting. Remember, global questions stimulate global answers. Emotional (likes/dislikes, etc.) information must be asked for directly.

5. For larger groups, organise into subgroups (seven-nine people) on the same or different topics, depending on the range of issues.

6. The facilitator should follow the full step-by-step process, which can include the silent generation and balloting of ideas used strategically in a wide variety of situations and taking relatively little time (e.g. for quick agenda setting).

7. Choose from the following steps, and follow the process:

    7.1   Silent generation of ideas in writing (10-20 minutes).

    7.2   Recorded round-robin listing of ideas on chart (20-40 minutes).

    7.3   A very brief discussion and clarification of each idea on the chart (20-40 minutes).

    7.4   Preliminary vote on priorities: silent, independent (10 minutes).

    7.5   Meeting break.

    7.6   Discussion of the preliminary vote (20-40 minutes).

    7.7   Final vote on priorities: silent independent (10 minutes).

    7.8   Listing and agreement on prioritized items.

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