SNOWBALL FIGHT

This is the core activity to jumpstart a research process. Participants write up their key questions or ideas on paper which they crumple up into “snowballs” and throw at each other in a “snowball fight”. The papers are then read out loud and organized into themes. It can be used for all kinds of situations as a fun and anonymous alternative to brainstorming.

PURPOSE
To identify what the group needs to learn in order to achieve its goals.
To begin developing a research design.

OUTCOMES
Main research questions and preliminary research themes are identified.
Preliminary research sample is determined.

TIME
20-60 minutes

MATERIALS
Small pieces of white paper
Pens for each participant
Colored Post-its
Big paper clips
Flipchart paper
Markers

SOURCE
Exercise developed by Levana Saxon of Partners for Collaborative Change, inspired by an activity by the same name written by Youth in Focus.

PREPARATION
Cut up enough small pieces of white paper for each participant to have 3 to 5 pieces.
Optional Create a version of the sample poster below with instructions for small groups.

PROCESS
1. Develop Snowballs.
   • Provide each participant a few slips of paper, depending on how much time you have to spend on this activity.
   • Once you have your research goal identified, you can use the prompt: “What do we need to know in order to reach our goal?”
   • Ask them write down their questions on the paper – one question per slip of paper. Unless you have a group that is bigger than 20 - there is no need to limit how many individual questions people write down.

2. Scatter and anonymize the snowballs. You can simply ask folks to turn in the slips of paper and then you redistribute them. However a process that is much more fun is to invite everyone to close their eyes and imagine that they are having a freak indoor snowstorm. If you want to amplify the visualization, you can ask them to pull on their boots, hat and jacket and then tell them to open their eyes and crumple their papers to have a snowball fight!
   • Encourage them to pick them up and throw them again and again.
   • It won’t hurt and can re-energize a group that has been sitting for a while.
   • Ask them to collect the “snowballs” (so that each person has at least 2-5 questions) and form a circle.
3. Organize snowballs into themes.
   - Invite a volunteer to read their question out loud and place it on the
ground in the middle of the circle.
   - Ask participants who have a similar question to walk into the middle
and silently place their question in the same place to create a pile. After
all the related, similar or identical snowballs have been placed, ask
participants to come up with a title for that cluster that captures the
theme. As they do this, write the title on a colored Post-it and stick it to
the cluster.
   - Ask for someone to read off a new snowball to start off a new cluster
and repeat step B. If someone is unsure where to place their question
(which cluster or a new cluster) invite them to read it out loud and get
advice from the group.
   - Allow for some discussion and exploration of the different themes. Ask
people to move questions around, create new themes or group them
differently until the clusters all make sense to them. Add or remove the
Post-its while they are doing this.
   - Write the final theme titles on the wall.

4. Develop your main research question. Have the group look at the clustered
themes to see if there are any obvious “umbrella questions” that all of the other
questions fall under, or ask if someone can think of a question that addresses all
of the different themes. For example, if the themes relate to the causes, effects
and solutions to a problem, your question can be, “What are the causes and
effects of X and what can we do to change it?” Or it can be more directly about
what the community wants, such as “What opportunities exist for community
input, and what input does the community have regarding (theme X,Y & Z)?”
You can also split the group into smaller groups of 2-4 participants and take 10
minutes to come up with an umbrella question and share them with the whole
group to discuss and decide.

5. Secure the clusters. Using paper clips or another device, secure all of the
snowballs in their theme groups with the colorful Post-it and theme title on top.
You will use them in the rest of the activity, and may come back to these stacks
of snowballs throughout the project.

6. Optional Begin to think about who can answer which questions. Identify areas
of the room where each theme will be discussed and ask people to choose
where they want to go. Recommend that each group choose a facilitator and
scribe and take time to talk about each question. The task for each group is to
read through each “snowball” in their theme, and identify who holds a possible
answer for each question. Have them develop a poster with the theme title
at the top, the questions listed and grouped by potential audiences, research
subjects or people who can answer those questions. See Sample Poster.

Note
Keep these posters for the next
step of the research process.
Sample Poster

**GROUP INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. **CHOOSE FACILITATOR**
2. **CHOOSE SCRIBE**
3. **READ EACH QUESTION AND DISCUSS:**
   A. **WHAT IS THIS QUESTION TRYING TO DETERMINE?**
   B. **IS IT REDUNDANT? (IF SO, COMBINE)**
   C. **WHO SHOULD WE ASK THIS QUESTION OF?**
4. **DEVELOP A POSTER LIKE THIS:**

   **THEME**

   **COMMUNITY:**
   - QUESTION.....?
   - QUESTION.....?

   **YOUNG PEOPLE:**
   - QUESTION.....?

   **CITY PLANNERS:**
   - QUESTION....?

   **DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION**
   - QUESTION...?