The Design Difference

A collaboration between Japan Society, the Designers Accord, Common Ground, and GOOD

How can creative thinking positively impact society?

When do multiple perspectives yield richer outcomes?

What is the Design Difference?

In November 2010, Japan Society, the Designers Accord, Common Ground, and GOOD held the Design Difference Charrette to explore how design can make a positive impact in addressing social problems.

Twenty-two designers, civic leaders, journalists, and innovators from Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States participated in the charrette, which consisted of a day-long immersion in Brownsville, and a day of structured brainstorming.

The focus of our two-day, problem-solving workshop was to develop fresh ideas and creative thinking for Brownsville, an underserved urban neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Only one square mile in size, Brownsville is home to the city's highest concentration of public housing. Most of the residents live in the familiar high-rise projects that make up over a third of the housing stock, yet the neighborhood itself is under-populated, with vacant storefronts and empty apartments lining the streets.

Brownsville is one of the most violent neighborhoods in New York City with a 50 percent increase in gun violence last year—even as the rest of the city has seen a trend towards lower crime. Drug trade pervades the landscape, and many of the male residents have already been to jail.

Only a third of the Brownsville population has graduated from high school, and the median household income in 2008 was estimated at $17,967—far below the poverty line.

The secondary goal of the charrette was to record how we could used the design process and the tools of design thinking in the real-world setting of Brownsville so that it could serve as a model for others to employ in their own work and environments. This document is meant to convey our approach and findings. We hope others will build on this, and share their experiences so that we can create a continuous cycle of learning and improvement.

A three-part series documenting the Design Difference was published on GOOD in January 2011.

An excerpted version appears here.
Read the full versions at:
http://www.good.is/tag/the-design-difference

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In Brownsville, Enormous Urban Challenges, and Hope

As I ride a bus through the neighborhood of Brownsville in Brooklyn two days after Halloween, I see ghosts. The location of a once-thriving famous pickle factory. The abandoned steel plant laced with razor wire. An empty main street that once was filled with bustling furniture stores.

As part of a group of thinkers gathered for a charrette to focus on one of New York's most underserved communities, we hear plenty from our tour guide about a phantom neighborhood of front stoops, street ball, and a vibrant Jewish community that lived here in the early 1900s. What we see is Brownsville's reality of broken windows and vacant buildings.

The bus stops outside what looks like an unremarkable building, a low-slung concrete-covered complex. Just stepping inside we know this place is different. The warm air is humidified by a large public pool. A hallway is draped with vivid murals made to look like an Egyptian tomb. Visitors are greeted by a slow-moving iguana named Juliet. And the most remarkable part:

There are people here, lots of people here, perhaps more people than we've seen during our entire 30-minute tour. This is the Brownsville Recreation Center, and it is the heart of the community.

At the rec center, we have lunch in a surreal setting—a theater still dripping with blood and gore from the annual haunted house—and meet Greg Jackson. The unofficial mayor of Brownsville, Jackson is a towering figure with a cheerful face, and he seems to know just about everyone in the neighborhood.

For Jackson, the vacant streets we saw on the bus ride in aren't the status quo. The rooms around us echoing with pick-up basketball games, the clatter of ping pong practice, the clang of weights—these are the Brownsville reality. "I say, the rec center is 'normal,'" he says, smiling. "Here, we can dream it."

As the executive director of the Brownsville Partnership, a pioneering homelessness prevention and community development program, dreaming is a big part of Jackson's job. In a telling moment, he points to the storefronts that used to be the center of the community. Back when he grew up, he says, his family spent Sunday afternoons walking the business district, window shopping.

"Daydreaming," Jackson calls this action, something which he thinks is critically important for the neighborhood. That's what's missing for the residents: that public imagination, the feeling of possibility, an idea of what could be.

We were here as part of an event called The Design Difference to help find out how we might be able to help Brownsville dream again.

A Tool For Change

The Design Difference was organized by the Japan Society in New York in partnership with Common Ground, the Designers Accord, and GOOD. It's the latest project of the Japan Society's Innovators Network, which hopes to champion social change in a way that broadens and strengthens the dialogue between Japan and the U.S. Betty Borden, the Japan Society's director of policy projects, says that the goal of the Innovators Network is to address global issues, like sustainability and urbanization, with local solution.

"We want to look at what people are doing at the community level," she says. "We're very interested in how communities have transformed and are transforming themselves."

In that way, the Society brings together innovators who can cultivate fresh thinking and new approaches to hard-to-solve challenges.

A "hard-to-solve challenge" might be a way of describing Brownsville. According to a Reuters story published earlier this year, Brownsville remains the most violent neighborhood in New York City with a 50 percent increase in gun violence last year—even as the rest of the city has seen a trend towards lower crime. Only a third of the population has graduated from high school, and the median household income in 2008 was estimated at $17,967—far below the poverty line. Drug trade pervades the landscape, and many of the male residents have already been to jail.

From an outsider's perspective, it feels like Brownsville's ills can be attributed to a single physical flaw: Only one square mile in size, Brownsville is home to the city's highest concentration of public housing. Most of the residents are stuffed into the familiar high-rise projects that make up over a third of the housing stock, yet the neighborhood itself is underpopulated, with vacant storefronts and empty apartments lining the streets.

But it quickly becomes apparent that the neighborhood is full of these contradictions. There's no sit-down restaurant, but plenty of fast food (New York's best selling Popeye's is in Brownsville); only two banks, yet dozens of check-cashing centers.

"Hope is Inside"

Since 2005, Brownsville has been aided by Common Ground, a legendary, international organization which works to end homelessness. Common Ground established the Brownsville Partnership as a unique collaboration between the neighborhood and the New York City Housing Authority. It's a revolutionary model, one that transcends disciplines or categorization. And it works because both groups are committed to transforming the physical environment. Besides working as a liaison to improve the conditions that create homelessness, Common Ground has helped to fund two affordable housing structures which are currently under construction.

In the most symbolic moment of Jackson's introduction at the rec center, he holds up a long vinyl banner with Rosanne Haggerty, the President of Common Ground, and speaks about their partnership. He quotes the banner often, as three words that have become a slogan for the community. These are the words he envisions will be printed on signs and T-shirts throughout the community: "Hope is inside."

In our subsequent tour of Brownsville, we do see hope inside. In one of the original Carnegie libraries, we view a massive museum collection focused on Brownsville and black history. It is the ultimate crowdsourcing project, with all objects coming from members of the community.

We tour a unit inside a housing project, and meet a resident who works a few hours at the security desk downstairs to keep her building safe. And we meet dozens of residents who greet us enthusiastically when they hear why we've come to their neighborhood. And—in what's perhaps the most captivating moment for the participants—we walk into a shiny new grocery store filled with pyramids of fresh produce, slick whole fish on ice, and technicolor towers of canned goods stacked to the ceiling.

We learn that this isn't the only new place to buy produce: In the summer there's now a greenmarket, staffed by local teens. We marvel, speechless, at the triumph of bringing fresh, affordable food to the neighborhood.

As we boarded the bus, Brownsville's challenges seem as insurmountable as that tower of cans. But as we drove away, it occurred to me that my hometown, Los Angeles, doesn't look that much different. What's happening in Brownsville is happening where I live, too. In this economy, any city in the country is only a plant-closing or a crime spree or a natural disaster away from collapse.

Solutions tested in this community could be replicated anywhere if they work. The question now became, how could design make a difference? And how could we— outsiders, with only a tenuous connection to the neighborhood—help in a way that was meaningful?

2 The Design Difference: Using Design to Conduct a Problem-Solving Workshop

Design is a process made for solving problems. Yet in the last few years, that process has come under fire when designers have attempted to solve problems that have little to do with their own experience.

Last year, Bruce Nussbaum stoked a heated debate when he wondered if designers working to solve problems in developing nations might be part of a new breed of imperialism. And it's happening right here at home, too. In 2007, I covered Project M, a group of designers working to bring clean water to rural Alabama, where a third of the population lives in poverty. The program was successful in the sense that it raised money, yet the group of outsiders were criticized by angry local residents and, as a New York Times article outlines, some efforts were not well-received by the community itself.

The mistakes made from parachuting in are less about designing outside one's cultural framework and more about not having the necessary team in place to do effective work.

This idea of "parachuting in," or the effectiveness of designers working outside of their own cultures, was part of what The Design Difference charrette hoped to examine. By concepting ideas for Brownsville, Brooklyn, one of New York's most underserved communities, the group's leaders also hoped to understand how using design as a tool for problem-solving had evolved.

"Designers used to rely on their methodologies and tools to create empathy, but as an industry, we've reached the limits of just imagining the situations of others," says Valerie Casey, founder of the Designers Accord, who organized The Design Difference. "This charrette is part of an ongoing exploration into how we might get better at using our craft in more purposeful and relevant ways."

To help, Casey enlisted John Peterson, founder of Public Architecture and The 1%, an initiative that asks design firms to donate one percent of their annual billings to pro bono projects. In Peterson's experience of seeing hundreds of firms working for marginalized communities, the mistakes made from parachuting in are less about designing outside one's cultural framework and more about not having the necessary team in place to do effective work.

In Brownsville, our local connections were built-in. "We chose to work closely with an informed and deeply-embedded client," says Peterson. "Greg Jackson and Common Ground were the conduits into the Brownsville culture, which was unfamiliar to the most of the design team."

In addition to Jackson, the organizers were careful to bring together an extremely diverse group of designers and non-designers, ranging from residents of Brownsville who could offer the most personal accounts of what has worked in the past, to Japanese residents who might be able to bring an outside perspective from another culture. Four countries were represented, with live translation bridging any language barriers. "I think the two critical aspects of this charrette was that each participant had direct experience working with community of need, so there was a great sense of humility to balance the optimism," says Casey. "In addition, each participant knew that this event was part of a longer journey and conversation."

Human-Centered Design

" ...focus on two strengths of the design process: human-centered design, which caters to the needs of the user; and systemic thinking, which looks at solutions within a larger context."

After an immersion day spent in Brownsville, meeting residents and activists, the group gathered at the Japan Society's headquarters in Manhattan for a full day. We were divided into small groups of about eight participants, and listened as Casey reviewed the insight we had gained through our conversations and observations the day before. I remembered the stories from Jackson and other residents about shootings and vandalism and began to feel a sense of despair. How could design honestly help with Brownsville's larger, complex societal issues of poverty, violence, and drug use?

My reaction wasn't unusual, says Casey. "When faced with the abstract and seemly intractable issues around sustainability, designers often ask for specific direction about what they can do," she says. The goal for the charrette, she says, is to provide an entry point to a very real, basic needs where designers could contribute constructively.

Casey encouraged the group to step back from such specific problems and focus on two strengths of the design process: human-centered design, which caters to the needs of the user; and systemic thinking, which looks at solutions within a larger context. Both would prevent myopic investigation of data-driven facts like drugs and violence, and focus on the larger, people-driven conditions that could make Brownsville a better place to live. Therefore, we would focus on larger issues of improving food, health, and housing, rather than "stopping crime."

Also crucial was the fact that not all solutions would be equally-weighted when it came to implementation—some would take longer than others. So Casey created a grid where the larger categories (food, housing, environment, transportation, health, retail,) were paired with various timelines (three weeks, three months, one year), and assigned to each group. So while one group was concepting solutions for improving health that could be implemented in three months, another group was thinking up ideas for housing solutions that could be implemented in three weeks.

The timeframes gave great guidance for narrowing lofty ideas into what would be possible to achieve. Each group was given about 30 minutes in which to tackle a specific combination, then we'd be asked to switch to another assigned category and timeframe. This prevented potential burnout from banging our heads against the same problem all day.

The format of the brainstorming, or ideation, exercises moved from an unedited, uncensored burst of ideas (divergent thinking), into more actionable, physically-oriented solutions (convergent thinking).

Each group began the brainstorming period by layering a page with quick ideas—or pieces of ideas—jotted on Post-its. Over time, common themes or similar trains of thought were grouped together and built upon, and the best three to five ideas were drafted into more specific concepts.

Turning Ideas Into Action

"The abundance of actionable solutions offered fresh insights to the people on the ground and didn't try to suggest that there was a quick or simple solution."
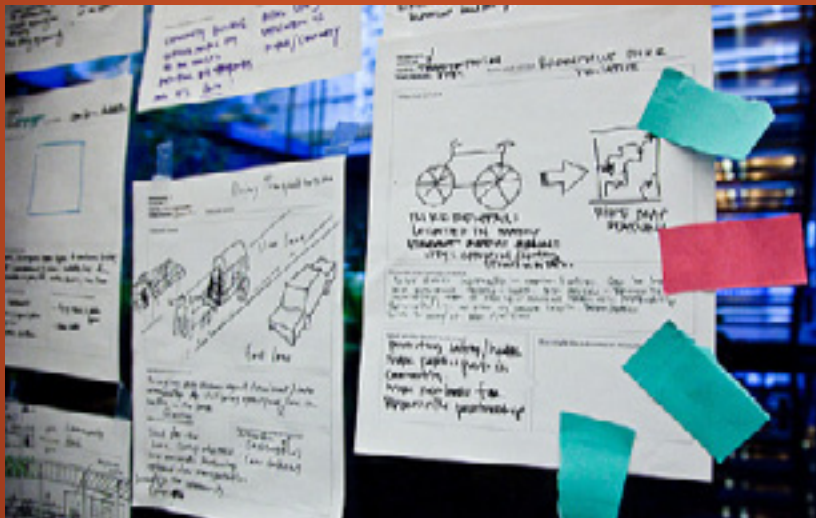
This cascade of ideas, not a prescriptive mandate of what Brownsville must do, showed that the group was sensitive to the fact that there was not one single solution, says Peterson. "There was no conclusion, which would have been an unrealistic goal in my opinion," he says. "The abundance of actionable solutions offered fresh insights to the people on the ground and didn't try to suggest that there was a quick or simple solution." To further clarify our thinking and turn those ideas into solid, action-based initiatives, we were asked to draw our concepts, or make a quick-and-dirty prototype of what this idea would look like out in the world. We were also asked to list the desired outcomes, and how those outcomes might be measured.

But perhaps the most important part of the charrette was a built-in dedication to follow through that might manage to transcend the pitfalls designers face when working in underserved communities and developing nations. Instead of creating a series of fanciful computerized renderings, or grand ideas that needed funding, we created simple but detailed, visually-based initiatives that built upon the work of our established contacts at Brownsville Partnership and Common Ground. "Our instant gratification culture, which is largely manufactured by design, was shifted in this charrette," says Casey. "We were able to deeply understand the years of effort by the Brownsville Partnership, and could see how this charrette is part of a process, not its end point."

Instead of creating a series of fanciful computerized renderings, or grand ideas that needed funding, we created simple but detailed, visually-based initiatives that built upon the work of our established contacts at Brownsville Partnership and Common Ground.

In many ways, the charrette highlighted the way that designers have shifted from creating things to creating ideas, which Casey has also seen through the Designers Accord's work. "Three years ago we focused on evolving our design practices by applying the principles of sustainability to the objects we were creating," says Casey. "Now we are applying our craft to create the kind of content and change in a way that supersedes 'design,' and is utterly more connected with society at large."

At the end of the day, we posted our concepts around the room, marveling at the range and diversity of ideas. Some of the same objectives had a dozen different ways to achieve them listed beneath. Some of the concepts were the same, but had completely different goals. Casey then went through and organized the concepts thematically, from transportation ideas to crowdsourcing projects. At the end of the day, the group had hundreds of ideas grouped into 27 concepts for Brownsville and five major themes. Each of the participants voted for their favorite ideas, which would then be consolidated and streamlined by Casey and Common Ground into actionable initiatives for Brownsville.

Thanks to Valerie Casey and the Japan Society, you can use all the charrette tools to organize your own problem-solving workshop. The worksheets are available for download at the end of this document.

3 The Design Difference: How You Can Propose Ideas for Brownsville

Armed with the 27 concepts across six categories like health, food, and retail, Valerie Casey, who led the charrette, met with stakeholders from Common Ground to refine the concepts into five "priority areas." Common Ground has been working on the ground in Brownsville for years, and its founder Rosanne Haggerty, who was named as a 2001 recipient of a MacArthur "Genius" Grant, is well-known for her transformative nonprofit and its innovative methods for battling homelessness. But these solutions for Brownsville were even broader and more imaginative than she expected.

"Many proposals went beyond design as an aesthetic intervention, to design as a way of improving the flow and functioning of community services, and enabling civic participation," she says.

"It completely opened our thinking to new ways of making Brownsville safer, healthier and more prosperous."

Five Opportunities for Change

The priority areas will serve as a map for future action, a way of organizing the broad concepts that emerged from the charrette into a series of actionable projects where people can focus their efforts.

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Here are the five priority areas for Brownsville, as outlined and written by Casey and her team:

①

Branding Brownsville

This concept is perhaps the most difficult and important one to execute. For that reason it should come first. It sets the stage for all the other concepts, involvement, and work. This "branding" is not only a logo but a new identity, language, and strategy that surrounds the community, affecting the way Brownsville is perceived both from the outside and by its own residents. This concept development should use the Brownsville Partnership's slogan "Hope Is Inside" as the launching point for this part of the process. This branding process could culminate in a concert or event to launch the brand.

②

DIY / Community Involvement

This concept centers around trading services and collaborative consumption. It will create a system that encourages residents to swap skills in housing repairs, etc (i.e. shareable.net). These interactions could take place by creating a central hub in the lobbies of the buildings or in other unused community spaces. Potentially incentives could be used to get residents to enroll and participate in the program, ensuring a more successful initiation of the concept, for example, a concept like a "Brownsville Cooks" cookbook.

③

Aesthetic Transformation & Redefining Public Spaces

This concept focuses on creating "welcoming spaces" combined with "community porches" that become destination points for the residents. These spaces may be an update or improvement of the already existing concierge/lobby security room in public housing. This concept embraces the idea of collective efficacy, where trust between Brownsville residents will increase through the act of sharing a space.
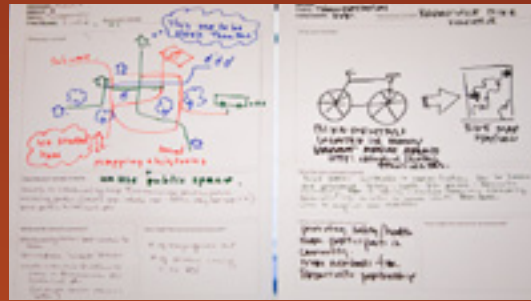
④

Encouraging Outdoor Activities

This concept centers around marking the history and existing positive people and features of Brownsville. The creation of walking trails will highlight these features. The trails will promote health, and incorporate (and create) wayfinding and branding. The trails will also increase safety by creating shared, neutral spaces and paths and by populating the outdoor spaces with more people and activity.

⑤

Economic Development & Bringing Resources to Brownsville

This concept involves creating a market that will create a community of vendors and provide a new retail experience in Brownsville. This could happen daily, weekly, or monthly and may draw more people with music, cheap coffee, food, and other offerings. This could also capitalize on the idea of a "district experience," establishing Brownsville as the place to go for a certain product or service. For example, Brownsville was once famous for selling furniture and tailored suits—can this be revived? The organizational structure or business model of this market could perhaps come from a student competition or through a challenge posed on GOOD.

Since this outline was created, some change is already happening, says Haggerty. "Since the charrette, we've zeroed in on making the assets and spirit of Brownsville more visible—a combination of "branding Brownsville" by getting the "Hope Is Inside" message communicated in all our organizing activities," she says. Brownsville has also started working on the "DIY/Community Involvement" front, says Haggerty. "Our amazing director, Greg Jackson, now organizes groups of young people each Saturday morning for a community clean up," she says. "The young people are proud to do it, and they are getting so much positive feedback from residents."

They're also trying to locate and design a more prominent hub for the Brownsville Partnership's activities. "We are looking for a space that can embody some of the excitement of Brownsville, and our comprehensive effort to make it a stronger, healthier community," she says, one that's closer to the housing projects, and has more of those "welcoming spaces" that are so needed.

How You Can Take Action

With the five priority areas laid out, the charrette has now moved into its most important phase: Engaging the design community in these solution areas.

"We will need help in refining the ideas and figuring out how to implement them for little or no cost," says Haggerty. "That will certainly mean enlisting designers to contribute their talents, suppliers to contribute materials, and lots of people to contribute their time and concern in building up this special neighborhood."

Common Ground is looking for creative input from designers and architects who can craft specific design responses to the charrette's findings.

Here's How You Can Help:

If you're a design firm...

and you want to contribute pro bono work for Brownsville, register with The 1% and send an email to:

designdifference@japansociety.org

...with the subject line **Design Firm** alerting our team that you're ready to be matched with a Brownsville client.

If you're a designer or architect...

and you want to submit a design proposal for one of the five priority areas, send an email to:

designdifference@japansociety.org

...with the subject **Design Proposal** and include a brief summary of your idea for Brownsville, as well as a link to your work.

If you'd like to volunteer or if you have resources to donate...

for an upcoming workday to help implement one of the ideas, send an email to:

designdifference@japansociety.org

...with the subject **Volunteer** and you'll be added to a future email list with more information about how you can get involved.

Charrette materials, for your reference

Feel free to model your own charrette based on the Brownsville methodology, and let us know how it went by emailing designdifference@japansociety.org

Background

A design charrette is a staged series of activities, where people representing multiple disciplines (design, policy, journalism, community activism) collaborate in creating ideas to tackle a highly defined challenge.

The challenge for this charrette is part of a sustained effort to create positive change in the Brownsville neighborhood of eastern Brooklyn, New York.

We had two primary goals for the charrette:

1. Generate ideas that the Brownsville Partnership might implement in the shorter term to help with the process of change in Brownsville.

2. Utilize the design process and the tools of design thinking in the real-world setting of Brownsville to create social innovation, and then document the process so that it can serve as a model for others to employ in their own work.

Who

Twenty-two participants from Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and US participated in the design charrette in New York from November 1–3, 2011. Each participant was selected based on their unique and relevant professional and personal perspectives.

Inputs

The event was structured as a series of activities to help build relationships, establish context, and create the conditions for collaboration and co-creation.

Monday, November 1: Connection
Opening dinner to welcome all participants will be held at the Top of the Times in the Times Square neighborhood in Manhattan.

Tuesday, November 2: Context
Conduct field research in the Brownsville neighborhood, and learn about the pertinent social issues during a discussion session.

Tuesday, November 2: Inspiration
Public symposium held at Japan Society to discuss the influence of physical space on social and personal behavior.

Wednesday, November 3: Collaboration
Participants engaged in a variety of workshop activities to generate new ideas and imagine possible solutions to help build a stronger Brownsville community.

Output

The synthesized ideas from the charrette were shared with the public in an online series on GOOD. Currently connections are being made with local design partners who will further refine the briefs and carry multiple initiatives forward in Brownsville.

Workshop Methodology

Attendees were divided into 3 small groups of 6-8 people each. The groups included a mixture of people from diverse backgrounds, geographies, and experiences.

During the workshop, 3 small group brainstorm sessions of one hour each were conducted.

Each of these sessions focused on 2 of 6 prevailing topics of interest in Brownsville. These topics were selected because they represented broad categories that would benefit from innovative ideas within the community. The 6 themes include: food, housing, retail, environment, transportation, and health. Each theme was explored separately for half of each worksession.

In addition to addressing select topics of interest, each group focused their sessions on generating ideas around a particular timeframe. The timeframes were 3 weeks, 3 months, and 1 year. These timeframes were symbolic representations of the types of interventions needed:

3 weeks: small and quick interventions, with limited resources
3 months: medium-sized solutions, co-created with partners
1 year: longer-term investments, with infrastructural orientation

The workshop was designed so that through the worksessions, each group had a chance to address each of the topics, and each of the timeframes.

The goal of the workshop was to generate ideas that the Brownsville Partnership might implement in the shorter term to help with the process of change in Brownsville.

Small Group Work Session 1		
Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
Topics:	Topics:	Topics:
Food	Retail	Transportation
Housing	Environment	Health
Timeframe:	Timeframe:	Timeframe:
3 Weeks	3 Weeks	3 Weeks
Small Group Work Session 1		
Group 3	**Group 1**	**Group 2**
Topics:	Topics:	Topics:
Food	Retail	Transportation
Housing	Environment	Health
Timeframe:	Timeframe:	Timeframe:
3 Months	3 Months	3 Months
Small Group Work Session 1		
Group 2	**Group 3**	**Group 1**
Topics:	Topics:	Topics:
Food	Retail	Transportation
Housing	Environment	Health
Timeframe:	Timeframe:	Timeframe:
1 Year	1 Year	1 Year

Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Successful small group brainstorming depends on matching a well-defined object of investigation (physical location, topic of interest, timeframe for project execution), with a process of divergent thinking focused on generating many ideas, and convergent thinking where strongest ideas are refined as concepts.

What is Divergent Thinking?

Rapid creation of random, unorganized, wild, free-flowing, novel ideas in a short period of time.

What is Convergent Thinking?

Selective critique and combination of ideas in order to develop strong concepts.

Strategies for Divergent Thinking

Build on the ideas of others
Withhold judgment
Write everything down
Draw!
Generate quantity

Strategies for Convergent Thinking

Create clusters of complementary ideas
Consider context
Imagine the scenario of usage
Design for the user first, then explore technical feasibility and business model
Aim to develop 3 concepts for each topic

Brainstorm prompts included
these strategies:

Ask Questions

What are the causes for the
current situation?

What are the effects?

What is broken in the current state?

What is working well?

Be a Contrarian

List the parts of this system.

Examine what is taken for granted.

Imagine how removing this can provoke
new thinking: Example: "Students teach
the teachers."

"Books write themselves."

Each group used a large 24' x 36'
worksheet to brainstorm a particular Topic
and Timeframe pairing for 30-minutes.

The group generated new ideas for 15-20
minutes, populating the worksheet with
post-it notes, and moving from divergent
thinking to convergent thinking.

The next 10-15 minutes was used to create
three concepts. A concept is an approach
to a challenge that addresses creative,
business, and technology issues. A concept
is more developed than an initial idea, but
less developed than a final solution. An
8.5" x 11" worksheet helped to structure
the concept's main components: name,
illustration, text description, desired
outcomes, and measurement of outcomes.

The concepts were clustered into
related themes and further synthesized
into solution sets that design partners
will further shape and execute.

Download Materials

→ Download the Brainstorming Map (PDF)
   http://www.valcasey.com/downloads/ideation_worksheet_0111.pdf
→ Download the Concept Worksheet (PDF)
   http://www.valcasey.com/downloads/concept_worksheet_0111.pdf

View the full articles at GOOD:
http://www.good.is/tag/the-design-difference

Thank You

Japan Society would like to thank the co-organizers of *The Design Difference* —Designers Accord, Common Ground, and GOOD—for their commitment to this project. Through the *U.S.-Japan Innovators Network*, Japan Society is dedicated to creating opportunities for Americans, Japanese, and others from around the world to better understand each other through dialogue and collaboration, and to use the these opportunities as a catalyst for meaningful change in their communities. We could not have asked for better partners than Valerie Casey at the Designers Accord, Rosanne Haggerty from Common Ground, and Casey Caplowe at GOOD. The success of this project is in no small part due to their incredible generosity and dedication.

As co-organizers, we would like to thank the many people and organizations that made this project possible. We were fortunate to have an amazing group designers, architects, writers, artists, leaders of non-profit organizations, and design students join us from Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States. We can't thank them enough for so openly and generously sharing their time, knowledge, talent, and experience with us. We'd also like to acknowledge and thank Ayumi Sakamoto for the amazing photographs she took as part of this project.

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