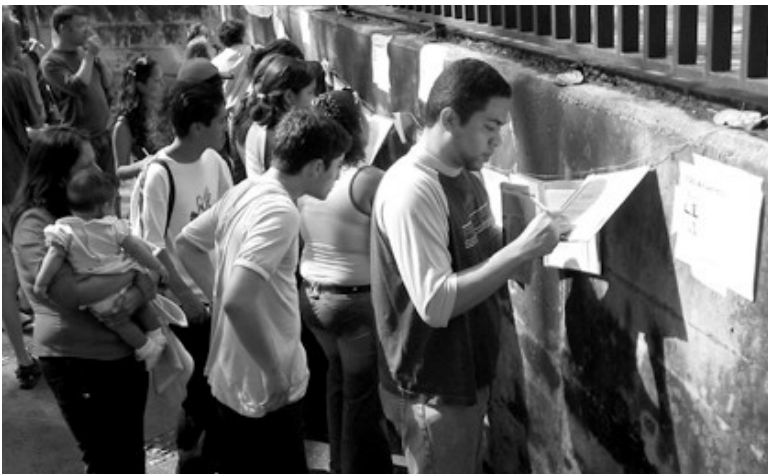




Dotmocracy Handbook

Version 1.0



Write one idea here in large letters:

Remember to use silence to provide space for people to reflect during meetings

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
------------------	-----------	---------	--------------	---------------------	-----------

Strengths & Opportunities: Great! - great that they were very knowledgeable regarding Phoenix "disorder" - mentioned it happened here in their presence

Concerns & Weaknesses: Work to keep quiet

Signatures: [Handwritten signatures]

Location (street): [Blank]

Date: [Blank]

Write one idea here in large letters:

Academic Olympics - just bringing communities + youth together (different events) maybe to speak out against current street violence

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
------------------	-----------	---------	--------------	---------------------	-----------

Strengths & Opportunities: [Blank]

Concerns & Weaknesses: May be difficult to organize. May not attract a lot of youth. -> create a sense of competition which is some schools is usually frowned upon

Signatures: [Handwritten signatures]

Location (street): [Blank]

Date: [Blank]

Write one idea here in large letters:

Let's order Pizza Pizza on Friday for lunch at the office.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
------------------	-----------	---------	--------------	---------------------	-----------

Strengths & Opportunities: We can all pick 1 pizza

Concerns & Weaknesses: PIZZA PIZZA TASTES LIKE CARB BOMB. Maybe "Eat pizza without Friday" - it's supposed to be a "baller" - too corporate

Signatures: [Handwritten signatures]

Location (street): [Blank]

Date: May 27/06

By Jason Diceman

Write one idea here in large letters:

Four horizontal dashed lines for writing an idea in large letters.

Signatures

A grid of 10 rows and 2 columns of dashed lines for signatures.

Do you agree? *Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:*

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Add brief comments:

Strengths & Opportunities

Concerns & Weaknesses

Five horizontal dashed lines for writing comments under 'Strengths & Opportunities'.

Five horizontal dashed lines for writing comments under 'Concerns & Weaknesses'.

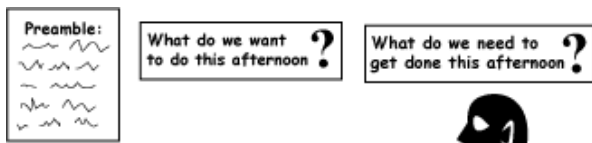
Location / event:

Date:

#

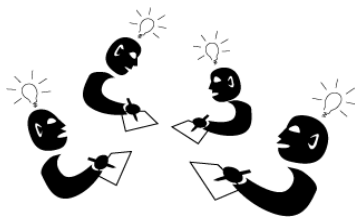
Essential Step-by-Step Process

Below are the key steps that take a dotmocracy process from questions to popular common answers.



1. An issue is presented and questions asked.

The hosting organization(s) provides a preamble of important information about the issue to be addressed. For example: fact sheets, opinion papers and summary documents could be published; experts and key stakeholders could make presentations. Post the key questions to be answered by the dotmocracy process where all participants can see them, for example in large letters on poster paper or with a projector.



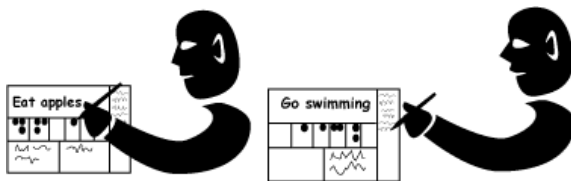
2. Discuss potential solutions.

In small groups, participants brainstorm and deliberate potential answers to the posted questions. Collectively and independently, participants draft many ideas.



3. Post ideas.

Participants clearly print each idea statement on its own Co-op Tools dotmocracy idea sheet. Sheets are either posted on a wall or passed among participants.

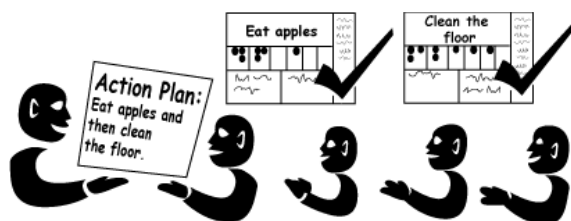


4. Fill dots to record opinions. Write comments.

Participants read and consider each idea and fill in one dot per sheet to record their opinion on a scale of “strong agreement”, “agreement”, “neutral”, “disagreement”, and “strong disagreement” or “confusion”. Participants sign each sheet they dot and may add brief comments.

Repeat steps 2 through 4.

Participants review and discuss comments and dotting patterns and post new ideas to be dotted.



5. Formulate a common solution.

The dotting process is called to a close and the results are shared. The most popular ideas should be celebrated. A small group of trusted stakeholder representatives and decision-makers discuss and formulate a final decision or plan that selects, combines, prioritizes and/or finds compromise between popular ideas with minimal disagreement.

www.dotmocracy.ca

download copies of this handbook
access other dotmocracy resources
post your experience and questions

Please send your feedback, comments and
suggestions about this document to:

dotmocracy-handbook @ cooptools.ca

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What is Dotmocracy?

Dotmocracy is an established facilitation process for prioritizing ideas among a large number of people. It is a participatory and equal opportunity large group decision-making process.

Participants put dots (traditionally stickers) next to a variety of written ideas to show which ones they prefer. The final result is a graph-like visual representation of the group's collective preferences.

Unlike voting, debate or consensus decision-making processes, dotmocracy easily scales to allow a large group of people to communicate their preferences on a wide range of options.

The dotting process generally does not produce a final decision, but rather provides clear guidance and insight that final decision-makers can use to inform and direct their creation of a plan.

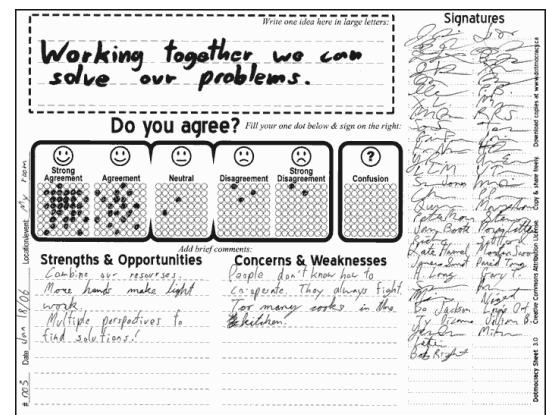
While a variety of traditional dotmocracy processes have been in use since at least the 1980s, Co-op Tools has more recently pioneered specific advanced dotmocracy methods and materials that significantly improve and refine the process, increasing mass participation and providing more reliable and useful results.

This handbook defines the Co-op Tools advanced dotmocracy methods.

See the appendices for key difference between traditional methods and the Co-op Tools advanced dotmocracy process.



Traditional dotmocracy with stickers on chart paper. Photo from www.saint-marys.edu



A completed Co-op Tools advanced dotmocracy idea sheet.

How To Use This Handbook

This handbook is written and designed to help facilitators organize and orchestrate effective and reliable advanced dotmocracy processes as developed and tested by Co-op Tools. The key to the process is the Co-op Tools **Dotmocracy Idea Sheet** found on the first and last page of this handbook. To start, you should become familiar with the elements of this sheet design.

The **Essential Step-by-Step Process** and the **Rules and Requirements** are the minimum a facilitator needs to know in order to conduct the process. The **Rules and Requirements** section should be treated as official references that when broken or ignored are proof that a dotmocracy process is not fully legitimate. Other guidance and tips are meant to be helpful but not required.

When the guidance of this handbook is followed by an experienced and trusted facilitator, the dotmocracy process should result in useful and sound direction that represents the collective preferences of all participants.

This handbook is a continuous work in progress. You can download the latest version from www.dotmocracy.ca. Please send your suggestions and comments to [dotmocracy-handbook @ cooptools.ca](mailto:dotmocracy-handbook@cooptools.ca).

Examples of Dotmocracy Results

Write one idea here in large letters:
We should buy fair trade coffee for our office.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: Impresses clients, fair trade, sugar free, maybe buy in bulk for staff to take home? IDEAL COFFEE

Concerns & Weaknesses: Costs a bit more, Does it TASTE AS GOOD?, I don't drink coffee. What about tea tea?

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: July 27/05
20

Strong united agreement.

Write one idea here in large letters:
Let's order Pizza Pizza on Friday for lunch at the office.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: We can all pitch in!

Concerns & Weaknesses: PIZZA PIZZA TASTES LIKE CARD BOARD, Maybe I'd eat pizza instead Friday is supposed to be a Potluck!

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: May 27/06
20

Clear disagreement.

Write one idea here in large letters:
Research posters by information posters.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: [Blank]

Concerns & Weaknesses: How many posters can be submitted, What class is this?

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: [Blank]

Too confusing.

Write one idea here in large letters:
Academic Olympics just bringing communities + youth together (different events) maybe to speak out against current street violence

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: [Blank]

Concerns & Weaknesses: May be difficult to organize, May not attract a lot of youth, Academic sense of competition which in some schools is normally frowned upon.

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: [Blank]

Mostly neutral, but a few participants strongly agree.

Write one idea here in large letters:
Junior staff should get a raise.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: They are awesome, We want the best

Concerns & Weaknesses: Why? We can't afford it, All staff

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: Feb 16/06
20

Fraudulent dotting: twice more dots than signatures

Write one idea here in large letters:
Groups of students/youth join up with organizations to build schools/donate inf resources (books, computers etc.) to impoverished countries, villages etc

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Strengths & Opportunities: [Blank]

Concerns & Weaknesses: HUGE infrastructure problem very difficult to arrange in school setting, It could be done but it would require community support - needs to be done w/ help of experienced NGOs

Signatures: [Signatures]

Location event: Kitchener
Date: [Blank]

Very neutral. Probably not worth moving forward on.

Rules and Requirements

To have a proper dotmocracy session that is fair and effective for everyone, the following situations must exist:

Core Rules

1. Official facilitators are authoritative and responsible for the dotmocracy session and location. They should be in control of the process but neutral on the content.
2. Each participant must only fill one dot per dotmocracy sheet.
3. There are no changes to an idea's text inside the idea box once dotting has started. Amendments should be presented as a new complete idea on a new sheet. Comments may be added at any time outside of the idea box.

Facilitators' Responsibilities

1. Everyone has the right to participate.
2. If the outcome of a process is important to someone (i.e. a stakeholder), they should be specifically invited and easily able to participate.
3. Everyone who asks for a blank dotmocracy sheet gets one.
4. There should be no limit on dispensing sheets as long as they are not being wasted.
5. Barriers to participation should be reduced as much as possible within reason and available resources.
6. Start and end times should be publicized to all participants.
7. Dotmocracy sheets need to be used on accessible tables, walls, and/or clipboards.
8. There should be enough pens for all the people who want to participate at any time.
9. Posted ideas or comments should not be censored unless obviously profane, confusing or promoting hate.
10. A dotmocracy sheet should only be removed from the dotting process according to the official facilitator's judgment.
11. Opinions are anonymous. Participants have the right to privacy and not having their identity associated with their dots and comments.
12. The following must be posted:
 - a. Process instructions, questions to be answered and any official preamble.
 - b. An official policy on how the results will be used by the hosting organization(s).
 - c. The hosting organization(s) and facilitator(s) contact information.

Participants' Responsibilities

1. Participants must fully read and consider a posted idea before filling in their dot.
2. A dot represents one's judgment of the idea written on the sheet, not the comments, although comments may inform one's judgment.
3. Participants must sign each sheet she or he dots. Exception: on request, a facilitator may fill a dot and sign a sheet for someone with disabilities or who is not comfortable putting their own signature.

Use of Dotmocracy Walls and Clipboards

Like any sheet of paper, dotmocracy idea sheets require a hard and flat surface for being written on. In some cases tables, desks or a smooth floor may be used, with sheets either passed around for dotting or set out so participants can walk to each of them. Co-op Tools recommends the use of a designated dotmocracy wall, clipboards or a combination of the two.

Dotmocracy Walls

Using a designated wall for dotmocracy sheets (and not any other posters) has several important effects:

1. It is easier for a facilitator to monitor and manage the process.
2. The dotmocracy process is further legitimized as something different from other posted papers.
3. Sheets are more visible and recognizable.
4. Crowds can gather around the designated area of a wall to see what it's about, thus promoting discussion and participation.
5. It does not require tables or floor space.



*Amnesty International staff. London UK 2006.
Courtesy Rob Purdie.*

Tips:

- Make sure the wall is smooth and that you can use tape on the wall without removing the paint.
- Plan to have about 40 cm of wall length for every potential idea. The longer the wall, the better.
- Remove obstacles and distractions from around the wall.
- Containers with pens should be stationed on or near the wall.
- Large print instructions can be easily taped on the wall.
- Beware that markers or dark pens may soak through a sheet and leave marks on a wall.
- Pens may run dry if participants are forced to write with pens in a horizontal position.
- Position sheets low enough for even the shortest participant to read and write on.
- Aim to have all sheets in a single horizontal line. Avoid placing sheets vertically above or below each other as this causes participants to crowd around a single area where it may be more difficult and uncomfortable for people to read and write on the sheets.
- After removing a sheet from the wall it may be easier to fold the tape over rather than trying to rip it off.

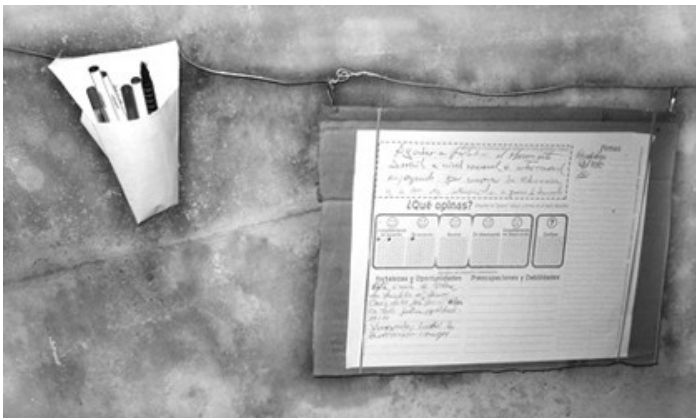
Clipboards

In a meeting of any size, clipboards with dotmocracy sheets can be easily passed between many standing or sitting participants. Ideally there should be only one sheet per clipboard; multiple sheets decrease the potential for many people to dot simultaneously and may also cause ideas at the bottom of a collection of sheets to be dotted less often.

Strong cardboard with an elastic band or two around it makes for an effective and affordable clipboard.

Clipboards on a Wall

Dotmocracy sheets on clipboards hung on nails, a taut wire, or placed on a ledge against a wall, can be easily moved around and changed. Such a set-up of clipboards on a wall is very accessible: it can be easily used by people at any height and handed to people using wheelchairs or walkers. This arrangement also allows pens to be used in a vertical position so the ink can flow readily. Pens can also be conveniently hung in envelopes on the wall.



Dotmocracy in a public space in Caracas, Venezuela as part of the 2006 World Social Forum.



Different Models

Dotmocracy can be facilitated in many different ways, but the three main models are:

1. In a meeting and focused.
2. In parallel with a meeting.
3. Outside of a meeting.

In a Meeting and Focused

An entire meeting or segment of a meeting can be dedicated to a focused dotmocracy session.

Advantages

- ✓ Produce and prioritize many ideas in a very short period of time.
- ✓ Participants get an opportunity to discuss and reformulate ideas as a group or in break-out groups.
- ✓ The preamble can be presented live with engaging media, and key speakers that may be able to answer important questions from participants.
- ✓ Participants can meet each other, recognize who is involved and develop camaraderie.



Students brainstorm ideas at the Ontario Council for International Cooperation Youth Symposium in Toronto, Canada, February 2006.

Disadvantages

- ✗ Requires a large venue and large-group logistics, e.g. snacks and drinks, materials for everyone to use at the same time, amplification systems.
- ✗ Those who are unable to attend the meeting are left out of the process and their opinion is not counted.

Examples

- A residence group has an ad-hoc meeting to find solutions to noise pollution complaints.
- An organization has a biannual goal-setting meeting to give direction to the management.

Suggestions

- Give everyone the necessary materials as they enter or have them already set out on tables and chairs: pens, scrap paper and dotmocracy idea sheets.
- Take and post completed idea sheets for participants, allowing them to continue their discussions.
- Help groups to produce many ideas.

This method can also be combined with an outside of meeting process, before or after the meeting.

In Parallel with a Meeting

Within a meeting a dotmocracy process can be conducted in parallel with the verbal agenda. After a brief preamble early in the meeting, dotmocracy sheets can be either circulated on clipboards or posted on a wall that is near to the meeting in progress.

Advantages

- ✓ Traditional meeting format can be mostly maintained. This can be important if the traditional meeting format is viewed as effective or required.
- ✓ Meeting discussion can inform and be informed by the posted ideas and dotting results.

Disadvantages

- x Either the verbal meeting or the dotmocracy process may be distracted by the other.
- x Participants may be confused or dismissive of the new ‘competing’ dotmocracy process.

Examples

- Organization members brainstorm and prioritize slogans while listening to a presentation about a new initiative they want to promote.
- Audience members write down and prioritize questions for a speaker.

Suggestions

- Have preamble and instructions written for those who may have missed the verbal introduction.
- Have a materials table: e.g. pens (tip down) in a cup, scrap paper, tape, idea sheets, sticky-notes, paper recycling, clipboards.
- Included agenda items to introduce the dotmocracy process and announce/discuss results.

To make this parallel process work effectively, the participants may need reminders and encouragement in order to make use of the dotmocracy process as an important and legitimate part of the meeting. This is especially true for groups new to dotmocracy.



Toronto Kensington Market public meeting 2005.

Outside of a Meeting

In this model the dotmocracy process is in progress for many hours, days or even without a planned end. Depending on what group of people the process is intended for, a dotmocracy wall may be in an organization common space such as foyer, lunch room, or hallway, or may be in a public space such as public building, square or park.

Advantages

- ✓ Greater opportunity for potential participants with competing schedules.
- ✓ Takes only a few minutes for participant to take part at their own leisure.

Disadvantages

- ✗ It can take many more hours, days or even weeks to equal the level of participation accomplished in one short, focused, large-group meeting.
- ✗ Participants generally do not get a chance to discuss ideas.
- ✗ People are less focused, less patient and less likely to consider the ideas in an informed context.
- ✗ Time and energy must be invested in promotion of the preamble and getting people to participate. In a public setting this could require full-time facilitators assisting in the process within a public space.

Examples

- A “suggestions” board in a staff lunch room.
- A dotmocracy wall in the foyer of a school for getting input from students on potential new course topics.

Suggestions

- Have clear instructions posted on the dotmocracy wall next to the sheets.
- Post and hand out the preamble. Publish it in a newsletter or other media read by the participants.
- Have pens readily accessible near the sheets, ideally next to the sheets hanging on the wall.
- Be proactive in encouraging people to participate. Ask them for a moment of their time. Hand them a pen. Walk them through the process. Answer their questions (but avoid biasing their opinion on the topic being addressed).
- Position the dotmocracy wall in highly visible and popular area, such as near food or along a common corridor.

This process has great potential for gathering public ideas and opinions, but requires development and trust from the public in the dotmocracy process. It may be months or even years before most community members begin to view the process as legitimate and useful. Effective publication and follow up on results can make all the difference for building legitimacy. You may wish to survey your target audience to see who is and is not participating and why.



Dotmocracy in a public space in Caracas, Venezuela as part of the 2006 World Social Forum.

Factors That Can Improve a Dotmocracy Process

There are infinite variables that may affect a dotmocracy process and influence whether it is a success.

Ideally: a process concludes with many useful and popular ideas that lead to a clear decision or plan of action that is unanimously supported.

Worst case: very few ideas will be produced, they will be unclear, not commonly supported and will not lead to any final decision or plan.

Below are some prioritized factors that Co-op Tools has recognized as extremely important for conducting a successful dotmocracy process. While you may not be able to control all these factors, you should consider and aim to positively influence them in your planning and execution. A dotmocracy process is improved by:

1. Trust in the facilitator(s), hosting organization(s) and fellow participants.
2. Increasing the number and variety of well-articulated ideas.
3. Diversity of people with different perspectives.
4. Increased number of participants.
5. Availability of high-quality information on the issue and knowledge of the related topics.
6. Participants are personally invested in the outcome.
7. A spirit of co-operation and common aims within the group.
8. Vocal support of the dotmocracy process by group members who have authority and the group's trust.
9. Time for deliberation, reflection and reformulation of ideas based on recognized patterns among in progress results.
10. More iterations of the process: each stage reflects and builds on previous results and learns from new investigation.
11. Recognition of the continuity and differences among results from independent dotmocracy sessions on similar and related questions over time and within different contexts. I.e. pay attention to the patterns between independent dotmocracy sessions.
12. Decision-makers are trusted, knowledgeable and experienced.
13. Clarity and practicality of the final conclusions, e.g. a specific action plan or policy.

The interpretation of each factor is rather subjective, but as one becomes more experienced at dotmocracy facilitation it will become more apparent which factors need more attention depending on the situation.

Facilitation Tips

These points, in combination with your knowledge of the dotmocracy process, and experience and skills with group facilitation will help you conduct an effective dotmocracy process. Many of these points relate to an in meeting process, but are not exclusive to that model.

General

- Have a clear and realistic plan, be well prepared with your materials and feel confident in your facilitation abilities.
- Establish authority over the process starting with first impressions. Dress appropriately for the culture. Have a name tag. Stand near the materials or presentation area.
- Plan each step as part of a time line with your agenda, leading to a final output. Leave a lot of extra time at the end for potential additional iterations and/or discussion of the results.
- Have participants help distribute materials, e.g. take-and-pass information sheets, scrap paper, pens and dotmocracy idea sheets.
- Keep yourself and the group aware of the time and your progress within the agenda.
- Number the posted questions for easy reference. Each posted idea should include the question number on it for easy reference.
- Ensure all written materials and ideas are legible for all participants.
- Be aware of tone, body language, moods and feelings within the group. Address awkward or confrontational situations before they escalate.
- Randomness and a bit of chaos is OK – it helps to deter systematic bias.
- Be flexible and accommodating to participant needs and surprising outcomes.
- It's good to have fun and keep things light, while still maintaining the legitimacy of the process.
- Reinforce all the rules that have been established. Consistency builds legitimacy and trust.
- Provide space for minority views and critical perspectives. Don't stifle debate or dissent, but also avoid letting it dominate discussions.
- Use short “energizer” games to get people more engaged and focused.
- Be aware of the expectations of the participants and the desired effect you wish to achieve. E.g. are these people coming there with a serious intent or casually “checking it out”? Are you aiming to make people feel like this is a folksy sharing of ideas or an important decision-making process? Select your venue, materials, presentation and facilitation style to address these questions.

Producing a Useful Preamble

- Aim to provide the most essential information and context necessary for making a smart decision.
- Provide a broad set of information without bias or commentary.
- Have key stakeholders write the preamble together.
- Include important facts, research, references, budgets, history, personal quotes, etc..

- Use diagrams and photos where helpful.
- Include different perspectives.
- Include the criteria for an ideal solution to the issue.
- Keep it simple and concise.
- When using examples, provide a wide variety to avoid bias towards a singled-out example.
- Presentations should avoid opinionated or personal commentary.
- Explain the results policy: who will be reviewing the results, with what level of authority; what kind of weight will they carry; where will they be published; what is the timeline, etc.

Authoring the Right Questions

- Involve stakeholders in the question writing.
- Keep it concise and clear.
- Brainstorm a large number of options, then shortlist.
- Test the questions on typical participants before hand to ensure they are clear and useful.
- If there are multiple parts to a question or related questions, it may make sense to address them together or order them in sequence.

Developing good ideas

- Make sure participants understand the questions and are informed on the topic.
- In pairs, get participants to quickly write down a list of ideas without stopping to discuss and consider any of them. Then in small groups they can discuss their favorite ideas.
- Use scrap paper for drafting an idea before writing it on an idea sheet to be posted.
- Encourage groups to seek consensus on idea texts, but also invite alternative and independent ideas.
- Stress the need for a wide range of ideas. Push participants to go beyond conventional thinking. Use radical examples to demonstrate how far an idea can be taken.
- Encourage building on ideas and seeking ideal solutions for all stakeholders.
- Focus on the “quest for solutions”.
- Suggest groups don't get bogged down on one idea, but write it down and move on. While deliberation is encouraged, the goal is to produce a variety of good ideas, not one perfect idea.
- Have groups break up and form new groups once or more during the brainstorming and deliberation phase.
- Get some informed members to author a few well-thought-out ideas ahead of time, to help seed the process.
- Each idea should be clearly associated with its question, although ideas without an associated question should not be censored.
- If an idea includes many elements and receives mixed dotting results, suggest that each element be given their own dotmocracy sheet. This way you can recognize which elements are the most supported.

Helping the Dotting Process

- Set-up the dotmocracy wall in a way that makes it easily accessible to the entire group. When the process is conducted outside of a meeting, ensure that participants know where the wall is and are requested to use it.
- Get participants to distribute themselves evenly along the wall, i.e. not to bunch up around only a few ideas.
- Maximize space between ideas.
- Ask people to dot with independence and intention, and avoid simply “following the crowd”. Encourage them to understand what they are dotting and why.
- Bring attention to newly posted ideas and ideas that lack dots.
- Keep the placement of ideas and comments reasonably organized.
- Refinements and combinations of popular ideas should be posted as soon as possible.
- Encourage new ideas based on emerging patterns and comments.
- Removing ideas only starts to save time when several ideas have only one or no participants dotting them at any time. Remove the duplicate, confusing and strongly disagreed-to ideas first.
- Duplicate ideas can be placed underneath each other, i.e. keep the clearest or most dotted version of the idea on top and place duplicate sheets underneath where they are not visible but participants can recognize that there are duplicates.
- If someone is not comfortable signing their own name, a facilitator can sign as a “witness”.



Dotting at the Ontario Council for International Cooperation Youth Symposium in Toronto, Canada, February 2006.

Interpreting Results

- Recognize joke ideas and put a “Ha ha” or funny face sticky note on them to differentiate from serious ideas.
- 33% strong disagreement or 25% confusion after only 12 dots or 20% of dots have been posted (whichever is larger) can usually provide enough of a trend to decide the fate of an idea.
- Judge idea results in comparison to the results of other ideas.
- A lack of clearly approved ideas may indicate the need for a different question, more information or further brainstorming and deliberation.
- Pay attention to comments that may indicate the need for further research to inform the process.
- If people write angry or hurtful comments or aggressive debate occurs, a conflict resolution process may be required to build understanding, trust, respect and empathy within the group.
- Investigate concerns written in comments and whether they can be addressed with discussion or a new (possibly more detailed) idea.



City staff read out popular ideas at the end of a dotmocracy process at a Kensington Market public meeting in Toronto, Canada 2005.

- Be wary of polarized results, e.g. those with dots mostly under “strong agreement” and “strong disagreement”. These are more likely to create conflict if pursued.
- The final decision for action should be formulated based on the patterns of agreement and relationships between popular ideas, not necessarily the single most popular idea, or least disagreed.
- Avoid making assumptions about meanings beyond what is written on an idea sheet.
- Collect completed sheets in folders, one for each question addressed, and potentially sub-divided into “popular”, “mixed”, “unpopular”, and “confusing/incomplete”.
- If possible, sort completed sheets in order of popularity in front of the participants with their help and input. For example, lay the 20 most popular ideas sheets on the ground in priority order from left to right.

Writing a Useful Results Policy

- Participants have the right to know what will be done with their input. The results policy for each dotmocracy session should provide this information.
- Make sure to include:
 - What is the purpose of the dotmocracy session? What does the host organization aim to achieve?
 - Who will be responsible for reviewing the results and authoring a conclusion?
 - What is the time line for producing a final output and how will it be shared back to the group?
 - Is there a plan or potential for another iteration of the process or a referendum on the proposed conclusion?
 - Do these results carry any formal authority on their own that can be mathematically recognized, e.g. any sheet with >20 strong agreement and <4 disagreement will be considered a formal statement of the organization. Or will the only formal conclusions be statements by official decision-makers?
 - Where will the archive of the completed sheets be available and when?
- While it’s usually good to have a specific conclusion in mind – such as the creation of a policy or goals for a project – decision-makers should be open to new conclusions that best reflect the group’s preferences, such as the cancellation of a project, or the need for discussion to address an underlying issue.
- Examples of potential next steps:
 - A specific committee will publish a statement or policy that reflects the results.
 - Key results will be published, further research will be undertaken and a new dotmocracy process will be conducted.
 - A project manager will be assigned to carry out the most approved goals as recognized by the project team.
 - The results will be discussed by the board and several assignments may be given to the manager.



Small group discussion at a Co-op Tools workshop in Toronto 2005.

- Plan for methods of communication to follow through on information sharing and decision implementation, e.g. mailing lists, newsletters, meetings, web sites, radio.
- When any decisions are presented, include a clear method for giving feedback and process for changing the decision, if possible. E.g. provide feedback at this phone number and e-mail; this decision can be overturned by a petition supported by 15% of members.



Jason Diceman facilitating a dotmocracy meeting for a City of Toronto public meeting 2005.

If you have comments or suggestions for more tips or other improvements to this handbook, please contact us:
e-mail **dotmocracy-handbook @ cooptools.ca**
or call **1-866-519-co-op.**

I hope you found this handbook useful for helping your communities and organizations find agreement.

-Jason Diceman

Appendix 1 – Advanced Dotmocracy Compared to Brainstorming-Voting or Consensus

A common method for large group decision-making facilitation is to collect ideas via a large group discussion and/or brainstorm, organize and refine the ideas to some degree, and then either vote (usually by raised hands) to see which ideas are most popular, or discuss and address concerns until a single consensus is reached.

Advantages of Brainstorm-Voting or Consensus Over Dotmocracy

- ✓ Many people are used to it and thus it may have more perceived legitimacy and may be easier to facilitate.
- ✓ All the communication is face-to-face, which helps build trust and community.
- ✓ There are more opportunities to smile, laugh and cheer as a whole group.
- ✓ People can feel heard by the group.
- ✓ The final decision is a single choice that may appear to be more decisive.
- ✓ A good facilitator may draw out people and ideas they might have not been written on a dotmocracy sheet.

Disadvantages of Brainstorm-Voting or Consensus Compared to Dotmocracy

- x The number and detail of ideas is limited to the facilitators' ability to record them. The facilitator is a bottleneck that does not allow the process to scale-up to large numbers of participants and ideas.
- x A facilitator may not correctly interpret what a participant is trying to say and thus record the wrong idea.
- x The facilitator may have a bias that affects how the ideas are discussed and recorded. For example a facilitator may subtly ignore or downplay ideas they do not like, or give extra time and attention to ideas they prefer.
- x There is limited opportunity for commenting and reflection on ideas. Any time spent listening to comments reduces time for new ideas.
- x Discussion may be swayed by confident public speakers.
- x The final vote is public (i.e. not anonymous) and may be easily skewed by strong personalities, people with authority or status, power relationships, cliquing and cultural influences.
- x The process requires participants to do public speaking in order to contribute, which many people with good ideas may be shy to do.
- x Discussions about the process can often take time away from the content of the decision-making.

Appendix 2 – Advanced Dotmocracy Compared to Traditional Dotmocracy

Traditional dotmocracy, also known as “dot voting”, “sticker voting” or “multi-voting”, is essentially placing stickers or written marks next to ideas one likes, usually written on easel paper by a facilitator.

The advanced dotmocracy process, with its specially designed idea sheets, rules and instructions defined by Co-op Tools, improves on the traditional dotmocracy process in several key ways:

- Any participant can present a detailed idea in their own words without the bottleneck and filter of a facilitator. In effect, many more ideas can be posted in a much shorter period of time.
- The distribution of ideas on separate sheets allows for unlimited ideas to be presented and rated at the same time.
- The agreement scale on each sheet makes it clear the levels of agreement, disagreement and confusion for every posted idea. Traditional method of just posting dots just for approval does not recognize disagreement or confusion.
- The one dot per person/per sheet provides a much more accurate representation of the participants’ collective opinions. For example, using the traditional dotmocracy method, 10 people can put one dot each on a idea, or one person can put 10 dots on the same idea. Reviewing the results, decision-makers can not tell the difference between the two different scenarios.
- Participants can write useful comments on the sheets or below on sticky notes.
- Documented rules and guidelines promote consistency and reliability of results.
- The letter-size idea sheets can be easily photocopied and archived. The traditional process uses poster paper.
- There is no need to purchase the dot stickers that the traditional process requires.

The main advantage of traditional dotmocracy over advanced dotmocracy is that it is simpler to learn and apply.

Write one idea here in large letters:

Four horizontal dashed lines for writing an idea in large letters.

Signatures

Two vertical columns of dashed lines for signatures.

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement Agreement Neutral Disagreement Strong Disagreement Confusion

Add brief comments:

Strengths & Opportunities

Concerns & Weaknesses

Five horizontal dashed lines for writing comments under Strengths & Opportunities.

Five horizontal dashed lines for writing comments under Concerns & Weaknesses.

Location / event:

Date:

#