

REDUCING OPTIONS

# QUICK VOTING METHODS

Dot voting, nose-picking, barometers – quick ways to get the majority view, mostly for larger groups.

<b>Duration</b>	<p><b>Preparation:</b> almost none, except for barometers, where it might take a few minutes to hang up the papers</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> from a few seconds (nose-picking) to a few minutes</p>
<b>Physical requirements</b>	Pens, sticky notes, or voting dots. You might prepare special “barometer” papers, or just use sticky notes.
<b>Energy level</b>	Medium, high for some variations
<b>Facilitators</b>	1
<b>Participants</b>	From 3 to all the people in the room
<b>Expected output</b>	Rough estimate of majority interests

There are many techniques which can be used to see what the majority is feeling, from a show of hands to more complex and engaging methods. Some allow each person a single vote, some allow multiple votes, and some allow people to express their reactions to all ideas. Use these techniques to get a sense of which ideas, insights, or data are most interesting to the most people without having a long discussion.

## Variations

- **Dot voting** is a familiar method where participants are given sticky dots or thick pens to mark their choices. Material is displayed around the room (perhaps pinned to walls or displayed on tables), and participants move around the space, marking the items that deserve more attention. Usually, each person is allowed to make a fixed number of votes; sometimes they are allowed to “spend” multiple votes on the same item. At the end, you can easily see which items have the most votes.
- Often, the need for “consensus” or “fairness” will push a team into a discussion of alternatives – which

is not a bad thing unless they are already basically agreed and don't know it yet. “**Nose-picking**” is a very quick method for teams or small groups to see if they agree. To vote, each team member puts one finger on their nose; they count together to three and each quickly put that finger on their preferred item. Anyone who hesitates, even for a split second, has lost her vote. If there is a tie, discount all the other items, briefly discuss the favorites, and vote again on the tied items. If there is still a tie, toss a coin.

- **Barometers** are a quick way to get everyone's view on every item. There are two ways to do this. In the first method, you hang or draw a simple “barometer” – say, a Likert scale from -2 to +2 – on every item. The participants go around the room and place a pen mark or dot to show their “vote” for each item. In the second version, you give everyone a bright sticky note and ask them to hold it high over their heads (“I like it”), low by their knees (“I hate it”), or somewhere in between to vote for each item. (If you have no sticky notes, applause works in the same way.) Go around the room and ask for the participants'

opinion of each item, estimating an average. Unlike the first method, this one gives an average, not a spread of votes.

### Method notes

- You might want to discuss with the groups what criteria they will follow in voting – but this can quickly lead to a weighty debate. Lightweight criteria include “interesting,” “priority,” or simply “rock-and-roll points.” If in doubt, ask them to choose based on “how interesting or useful this idea is right now.”
- These are quick methods to judge the interest of the group, not robust survey methods. Treat the results as an information point, not a decision. Is there a balance? Is there a wide enough range? Are there some risky, weird, or much-loved ideas which need to be kept in as “dark horse” prototypes? Are ideas already implemented somewhere, or have they already failed? Make a conscious decision based on the voting (don't let the voting decide), then take a handful of ideas forward. ◀