

# Workshop Method

## Issue Sorting Process

This method is part of a larger process called 'Participatory Strategic Planning.' It was developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs, a global, not-for-profit, social change organization. Its primary objective is to promote positive change in communities, organizations and individual lives in the US and around the world by helping people find their own solutions to problems and the means to implement those solutions.

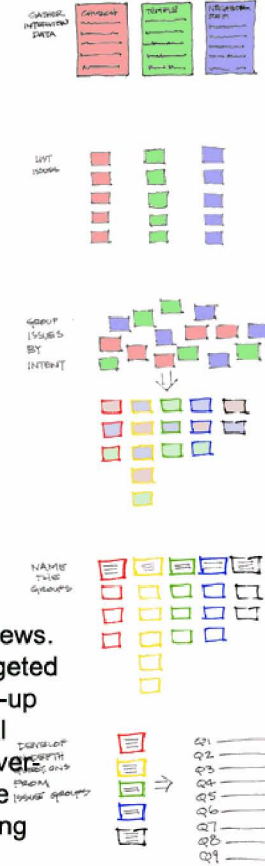
### How it usually works:

The workshop method usually begins with the creation of a focus question. This is an open-ended question that addresses a group or organization's need for a new direction or new solution to an issue. This question is usually created by a representative group of stakeholders and management.

The workshop method is built upon the assumption that everyone in the organization or group knows something that the group needs, and that 'buy-in,' or shared ownership, of a plan is critical to the plan's success.

The method works from the bottom up, starting with each participant's personal responses to the focus question, and works to create a shared vision around the responses. This allows every participant to feel that their concerns and ideas are part of the group solution, and thus to feel inspired to help implement that solution. In addition, this bottom-up, consensus-driven process gives every voice equal weight, thus minimizing the chances of one strong personality commandeering the process and preemptively deciding on a solution.

In a planning context, this method could be used to create common ground between government and community groups to allow them to work together to creatively plan for the future or address current needs and issues.



### How we used the method:

We used part of this method as a technique for sorting and synthesizing collected data from our first set of interviews. Our goal was to use this data to generate follow-up or targeted questions for the second round of interviews. The bottom-up aspect of the technique allowed us to work from the actual responses of the stakeholders, rather than forcing us to over-intellectualize or impose ideas from above. It was also the intention of our workshop that it be an internal team-building and consensus-building exercise.

Given the disparate goals, ours was an atypical implementation of the process, in that the participants were not working with self-generated data. Still, the gradual and iterative aspect of the process encouraged us to focus on underlying intentions, allowed us to integrate a large amount of data into manageable, tangible groups, and pushed us to explore further questions and possibilities.