

**PMEducation**

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

**WHAT IT IS**

The Nominal Group Technique is an extension of Brainstorming which goes beyond idea identification and into prioritization of the ideas. It uses forced rating, meaning participants can only have one number one priority, one number two priority and so on.

In a group it often happens that the person with the loudest voice or most authority has their way, causing other participants to feel a lack of commitment and that the ‘wrong’ outcome was decided. Nominal Group Technique provides a way to give everyone in the group an equal voice. **Anonymity is the key.**

This tool usually appears in the process of: Collect Requirements; and also in Estimate Time Durations. However, it can be used any time a rating of alternates is required.

**HOW IT WORKS**

1. IDENTIFICATION: Begin with the question or problem. Each participant silently and anonymously generates and writes down their answers or solutions (can be more than one per person). Participants are not to consult, discuss, or share their ideas with other participants.
2. The facilitator collects the contributed answers to the question or solutions to the problem and writes them on a whiteboard, flip chart or other medium for all to see.
3. Some contributions might require clarification, in which case some participants would need to identify themselves or the point remains unclarified.
4. If more than one contribution is very similar then combine these for a shorter more manageable list.
5. PRIORITIZATION: Again **anonymously**, each participant rates each contribution, starting with the highest rate as being most favourable. Think of this as voting privately. For example, if there are 5 contributions each participant rates their preferred contribution as 5. Then the next preferred as 4 and so on.
6. The facilitator collects the participants’ ratings and makes an overall group rating table with the TOTALS of each rating for each contribution. The overall group rating table is written on a whiteboard, flip chart or other medium for all to see. Anonymity can be maintained by carefully filling the overall group rating table *horizontally*, in a way that participants cannot be identified by vertical columns.
7. The contribution with the highest overall group rating becomes the first priority.

**KEY ELEMENTS**

For this method to be effective, the following key elements must be used:

* Representative selection of knowledgeable participants
* Agreement in the group to accept the outcome of this technique
* Strict facilitation to ensure equal and fair expression for all

ADVANTAGES and DISADVANTAGES

of NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

 ADVANTAGES

* Highly visual. Easy to see and to explain to others
* Provides vehicle for Stakeholder Engagement
* Encourages all participants to contribute equally. Democratic
* Gives equal voice to all participants. Diminishes competition
* Allows participants to express their views freely
* Is found to generate more contributions than group discussion
* Provides a greater sense of closure than group discussion

 DISADVANTAGES

* Some participants might be uncomfortable writing ideas down
* May appear slow moving to dominant participants
* Lacks spontaneity of conventional Brainstorming
* Lacks cross-fertilization of conventional Brainstorming
* Without discussion, opinions might not converge in the rating process

FINAL NOTE: This tool, used in its entirety, is useful for Identifying and Prioritizing answers or solutions. Even in many cases where conventional Brainstorming is preferred for identification, the list of answers or solutions generated can be prioritized using Steps 5 to 7.

Below you will find the filled in Overall Group Rating Table. There were 5 contributions and 7 participants. The ratings are mixed to maintain anonymity, by filling in the table horizontally. The group selection for first priority was Contribution C, with 25 points.

