

Dot Voting

A Method for Groups to Decide their Top Priority issues

What	The process outlined below is specifically for youth interagencies in Queensland participating in YANQ's Youth Consultative Network (http://www.yanq.org.au/ycn). However the process may be adapted to suit many group decision making tasks.
Why	This strategy is used when there is a variety of issues and opinions and a group decision is required. The process does not necessarily result in a consensus decision (i.e. where EVERYONE agrees with the issues), but it will give everyone in the group an equal role in making the decision.
Items Needed	Butchers paper, flipchart or whiteboard and marking pens. Possibly (see step 1 below) small slips of paper – large enough to write short 3-4 word sentences on. Sticky dots, post-it notes or a thick pen for marking dots. A rough rule of thumb for determining the number of stickers you need (or marks with a pen people can make) is to divide the number of issues by 3 and give each member that many stickers (rounded up). So if there were 15 issues, each group member would get 5 sticky dots or post-it notes. Giving too many or too little dots/votes to each person can hamper the process – a minimum of 3 and maximum of 10 votes per person are good limits to work within.
How	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create two lists of issues – one for issues facing young people, the other for issues facing services for young people. You can ask people to nominate issues either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • before the meeting via e-mail; • at the meeting – provide butchers paper/whiteboard and pens and either set aside time or use the networking time at the start or during a break for people to jot down their issues. In the latter case it helps if someone is assigned the job of walking around the room encouraging people to put their issues on the butchers paper; • at the meeting on small slips of paper that are filled out and handed to the facilitator. The facilitator may need several minutes (e.g. during a break) to record the issues (see next step). 2. Record the list for everyone to see (eliminate duplicates) eg white board, blackboard, flip chart etc 3. Spend some time in the group discussing the issues. This discussion can be used to clarify issues and remove duplicates. Make it clear that during this discussion no-one is to be attacked for advocating for (or against) a particular issue. 4. Provide individuals with the required number sticky dots (roughly – the number of issues divided by 3). 5. Each individual uses their dots to select the items they consider important. Each person's dots can be placed on one item or spread across a number of items. <p>Eg: You might get the following list for Issues Facing Young People (10 people voting, 3 dots/votes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of accommodation  • Transport to work or recreation  • Not enough affordable recreation  • Underage drinking  • Centrelink Breaches  • School expulsions  • Self-harming  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. You can visually see the priority areas, in the example above is clearly “Lack of Accommodation”. The second priority would be “Centrelink Breaches”. The third priority is a tie between Transport and self-harming. 7. If you need to break a tie, provide more time for discussion. If through discussion the group cannot come to a consensus, repeat the voting process (provide more dots). This time however, limit the voting to just those issues that are tied – or to the top 3-5 issues that were identified in the first round.

Variations & Other Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes facilitators provide two different coloured dots/post-its. One of the colours (e.g. Red) represents an individual's personal preference. Each group member gets just one of the higher-preference coloured dots or post-it notes. The other colour (of which each group member gets several) represents a normal vote. In the instance of a tie, the items with more high-priority colours can be declared the 'winner'. • Some groups allow the chairperson to cast a deciding vote in situations where you need to break a tie. • This process could be used to determine priorities for your interagency. The next step would be to discuss actions your interagency can take to address those issues. • The process might be useful to run regularly – e.g. as an early warning system to see what low-priority issues are on the horizon now but may develop into higher priorities in the future. • If you have very tight agendas, you could split this process over two meetings. That is, do 'Issues for Young People' at one meeting, and 'Issues for Services' at the next. Or have a brainstorming session at one meeting (to come up with a long list of issues) and the voting process at another.
Web links to variations and other similar processes (all links accurate as at 14/2/2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. http://www.cap.nsw.edu.au/QI/TOOLS/mno/multivote.htm. 2. http://www.audienceialogue.org/dotmocracy.html. 3. http://blogs.ittoolbox.com/eai/implementation/archives/using-multivoting-to-drive-a-decision-11725. 4. http://www.foundationcoalition.org/home/keycomponents/teams/decision3.html. 5. http://www.sixsigmaspc.com/dictionary/multivoting.html. 6. http://www.asq.org/learn-about-quality/decision-making-tools/overview/multivoting.html 7. http://www.innovationtools.com/Articles/ArticleDetails.asp?a=141