

HOW-NOW-WOW MATRIX

What: A tool that helps teams select which ideas to implement or develop further by assessing each idea against feasibility and potential impact.

Why: When people want to develop new ideas, they are most often asked to think 'out of the box' in the brainstorming phase. However, when it comes to selecting or merging ideas, people often end up picking the ones that are most familiar to them. The How-Now-Wow matrix helps you avoid this by forcing people to weigh each idea on two parameters.

When: The tool is an idea selection tool and a great next step for when you have a large number of ideas to choose between following your creative idea generation. For example after a [Crazy Eight exercise](#) or [Round Robin brainstorming exercise](#).

Step 1

PREPARE THE EXERCISE

Draw a 2-by-2 matrix as illustrated below. The X-axis denotes the originality of the idea, and the Y-axis shows the ease of implementation. Divide the matrix into four quadrants. Label the quadrants as:

- Now/Blue Ideas: 'Normal' ideas, easy to implement. These are typically the 'low-hanging fruit' and solutions to fill existing gaps in processes, and usually result in small benefits.
- How/Yellow Ideas: Original ideas, impossible to implement. These are breakthrough ideas in terms of impact, but absolutely impossible to implement right now given current context/technology/resource etc. constraints.
- Wow/Green Ideas: Original ideas, relatively easy to implement. 'Wow' ideas are those with potential for orbit-shifting change and possible to implement within current reality.

INFORMATION

PHASE
DESIGN

TIMEFRAME
60-120 MINS.

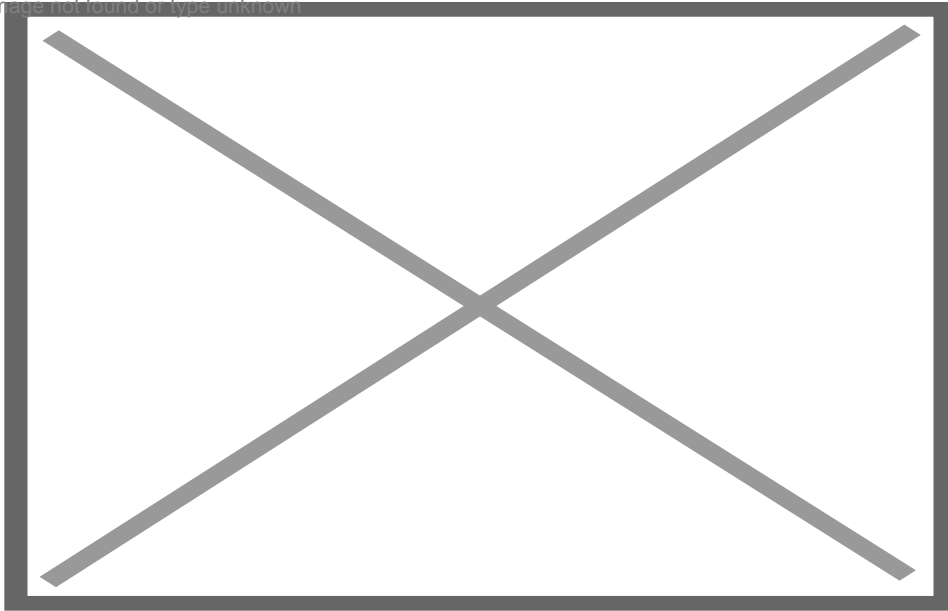
MODE
FACE-TO-FACE

PARTICIPANTS
4 - 10

FACILITATION LEVEL
BASIC

MATERIALS
FLIP CHART-SIZED PIECES OF
PAPER, MARKERS AND/OR
MULTI-COLOURED VOTING
DOTS, AND TIMER

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Make sure you have sticky dots in colours corresponding to the colours of the quadrants. If blue, green, and yellow sticky notes are not available, change the quadrant colours to the colours available to you.

List down the ideas that you have collected from your brainstorm on large flip charts.

Place the matrix and flip charts with ideas on the wall where you will conduct the exercise.

When choosing your workshop participants, make sure to include people who are equipped to also reflect on protection, gender, and inclusion aspects as well as conflict sensitivity aspects. This will help ensure your final solution design is as inclusive and robust as possible.

Step 2

TIME FOR THE HOW-NOW-WOW

Introduce the participants to the timeframe and the purpose of the exercise by going through the following:

- What are we going to do today?
- Why are they invited?
- What are their roles (if participants do not know each other well)?
- What is the timeframe?

To get the exercise started, go through the following steps:

1. Introduce the How-Now-Wow matrix and the four quadrants carefully to the participants.
2. Ask the participants to walk around the room to read through the ideas placed on the wall. If the same participants have been part of the brainstorm session where the ideas are derived from, ask them if there are ideas that need to be clarified, or if any might have been left out.
3. Ensure that all ideas are well understood and clarify any uncertainties or questions.

4. When all is clear, give each participant three sticky dots of each colour (3 blue, 3 yellow, 3 green). The typical number of dots per person is 9 but you can reduce/increase that number based on the time at hand and the number of ideas generated.
5. When participants are to vote and categorise each idea, they must think of the following:
 - Blue dot: Ideas that are low risk, have high probability of acceptance, typically low-hanging fruits, examples of implementing the idea exist in the context/sector.
 - Green dot: Ideas that are innovative and can relatively easily be implemented.
 - Yellow dot: 'Green ideas' not easily implemented but if done are very impactful – these are the dream and breakthrough solutions.
6. Ask each participant to step forward and vote for what they think are the three best ideas in each category. They do this by sticking a coloured dot in front of each idea that they choose.
7. In the end, count the number of dots under each idea to categorise them. The highest number of dots of a certain colour categorises the idea under that specific colour.
8. In case of a tie between colours, for example, if there are same number of blue dots and green dots, the idea is blue. If same number of yellow dots and green dots, the idea is green.

Allow 20–40 minutes for this step, depending on the number of participants.

Facilitators tips

Ask the participants to stand up to during this entire step to bring more energy into the room.

When participants vote, remind them to consider annual and programmatic strategies, current plans, resources, capacities, and operational context, as well as internal and partner factors.

Remind participants to apply a conflict-sensitivity lens as well as a protection, gender, and inclusion lens, when voting for ideas.

Step 3

DISCUSS, PRIORITISE, AND PLAN

You now have a bucket of:

1. Now ideas (Blue): low-hanging ideas that you can implement straight away.
2. Wow ideas (Green): feasible ideas in the current context and current resources to develop further in the near future to significantly improve your work.
3. How ideas (Yellow): Ideas to keep an eye on for the future. Ideas that are important to consider in future programme or project development processes.

Sort all the ideas by category for easy overview by all participants. Then, invite participants to give their rationale for categorising the ideas as they did. Ask if everyone is satisfied with the categorisation. If not, allow for discussion to agree on the final categorisation.

Finally, ask the participants to prioritise the now and wow categorised ideas and discuss how to move forward. With the prioritisation in place, decide who will do what,

and when, to take the ideas to the next level.

Next step: To get a deeper understanding of what it takes to turn the new ideas/solutions can be into concrete actions, the [Mini Theory of Change tool](#) can be helpful.

Allow 20–40 minutes for this step, depending on the number of participants.

Facilitator tips

It can be helpful for the prioritisation and action planning discussion to remind participants of current or upcoming strategies, plans and commitments, where the ideas may feed into and gain synergies from.