

Fireside Chats for Idea Generation

Roosevelt Institution Event Template

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Goal: to provide a baseline set of ideas that a chapter can use to initiate projects for presentation at challenge league conferences or submission to publications.

Preparation

Find a venue that will make everyone feel comfortable — not a classroom or a meeting room, more like a dorm lounge or a cafeteria.

Pick a theme, things like “long term Sunday” where you can’t think of anything that could be implemented within 50 years, or “crazy shit Wednesday” where you look for outside-the-box ideas

Get the word out all around campus. Posters, blanket the email lists, invite everyone. But look, if you don’t have time, inviting just your members will work too.

Print/email out the fact sheets. The challenge coordinators are preparing a few pages of straight facts about the issue. If we want to reduce carbon emissions, what’s the breakdown in where it comes from, how are each growing, what are emissions rates in other countries, what’s the cost per megawatt-hour of different kinds of energy and how much carbon do they produce, etc.

Quick Facts:

- Event template to generate ideas to prepare for challenge tournaments and publications
- First-ever national student policy brainstorm
- Prepared with creativity consultants and inventors
- Scaleable for chapters with ten members or hundreds
- Can target to Roosevelt members or advertise to the wider campus community
- Will share ideas nationally so everyone has a project
- Getting together with buddies to talk about ideas is what college is all about

At the Event

Start the conversation. If it’s pizza or beer or dinner or what, your budget and campus culture will determine what’s the thing to do. You’ve got to make it fun, get people comfortable in the space and interacting together

Have an icebreaker. Pass around a commonplace object (e.g. a toothbrush or a shoe) and ask each person to invent a new use for it, or even a way you could use it to solve your challenge. It doesn’t seem like it is wildly important thing, but running a warm up will help to set the tone (creative) and it forces everyone to say something and feel comfortable sharing. You’ve got to give people permission to think outside the box and say stuff that might be totally dumb.

Break into groups of four to eight. There is an ideal number of people to have a brainstorm with. This is important because in a group smaller than this there isn’t a critical mass of ideas and a group larger than this people feel they can hide or that there isn’t time to hear from everyone right as they are having their idea. It is also preferred that they be from diverse backgrounds and experiences so that their ideas

Supplies:

- Beer/ pizza/ food/ jar o’ red vines
- Objects for icebreaker
- Fact sheets and question sheets
- White boards or butcher paper

don’t end up overlapping, so make sure people aren’t all sitting with the people they know from their major or theme dorm or club or something.

Use the questions and fact sheets. Your challenge coordinators are coming up with

fact sheets to define the problem and questions that focus people on the specific things we need to reduce. Once we have a breakdown of the sources of carbon dioxide emissions, we'll go through and think about how we can reduce each specific one. You may let people pick a question to start with or you may want them to draw out of a hat — if a question seems easier, everyone at every chapter will pick that one and it might be easier to do creative work on something totally unfamiliar.

Set a target number of ideas — “We want each group to write down 50 ideas to answer the question you were given. We don't care how good they are or how practical they are. We just want you to get to 50.”

Hit the target with an unstructured brainstorm. No discussion, just get the ideas written on butcher paper or white boards. Absolutely critical that everyone knows that in this group setting they are being given permission to really let out lots of silly ideas and that they can relax and allow their ideas to flow and bounce around without being judged by peers.

Rotate the questions every fifteen minutes or twenty minutes, maybe? You don't want people to burn themselves out on one thing, and you don't want one person who cares nothing about public transportation to get stuck with that one for the whole time. On the other hand, if people are delving deeper and coming up with new stuff, let them run with it.

Follow-up

Collect the ideas. Every single idea — don't throw anything away. We'll also collect them at the national level and post it to the national collection, but we expect mostly people will be interested in running with the ideas they came up with at their own chapter. Maybe they'll look at directions other chapters went in for inspiration before the next time though.

For homework, at the event each person should come up with one question they'd like to see asked next time, or one fact they'd like to know the answer to (and if that, they find the answer), or one person they'd like to talk to about it. You can also get creative about it — ask everyone to bring in a photo of a wasteful way they use energy in their lives. The point is to try to get people to, in easy ways, become a little more expert on the subject and be thinking about it throughout the week.

Schedule a follow-up. I think with two or three of these people will have their ideas from the last week in their mind, and will also get used to the format and start to like it more. I think this could be a pretty cool thing. What college is supposed to be all about and such.