Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

This description is adapted from Brilhart and Galanes in *Group Discussion* (1998). The original work was published by Andre L. Delbecq, Andrew H. Van de Ven, and David H. Gustafson in *Group Techniques for Program Planning: A Guide to Nominal Group and Delphi Processes* (1975).

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is an alternative to conventional problem-solving discussions. NGT alternates between interacting verbally and working silently in the presence of others. The essence of NGT is for several persons to work individually in each others’ presence by writing their ideas down on paper, then to record these ideas on a chart as a group, clarify them, and evaluate them by a ranking procedure until a decision has been reached. The procedure may vary, but it always involves a cycle of individual work, followed by discussion.

The specific steps are identified below:

**IDEA GENERATION:**

1. The facilitator gives a clear definition of the problem, and asks participants generate a list of features of the problem, considering the various emotional, personal, and organizational aspects of the problem. Then participants give a clear definition of the problem. (This can be done on index cards, if preferred; these cards can then be collected for use in the next step.)

   At this point, there should be no mention of solutions and no interaction. Allow the group about 5-15 minutes to “brainwrite.” Each person should write all ideas for solving the problem that he or she can think of. (NOTE: The leader may also generate a list of ideas.)

2. The generation of ideas is done silently, and in writing.

3. In a “round robin” session, the facilitator records results on a sheet of paper (flip chart) in front of the group where all can see the list. The procedure is as follows:

   a. The facilitator asks each person in turn to give one item from his/her list. This item is recorded on the flip chart. No discussion is allowed at this point.

   b. Do not record who suggested the idea, or more than one idea from one person at a time.

   c. Keep going around the room until all ideas have been posted on the flip chart. Additional ideas may occur to members while this session is occurring; be sure they are stated and listed.
d. If someone has the same (or very similar) idea as another person, put a tally mark by the idea, but don’t record it twice.
EXAMPLE: Gun control ### I

**CLARIFICATION INTERACTION:**
1. The facilitator should take the group through the list item by item, requesting clarification and elaboration, but **not** evaluation.

   Anyone may ask another person for clarification of an idea on the list. Questions such as, “What does item 6 mean?” or “Do you understand item 4?” are now in order for discussion.

   No lobbying, criticism, or argument are allowed at this time.

**EVALUATION:**
1. The facilitator asks each person to write down the five or so items (s)he most prefers. These items should be ranked (5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest). (This can be done on index cards, if preferred; these cards can then be collected for use in the next step.)

   a. The facilitator asks each person to give the ranking for each item, recording the results on the flip chart.
   EXAMPLE: Gun control 5 2 3 5 1  
   NOTE: Not all items will receive ranks.

   b. The facilitator then sums the ratings for each item, then divides by the number of group participants to calculate a value weight for each item. Most items will have a fractional value.
   EXAMPLE: Gun control 5 2 3 5 1 = 16 ÷ 6 people in group = 2.67

   c. Items which no one rated are removed (crossed out) from the list.

2. Now participants engage in an evaluation discussion of the several items having the highest average ranks. This should be a full and free evaluation with critical thinking, disagreement, and analysis encouraged.

3. If a decision is reached, fine. If not, re-vote on the remaining items and discuss further. This process can be repeated several times as needed until a clear synthesis of a few ideas or support for one idea has emerged.

4. The group then takes appropriate action on the results.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NGT ACTIVITY**
1. In what ways does using NGT *enhance* the problem-solving process?
2. In what ways does using NGT *hinder* the problem-solving process?
3. If you were to change one of the steps of the NGT, which would it be? Why?