

Dotmocracy

Handbook

A completed Dotmocracy form titled "Fostering our Democratic Ideals". The form includes a "Do you agree?" section with five smiley face icons representing levels of agreement: Strong Agreement, Agreement, Neutral, Disagreement, and Strong Disagreement. Below this are two columns: "Strengths & Opportunities" and "Concerns & Weaknesses". The form is filled with handwritten text in blue ink. The "Strengths & Opportunities" column lists points like "One look you have funding and you may be able to engage government officials with the budget and make some sense of it like your votes & the gov formal" and "Required: mission has a lot of value of participation primary". The "Concerns & Weaknesses" column lists points like "quite programs may not adequately target objectives or be effective" and "the gov will take over the project w/ its budget". There is also a "Signatures" section on the right with several signatures.

A simple tool
to help large
groups find
agreement

Jason Diceman

Version 2.2 - Colour

This handbook is dedicated to the many community leaders I met in Cumaná and Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela. My work is inspired by your optimism, camaraderie, and perseverance.

I also thank my most amazing wife who supported me when I said “it’s almost done” for 31 weeks in a row.

Download the latest version
of this handbook at

www.dotmocracy.org

You can also access other free resources, post comments and questions, share your facilitation experiences, and most importantly join our mailing list!

Send your feedback or request facilitation and training:
jason@dotmocracy.org
416-538-2667 toll-free 1-866-519-2667

Copy editing by Leigh Nash.

All text, layout and photos by Jason Diceman, unless otherwise credited.

Dotmocracy Handbook - Version 2.2 (colour) - March 2010.

© 2010 Jason Diceman. All rights reserved.

ISBN 145152708X EAN-13 9781451527087

Table of Contents

INTRODUCING DOTMOCRACY	1
WHAT IS DOTMOCRACY?	1
WHO USES DOTMOCRACY?	4
FEATURES OF THE DOTMOCRACY SHEET	6
FEATURES OF THE DOTMOCRACY PROCESS	7
ORIGINS OF DOTMOCRACY	10
PROCESS FUNDAMENTALS	11
THE ROLES INVOLVED	11
STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS	12
EXAMPLES OF DOTMOCRACY RESULTS	14
DOTMOCRACY RULES & REQUIREMENTS	15
FACILITATION DETAILS	17
HOW TO USE DOTMOCRACY WALLS AND CLIPBOARDS	17
APPROACHES TO DOTMOCRACY IN & OUTSIDE OF MEETINGS	22
FACTORS THAT CAN IMPROVE A DOTMOCRACY PROCESS	26
SESSION FACILITATION TIPS	27
EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF A SESSION	41
FACILITATOR RESOURCES	42
BLANK DOTMOCRACY SHEET	43
DOTMOCRACY MATERIALS LIST	44
EXAMPLE MEETING AGENDA	45
EXAMPLE OF POSTED INSTRUCTIONS	46
APPENDIX 1 — A COMPARISON OF DOTMOCRACY VS. MULTI-VOTING	47

Introducing Dotmocracy



At a typical town hall style general meeting only a minority of people will have their voices heard and few, if any, clear agreements will be found

What is Dotmocracy?

Have you ever taken part in a decision-making meeting with many people and felt frustrated with the lack of progress?

Have you ever attended a forum or workshop where dozens of people brainstormed a long list of ideas, but there was no sensible way to collectively prioritize all the results and recognize the best suggestions?

Have you ever attended a conference and thought of how useful it could have been to recognize common points of agreement among the attendees?

I created Dotmocracy and this handbook to provide a solution for these kinds of challenges.

**Dotmocracy is a transparent, equal opportunity,
and participatory large group decision-making tool.**

Dotmocracy is a simple method for recognizing points of agreement among a large number of people. Participants write down ideas on specially designed paper forms called ***Dotmocracy sheets*** (see page 43) and use pens to fill in one dot per sheet, recording their levels of agreement. The result is a graph-like visual representation of the group's collective opinion.



*Dotmocracy in progress
(Photo: Yvonne Bambrick)*

Close-up of a completed Dotmocracy sheet showing strong agreement for a suggestion to make 'cycling in physical education mandatory'

Compared to surveys, voting, or typical meeting formats, Dotmocracy provides unique and valuable opportunities. In a Dotmocracy process, every participant can simultaneously present his or her own ideas anonymously in writing. The level of popular support for each idea can be quickly and accurately discovered through the dotting process. Feedback comments for each idea can also be recorded.

Dotmocracy helps people quickly recognize their collective preferences, which can then lead to the crafting of popularly supported plans.

Dotmocracy can be used within large meetings, conferences, and forums, and also outside of meetings through the use of **Dotmocracy walls** (see page 19). Along with the Dotmocracy sheets, there are also prescribed **steps** (see page 12), and **rules and requirements** (page 14) that help to ensure the results of a Dotmocracy process are reliable and constructive.



Participants at a municipal meeting review information materials and discuss their perspectives and opinions before starting to write down their ideas on Dotmocracy sheets



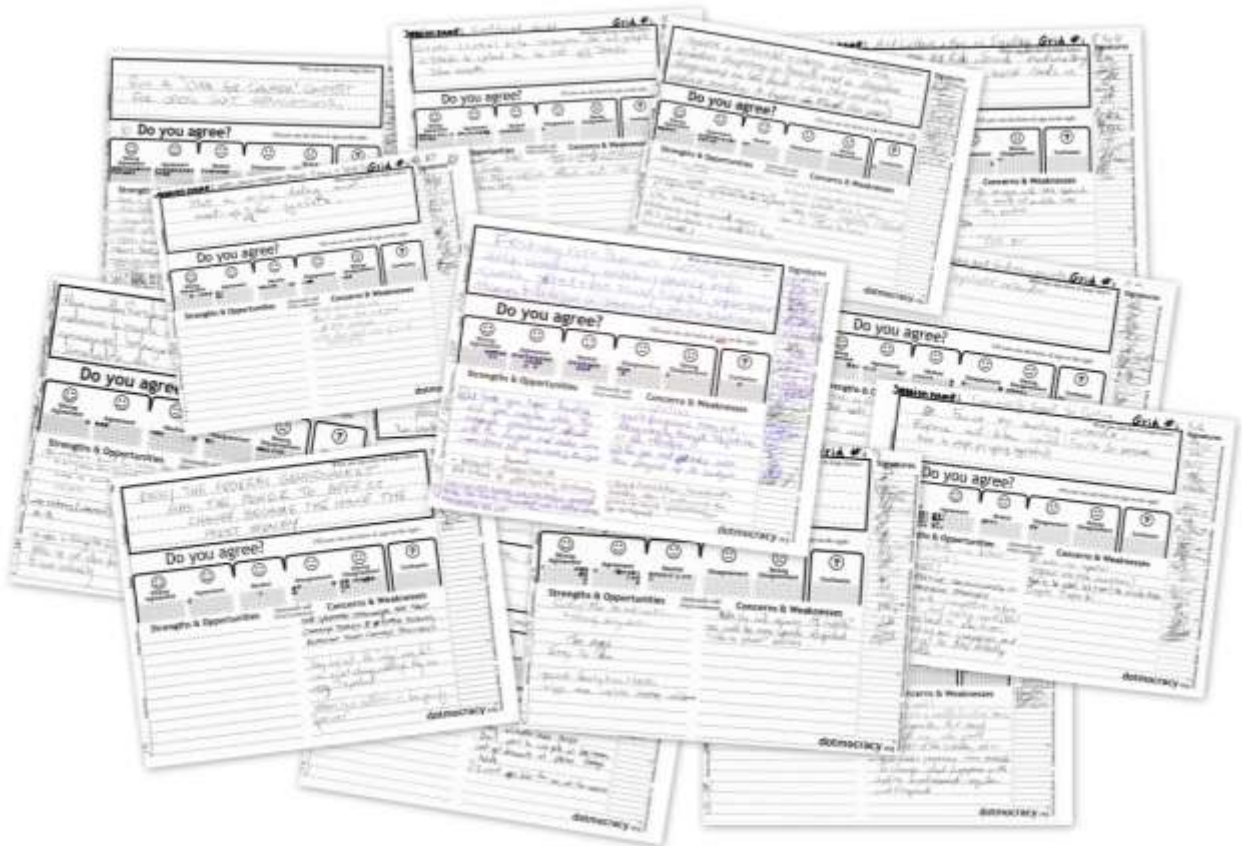
Dotmocracy sheets on hanging clipboards are filled in during a workshop addressing organization funding opportunities

Dotmocracy has also been proven to:

- Recognize collective priorities and direction from all participants.
- Engage and empower diverse groups of people.
- Recognize agreement on unique and specific ideas, as well as general and thematic ideas.
- Give an equal voice to even the quietest of participants.
- Help avoid verbal debates and ‘soap box’ style speech-making.
- Support friendly discussions while efficiently leading to practical conclusions.
- Provide fully documented results that can be easily turned into action plans.

The Dotmocracy process is fun and takes only minutes to learn and apply.

This handbook will teach you the basics of how to properly facilitate an effective and productive Dotmocracy process in a wide variety of situations.



Who Uses Dotmocracy?

A wide range of people use Dotmocracy for many different reasons. Here are a few examples:

“The City of Toronto has used Dotmocracy sheets at large public meetings. We find it is particularly useful for avoiding conflict and for generating a great number of ideas in a short period of time.”

*David Nagler, Senior Coordinator,
City of Toronto Public Consultation Unit (Toronto, Canada)*

“Our not-for-profit organization used Dotmocracy to conduct an all-staff review of a communications plan. Participants found the Dotmocracy tool useful in building consensus, while also giving them some room to provide feedback.”

*Adam Hess, Communications and Marketing,
Voluntary Service Overseas Canada (Ottawa, Canada)*



Toronto Bicycle Union members and supporters share ideas for organization projects



Community members at a City of Toronto public meeting discuss plans for summer events in Kensington Market

"We used Dotmocracy sheets to get feedback on key issues relating to project execution for a construction company."

*Jeremy Kidner, Risk Management Consultant,
Risk I.Q. (Hong Kong, China)*

"A group of about 40 law enforcement and traffic engineering professionals used Dotmocracy within our state-wide Traffic Records Coordinating Committee. The sheets worked like a charm in an exercise to update the objectives of our strategic plan."

*Charles Lambert, Traffic Records Coordinator,
Nevada Department of Public Safety (Carson City, USA)*

"Our school used Dotmocracy to help with a school-wide inquiry, working with K-5 children and adults to improve our lunchroom."

*Donnan M. Stoicovy, Principal,
Park Forest Elementary School (Park Forest Village, USA)*

"Calgary Transit used Dotmocracy as a hands-on tool that allowed community members to rank their own ideas for transit station improvements. Everyone participated in a relatively short period of time. Participants felt this committee meeting was their best so far."

*Jen Malzer, Senior Transit Planner,
City of Calgary (Calgary, Canada)*

"I teach social service students and community workers Dotmocracy as a useful and practical how-to resource that always works beautifully to enable everyone to have a voice."

*Linda Hill, Professor, Social Service Worker Program,
Humber College (Toronto, Canada)*



*Dotmocracy in the classroom at
Park Forest Elementary School*



*Social Service students are taught
Dotmocracy at Humber College*

Features of the Dotmocracy Sheet

The simple design of the Dotmocracy sheet has an amazing capacity to create new opportunities within large groups.

The image shows a Dotmocracy sheet with handwritten text and red callout boxes numbered 1 through 6. The sheet is titled "Do you agree?" and features a scale from "Strong Agreement" to "Strong Disagreement" and "Confusion". The handwritten text includes "Run a 'CODE FOR CANADA' CONTEST FOR OPEN GOVT APPLICATIONS." and "Do you agree?". The sheet also has sections for "Strengths & Opportunities" and "Concerns & Weaknesses". The sheet is signed by many participants, with signatures visible on the right side. The sheet is numbered 4 in the bottom left corner. The sheet is titled "Do you agree?" and features a scale from "Strong Agreement" to "Strong Disagreement" and "Confusion". The handwritten text includes "Run a 'CODE FOR CANADA' CONTEST FOR OPEN GOVT APPLICATIONS." and "Do you agree?". The sheet also has sections for "Strengths & Opportunities" and "Concerns & Weaknesses". The sheet is signed by many participants, with signatures visible on the right side. The sheet is numbered 4 in the bottom left corner.

1. Writing one idea per sheet encourages concise and thoughtful statements. Judgments are made on each specific statement as it is written in the idea box, allowing for subtle and important differences in wording to be recognized.

2. The **agreement scale** on each sheet makes the levels of agreement, disagreement, and confusion visually obvious, for every posted idea.

3. Requiring **one signature per dot** helps validate that no participant has put more than one dot per sheet, i.e., it deters fraudulent results.

4. Positive and negative constructive **feedback comments** are recorded directly on the sheets.

5. Space is provided to record a **unique identification number for each sheet**, along with other information about the session, which aids in the organizing and referencing of results.

6. The Creative Commons License means **anyone can copy and use** blank Dotmocracy sheets without asking for permission or paying a licensing fee.

This sheet is from a "Next Steps" Dotmocracy process conducted at the 2009 ChangeCamp in Toronto, attended by many software "coders."

1. Writing one idea per sheet encourages concise and thoughtful statements. Judgments are made on each specific statement as it is written in the idea box, allowing for subtle and important differences in wording to be recognized.
2. The **agreement scale** on each sheet makes the levels of agreement, disagreement, and confusion visually obvious, for every posted idea.
3. Requiring **one signature per dot** helps validate that no participant has put more than one dot per sheet, i.e., it deters fraudulent results.
4. Positive and negative constructive **feedback comments** are recorded directly on the sheets.
5. Space is provided to record a **unique identification number for each sheet**, along with other information about the session, which aids in the organizing and referencing of results.
6. The Creative Commons License means **anyone can copy and use** blank Dotmocracy sheets without asking for permission or paying a licensing fee.

The 8 ½" x 11" letter-size sheet is easily scanned or photocopied, and stored in binders and folders, making it convenient to share, review, and reference.

Features of the Dotmocracy Process

Open-ended and Measurable

Surveys and polls are excellent at recording quantitative levels of agreement on multiple choice questions, but lack the option for respondents to pose their own suggestions for polling.

Open discussions are great for sharing ideas and perspectives, but are difficult to objectively report on clear outcomes, especially in groups of large sizes.

Dotmocracy sheets provide measurable results, like a survey, while remaining open-ended and deliberative, like a discussion.

Transparency through Simplicity

The obvious agreement scale is simple enough for a child to use and interpret, yet is sophisticated enough for scientists. Decision-makers can read and reference completed Dotmocracy sheets to help them create plans to match and address popular opinions. Announced decisions can be compared against Dotmocracy results to see if they match the expressed will of the people.

Results that can be Compared and Confirmed

The standard process and format of the Dotmocracy sheet allows for easy comparison of results between different sessions. The same ideas can be posted for dotting among different groups, or within the same group on different dates. Similarities in dotting patterns on the same ideas can help confirm and reinforce results, while differences in dotting can raise important questions for further investigation.

One of many agreements decided by student's age 5 to 11, addressing an overcrowded cafeteria



A workshop participant reads an idea before dotting

Unlimited Potential of Ideas and Participants

With a surplus of Dotmocracy sheets, there is no limit to the number of people that can participate, or the number of ideas they can write down. With all participants dotting at the same time, the most popular of all ideas can be quickly discovered and celebrated. There is no expectation that all participants will dot every sheet; rather, a representative sample of participants will dot each sheet.

Affordable “Technology”

This paper-based “technology” costs only pennies to use, while providing features and results comparable to expensive computerized idea rating systems.

Equal Opportunity by Design

At their heart, Dotmocracy sheets rely on the anonymous use of pens, not voices. Without having to speak or debate in front of a crowd, average people can find popular support for their ideas and recognize disagreements without fear of public criticism.

Judgments are made of the statements as they are written, not of the person who created them, or how they were spoken.

The ideas and opinions of the loudest, most confident speaker are given no more or less opportunity than those of the quietest and shyest person in the room.

Dotmocracy helps groups find agreements they likely otherwise would not have reached on ideas they might otherwise have never heard.



A Hong Kong construction company asks its staff to dot their opinions as part of a risk assessment process



Members of a Venezuelan community discuss ways they can improve their neighbourhood

Supports Consensus Decision-making

Dotmocracy fits well within a consensus process that works towards finding the most acceptable option for everyone involved. It does this by promoting equal opportunity, open discussion, collaborative drafting of proposals, identification of concerns, and encouragement of idea modification.

Dotmocracy is Not a Voting System

In voting there are only a few fixed options to choose from, and the option with the most votes wins. In Dotmocracy, the options are not fixed. Instead, participants are invited to generate many ideas, and then use the agreement scale to recognize which ideas have the strongest united agreement and the least disagreement. It is then up to decision-makers to interpret the results and propose a plan that matches the expressed preferences of the participants.

Compared to voting, Dotmocracy is not as definitive in its results, but it is much more participatory, open-ended, and useful for understanding the collective opinions of people on a wide range of ideas.

Authentic Voice of the People

In traditional large meeting formats, the outputs are often a facilitator or reporter's notes based on their interpretations of the meeting's discussion. Any recorded quotes only capture individuals who speak up, without any way of acknowledging the silent opinions of other participants.

Dotmocracy invites participants to write statements in their own words and then to collectively rate these ideas, to recognize which statements are most agreed upon. There is no restriction or intermediary between the participants and the dotting results.



Clipboards are passed around the audience at a technology conference in Toronto, Canada



A participatory democracy training-the-trainers government workshop in Caracas, Venezuela

Origins of Dotmocracy

I created the Dotmocracy sheets after being inspired by a simpler large group process known as “**multi-voting**,” “**dot-voting**,” “**dot democracy**” or “**voting with dots**,” among other names. In multi-voting, participants vote on their favourite option using a limited number of stickers or marks with pens — dot stickers are the most common. Technically, the multi-voting model is known as a **cumulative voting system**. Multi-voting comes in many variations and is generally good for comparing and prioritizing options from a list of up to about a dozen related, but distinct, ideas. When there are a higher number of options, participants are presented with **too many choices** to reasonably compare. Multi-voting is also less reliable in instances when **votes are split** between similar and/or incomparable options.

Using Dotmocracy sheets and following the process defined in this handbook, large groups can easily and reliably recognize agreements on an unlimited number of ideas of any type, without the problem of vote splitting.

For an exhaustive comparison of these two methods, please see **Appendix 1 — A Comparison of Dotmocracy vs. Multi-voting** on page 47.

I did not coin the term “Dotmocracy.” It was one of the many names I heard experienced facilitators use to describe multi-voting processes with dot stickers. The original Dotmocracy sheet format, which I created in 2004, also used dot stickers and was only a modest upgrade on the traditional dot-voting model. With the publication of my first version of the Dotmocracy Handbook in 2006, the process no longer used stickers, and was clearly defined by rules and requirements.



*Traditional voting with dots
(Photo: www.saint-marys.edu)*



*The first Dotmocracy sheets, which used dot stickers,
at Karma Food Co-op, Toronto, 2004*

Process Fundamentals



Youth contribute their ideas and opinions on a Dotmocracy wall during a conference in Toronto

The Roles Involved

There are three main roles for people who are involved in a Dotmocracy process:

- Hosts:** Representatives of the organization(s) that have sponsored the process and will be responsible for leading action on the results. Hosts work with facilitators to help decide on key aspects of the Dotmocracy session plan.
- Participants:** The many people who take part in the process, contributing their ideas and opinions. Participants should also be stakeholders, i.e., they will likely be affected by the outcome of the decision.
- Facilitators:** Trained individuals who plan, prepare, and manage the Dotmocracy process, while remaining neutral on the content.

On occasion, a host may also be a participant, but the role of facilitator should always be distinct, since facilitators are required to be neutral on the content and results.

Step-by-Step Process

Below are the basic instructions for running a proper Dotmocracy process.

1. Learn about the issue.

Before starting a Dotmocracy process on a complex topic, education should be provided to the participants to ensure they are knowledgeable on the issue that will be addressed, e.g., distribute a primer booklet a few days ahead of time, or host an introductory lesson on the topic.

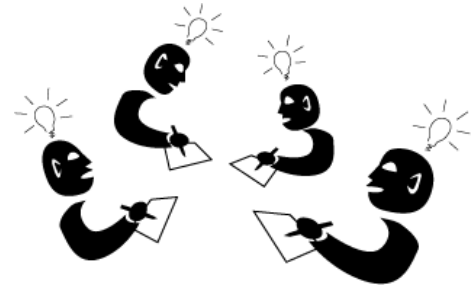
2. Present the issue and question(s).

The hosting group provides a preamble to introduce the issue at hand and the context in which it will be addressed. Post the key question(s) participants will answer through the Dotmocracy process.



3. Discuss potential answers.

In small groups, have participants brainstorm and deliberate potential answers to the posted questions. Invite participants to collectively and independently draft many ideas.



4. Write ideas on Dotmocracy sheets.

Participants clearly print idea statements on Dotmocracy sheets, one idea per sheet. Sheets are usually either posted on a wall or passed around among participants.



5. Fill in dots to record opinions.

Write comments.

Participants read and consider the ideas and fill in one dot per sheet to record their opinion of each idea on a scale of “strong agreement,” “agreement,” “neutral,” “disagreement,” “strong disagreement,” or “confusion.” Participants sign each sheet they dot and may choose to add brief comments.



Repeat steps 3 through 5.

Participants review ideas, discuss comments and dotting patterns, and post new ideas to be dotted.

6. Report the results.

The end of the dotting process is announced. The sheets are collected and sorted by topic and/or level of agreement. All results are published, with the most popularly agreed-upon ideas celebrated and the important disagreements recognized.



7. Formulate and announce a decision.

The hosting group authors a plan that selects, combines, prioritizes, and/or finds compromise among the popularly agreed-upon ideas, with minimal disagreement. The decision is publicized and the hosting group is held accountable to the reported results of the Dotmocracy process, in relation to the original preamble provided,

Share Your Story on www.Dotmocracy.org

How have you used Dotmocracy? Write a message in the Dotmocracy.org guestbook, or submit a short case study, to let the world know how your group made use of this simple yet powerful tool.

Examples of Dotmocracy Results

Understanding the basic outcomes of a Dotmocracy session only requires a simple examination of the dotting patterns. Remember, it is **not** the total number of dots you should be looking at, but **where** the dots were placed on the scale of agreement. Beyond levels of agreement, one should also consider the written comments and relationships between ideas when planning for next steps.

Write one idea here in large letters:

KEEPING OUR STAFFERS TOGETHER IN
SOCIAL UNIFORMS. TRY FEARS, ETC TO
KEEP CROSS-POLLINATION GOING!
FROM VET/MEET-UPS #CLANET CAMP

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

United strong agreement

Write one idea here in large letters:

Create central bike calendar for all groups
in Toronto to upload to, to list all Toronto
bike events...

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

Various levels of agreement & acceptance

Write one idea here in large letters:

'GEEK A BILL for a government in Canada'
Ask people for ideas & how to make government &
policy more transparent. Put forward it to the closest
the creative critical dialogue.

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

Weak agreement & acceptance

Write one idea here in large letters:

ONLY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
HAS THE POWER TO AFFECT
CHANGE BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE
MOST MONEY

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

Strong disagreement

Write one idea here in large letters:

What about a nude cyclists' calendar

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

Conflicting opinions

Write one idea here in large letters:

CYCLISTS UNION BUREAU
PEACEMAS

Signature: _____

Do you agree? Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Strengths & Opportunities

Options: add brief comments

Concerns & Weaknesses

Options: add brief comments

High confusion & weak conflicting opinions

Dotmocracy Rules & Requirements

Rules

To facilitate a Dotmocracy session that is reliable, accountable, fair for all participants, and which promotes useful results, follow these rules:

1. The official Dotmocracy facilitator(s) are authoritative and responsible for the Dotmocracy process, but maintain neutral opinions on the session's content.
2. Each participant may only fill in one dot per Dotmocracy sheet.
3. Participants must sign each sheet that they dot.
4. Participants may dot as many or as few sheets as they please during the session.
5. There are no changes to an idea's text inside the idea box once dotting has started on that sheet.
6. Participants have the right to keep their dotting choices secret and their comments anonymous.
7. A Dotmocracy sheet should only be removed from the dotting process by the official facilitator(s).

When a facilitator fails to follow these rules, it degrades the process. Just like in sport and law, rules promote fairness and reliability. The design of the Dotmocracy sheets, in combination with these rules, has been refined to ensure participants' ideas and opinions will be collected in a transparent, constructive, and accountable manner. Following these rules will help you to build trust with participants and observers in both the Dotmocracy process and in yourself as a Dotmocracy facilitator.



Amnesty International staff in a planning workshop (Facilitation & photo: Rob Purdie, London, UK, 2006)



Celebrating results of a Dotmocracy workshop at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela

Required Posted Information

For each Dotmocracy session, the following information should be posted for all participants to easily read:

1. The basic process instructions.
2. The preamble and references to any related information materials.
3. The question(s) to be addressed.
4. An explanation of where and when a copy of the complete results will be accessible.
5. A statement describing how the results will be used by the hosting organization(s).
6. The hosting organization(s) name and contact details.
7. The official facilitator(s) name and contact details.

Posting this information provides a consistent explanation about the session and who is responsible for it.



A Dotmocracy wall with all required posted information on blue 11"x17" sheets

Facilitation Details



Facilitator, Jason Diceman, goes through dotting results at the end of an all-day Toronto Cyclists Union workshop

How to Use Dotmocracy Walls and Clipboards

Like any sheet of paper, a hard and flat surface is required to write on Dotmocracy sheets. This may seem obvious, but it needs to be thought through. In some cases, tables, desks, binders or books may be used, with sheets either passed around for dotting, or set out so participants can walk to each of them.

From my experience, I recommend the use of clipboards, a wall, or ideally, a combination of the two.

Passing Clipboards

In a meeting of any size, clipboards with Dotmocracy sheets on them can be easily passed between many standing and sitting participants. Ideally, there should be **only one sheet per clipboard**, because multiple sheets on a single clipboard decrease the potential for many people to dot simultaneously, and may also cause ideas at the bottom of a collection of sheets to be dotted less often.

Letter size pieces of **cardboard with an elastic band** or two around them make for effective and affordable clipboards. The elastic band can also hold a pen to the clipboard when it is passed around.



Small groups drafting ideas, dotting, and writing comments in a workshop



Using cardboard clipboards at an outdoor community meeting

Passing clipboards works well within an audience seated in rows. Instruct participants to continually pass sheets in one direction along their row, and alternate directions for each row, making a zigzag flow towards the front. Co-facilitators may need to run sheets from the front to the back rows to continue the dotting.

If participants are sitting in many small groups, assign a number to each group and ask participants to pass sheets to the next group, in numbered order.

One challenge with passing clipboards is that they often pile up in front of individuals who are slower at dotting, or who are distracted. When this happens, ask for participants to allow clipboards to skip over anyone who is busy and remind everyone that no one is expected to dot every sheet.

Make sure that all sheets make their way to the front and that no sheets are lost in the shuffle.

Try to ensure that participants are seated in such a way that participants in each group or row are relatively diverse in the perspectives they bring to the topic, otherwise, there may be a systematic bias in the results based on which sheets were dotted by which rows or groups.

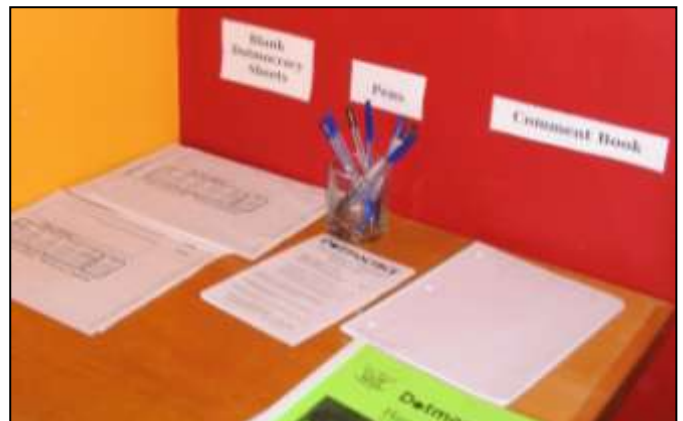
Dotmocracy Walls

Setting up and using a designated Dotmocracy wall is quick and easy:

1. Select a long wall with a smooth surface that masking tape can be used on.
2. If possible, remove any distracting posters, hangings, or signs. Move obstacles such as chairs, tables, or cabinets away from the wall.
3. Post a sign reading "Dotmocracy" on the wall, along with the required instructions, preamble, and session details all printed large (see *Required Posted Information on page 14*).
4. Post Dotmocracy sheets on the wall in a line at about shoulder height.
5. Invite participants to follow the step-by-step idea drafting and dotting process.

Tips

- Window walls can work well, but you need to make sure the Dotmocracy sheet is blank on the other side, as light coming through the window may make it difficult to read the sheet.
- The longer the wall or combination of walls, the easier it is to manage dotting among a large number of participants.
- Containers with pens should be stationed on or near the wall. Store the pens tip down to avoid drying out.
- Markers or heavy ink flow pens may soak through a sheet and leave marks on a wall, so test your pens first. Pencils can work too, preferably those without erasers that could allow someone to alter results.
- Aim to have all of the sheets in a single horizontal line. If possible, avoid placing sheets vertically above or below each other, as this may cause participants to crowd, making it more uncomfortable for people to efficiently read and write on the sheets.
- After removing a sheet from the wall, it may be easier to fold the tape over rather than to rip it off.



A Dotmocracy wall and materials table setup in a café

Dotmocracy walls require minimal materials to prepare, use little space, and can be effective at drawing a crowd to participate in or outside of a meeting.

One challenge with posting sheets directly on a wall is that most pens tend to run dry when used continuously to write on a vertical surface, requiring participants to frequently shake their pens to keep the ink flowing. Additionally, walls may be too rough to write on. I created the 'clipboards on a wall' approach to solve these two challenges.

Clipboards on a Wall

In my experience, this approach is very reliable, flexible, and efficient, although it requires considerable preparation. Here are the basic steps to set-up a Dotmocracy wall using clipboards:

1. Select a long wall or fence to which you can attach a string or wire (e.g., with masking tape), or that has a long ledge between waist and shoulder height.
2. Prepare enough cardboard clipboards to fill the length of the wall, plus a few extra. If using string or wire, attach paper clips to the clip board to act as hooks.
3. Attach one sheet per clipboard and hang them on the string or wire, or place them on the ledge, for dotting.

With this set-up, Dotmocracy sheets can easily be moved around and changed as dotting progresses. This set-up is very accessible because it can be comfortably used by people at various heights, and the clipboards can also be easily removed from the wall for use by participants in wheelchairs or those who need to sit. This arrangement also allows pens to be held in the normal upright position so the ink can flow readily—which, as described earlier, can be an issue when trying to continually write on a vertical surface.



Cardboard clipboards hung from paper clip hooks on a wire



Cardboard clipboards sitting on a ledge with pens in a paper cup nearby



Cardboard clipboards hanging on a wire serve as a reliable Dotmocracy wall in a park in Caracas, Venezuela, 2006



At the 2009 Canadian Conference for Dialogue and Deliberation, a participant temporarily removes a cardboard clipboard from a Dotmocracy wall to fill in a dot and write a comment

What approach has worked best for your group? Email: jason@dotmocracy.org

Approaches to Dotmocracy In & Outside of Meetings

Dotmocracy is best facilitated within large meetings. Meetings provide the best opportunity for collective learning, critical and insightful conversations, and highly productive dotting. Alternatively, a Dotmocracy process can be conducted without having a meeting, by setting up a Dotmocracy wall in an accessible location and advertising its purpose. I explain both approaches below.

In a Meeting

In this approach, an entire meeting—or portion of a meeting—is dedicated to a focused Dotmocracy session, i.e., the process of writing ideas and dotting is given significant time within the meeting agenda.

Advantages

- ✓ Who will be participating can be planned and accounted for.
- ✓ The preamble can be presented live with engaging media and/or talks by key individuals, potentially including a question and answer period with participants.
- ✓ Participants have an opportunity to discuss and formulate ideas in small groups.
- ✓ The dedicated time in a meeting allows participants to concentrate on the tasks of brainstorming, discussing, drafting ideas, and dotting.
- ✓ A large team momentum can quickly produce a high number of results.
- ✓ Participants can meet and get to know each other, which helps build camaraderie.
- ✓ Results can be announced and celebrated with all of the participants together, creating a sense of team accomplishment.



Experienced participants fill in hanging clipboards within a full day meeting



Breakout groups discussing and dotting ideas at a large workshop; co-facilitators help participants use the Dotmocracy sheets

Disadvantages

- ✗ Requires a large venue and large meeting logistics, e.g., chairs, snacks and drinks, materials for everyone to use at the same time, audio/video systems.
- ✗ Those who cannot attend the meeting may be left out of the process.

Examples

- A residence group has a special general meeting to find solutions to local issues.
- An organization has a bi-annual goal-setting staff meeting to give direction to management.
- A large steering committee discusses and prioritizes objectives for the coming year.

Suggestions

- Have co-facilitators (e.g., host organization staff) gather and post Dotmocracy sheets on the wall, while participants continue small group discussions.
- Help the production of many ideas by encouraging a bit of competition between the small groups.
- Remind participants in small groups that they do not need to reach consensus on an idea in order to post it. Anyone can also write down an idea on their own.
- Make sure to provide enough time for dotting of the sheets. A basic rule of thumb is about one minute per dot per participant. Aim for at least 15 dots or more per sheet.

For a Dotmocracy process to be most productive, there must be allotted time within the meeting for people to focus solely on the act of writing ideas and dotting. Do not rely on breaks or expect participants to dot sheets during other parts of the meeting agenda.



Youth and seniors use Dotmocracy at a general member meeting to propose a new slogan for their co-operative



Celebrating 38 agreements found at a community meeting in Marhuanta, Ciudad Bolivar, Venezuela, 2007

Outside of a Meeting

In this model, a Dotmocracy wall is in progress for many hours, days, or even without a planned end. Depending on the intended participants, the Dotmocracy wall may be in an organization's common space, such as foyer, lunch room, or hallway, or in a public space, such as a public building, square, or park. There may need to be facilitators present to manage the materials and encourage participation, although for experienced participants, the process may be mostly self-managed.

Advantages

- ✓ Provides maximum opportunity for people who have competing schedules to participate.
- ✓ Ideal for gathering input at a large event and/or in a public space.
- ✓ Takes only a few minutes for people to participate at their own leisure.
- ✓ Useful for gathering input and making group decisions without having a meeting.

Disadvantages

- ✗ Can take many more hours, days, or even weeks to equal the level of participation accomplished in one focused Dotmocracy meeting.
- ✗ Participants generally do not get much opportunity to discuss ideas directly with each other.
- ✗ Participants are less mentally focused on the topic and less likely to carefully consider complex issues.

Examples

- A 'suggestions' board in a staff lunch room.
- A Dotmocracy wall in the foyer of a college for gathering input from students and staff on potential institutional changes.
- A 'feedback' station at a trade show or conference.



Facilitator Jason Diceman prepares and helps parents use a Dotmocracy wall in a school

Suggestions

- Dotmocracy outside of a meeting is **most appropriate for topics that do not require much critical thought, discussion, or education on the subject.**
- Promote the process in an organization's newsletter or other popular media among the participants, so they are aware of the process before they first see the Dotmocracy wall.
- Position the Dotmocracy wall in a highly visible and common area, such as near an entrance, in a break area, or along a main corridor.
- Post large attractive signage and clear instructions on the Dotmocracy wall.
- Have pens clearly available near the sheets, tips down so they do not dry out.
- Post a mailing list sign-up form for participants to request copies of the results upon completion.
- Be proactive in encouraging people to participate. Ask them for a moment of their time. Hand them a pen. Walk them through the process. Answer questions.

I encourage facilitators to combine in and out of meeting approaches to maximize participation. If you are not getting the level of participation you expected, investigate why. Sometimes simple changes to placement, signage, or the provision of materials can make all the difference.



A retail cooperative using (early version) Dotmocracy sheets on a wall by the cashier to capture opinions from members as they shop

Need Help?

Do you have questions about planning a Dotmocracy wall, or do you need support in facilitating a Dotmocracy meeting? Contact:

Jason Diceman jason@dotmocracy.org
416-538-2667 Toll-free 1-866-519-2667

Factors That Can Improve a Dotmocracy Process

Here are some of the key variables that can help your group produce useful results from a Dotmocracy session. Aim to maximize each of these factors.

1. Trust in the facilitator(s), hosting organization, and fellow participants.
2. Variety and quantity of well-thought-out ideas, each clearly written on their own Dotmocracy sheet.
3. Number of participants and diversity of perspectives they bring.
4. Quality of information and degree of understanding among participants concerning the issue at hand.
5. Degree participants have a stake in the outcome, i.e., could it make a difference in their lives.
6. Cohesive spirit of co-operation and common aims within the group.
7. Willingness to use the Dotmocracy process.
8. Time for in depth deliberation, reflection, and reformulation of ideas.
9. Opportunity for participants to recognize and discuss patterns in the results.
10. Repetition of the learning–discussing–drafting–dotting process. Each repetition reflects on previous results and learns from new investigations.
11. Duplication of similar and related questions over time and within different contexts. Recognize the similarity and differences among results from different sessions.
12. Trusted, knowledgeable, and experienced people interpreting results and making the final decisions.

Each of these factors is rather subjective, but as you become more experienced at Dotmocracy facilitation, it will become apparent which factors need more attention, depending on the situation.

Session Facilitation Tips

General Planning & Logistics Preparation

Here are some basic points of advice for helping you plan the practical elements of a Dotmocracy session.

- **First, meet with representatives of the hosting organization** who can give you necessary information and will need to approve the session plan.
- Understand the history and context, and clarify the goals and outcomes to be achieved by the session.
- Refine a plan to ensure the “right” people will be taking part to make an intelligent decision, ideally those with the authority to make it happen.

Special care needs to be taken in choosing the participant invitation and selection method. Leaving out key individuals or groups could undermine the results.

- If the participants will only be a sample of the larger whole, consider important representative criteria. For example, when working with an organization, you may want to include people from each department and various levels of management. For a public meeting, you may want to consider demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and geography.
- If there are clearly different stakeholder groups to be invited, consider the option of using **different pen colours for each stakeholder type**. This allows you to recognize whether patterns of disagreement are related to stakeholder groups, and also to confirm that ideas have been dotted by all stakeholder types.



A large professional meeting that required extensive planning, teamwork, and a considerable budget



A registration table with nametags, sign-in sheets, and information handouts

- Confirm that the organization's leadership are supportive of the process and will use the results of the Dotmocracy session.
- Avoid planning to use Dotmocracy during a meeting that already has an established traditional format (e.g., an annual general meeting), unless you are assured the participants will be open to a new approach.
- **Investigate the session venue ahead of time** to plan the set-up and logistics, e.g., potential locations for the Dotmocracy wall, seating options, what A/V systems are on site.

Delegate basic logistics (e.g., registration, snacks, technology) to others so that you can focus on the substance of the session.

- Double check that you have all of your materials before departing for the venue.
- Have a back-up plan for things that could go wrong.
- **Arrive at least 1 ½ to 2 hours before the start.** Prepare and set up everything with 20 minutes to spare. This will help you and your hosts to be relaxed as the first participants arrive.
- Train volunteers from the hosting organization to act as **co-facilitators that will assist you**, e.g., in distributing materials, promoting quality discussions, posting Dotmocracy sheets on the wall and collecting sheets.

If you are new to managing large meetings, you may want to work with an experienced facilitator and/or attend training before facilitating your first big session.



If a regular meeting already has an established format (such as this circle plenary), you should introduce and formally request permission to use the Dotmocracy technique well before attempting to apply it

Photo: flickr.com/photos/all2gethernow/

Educating Participants on the Topic

Work with the hosting organization to ensure participants know the most essential information required to prepare for discussing and drafting ideas.

- Education can be provided through presentations, videos, and/or print materials—ideally read well before the session.
- Have key stakeholders help to author, or at a minimum, review the education materials before finalizing them.
- Include important facts, research, references, budgets, history, examples, personal stories, etc.
- Use diagrams, photos, and illustrations to **make information visual and compelling**.
- When giving perspectives, examples, and scenarios, provide a variety to avoid bias towards a single view. Use some extreme and innovative examples to encourage creative thinking.

Conducting a Dotmocracy process when participants are not well-informed on the topic could lead to flawed decisions, cynicism about the process, and poor reputations for the facilitator and host.

- **Keep content simple and written in concise, plain language.** If at all possible, have the content reviewed by laypersons to test and confirm how clearly the information is presented.
- If prudent, include **criteria for a solution**, but avoid defining unnecessary restrictions.
- **Have experts and detailed resource materials on hand** during the session to answer questions and provide necessary insight.

Dotmocracy can only recognize sensible agreements if the people participating understand enough about the topic at hand to make sensible suggestions.



A map of the streets, related to the session question, is posted in large format on the wall



An informative presentation is made at the beginning of the meeting

Authoring a Useful Preamble and Good Questions

The preamble is a refined set of statements that formally introduces participants to the topic. The preamble should be written, posted, and read out loud. The preamble and questions used in a Dotmocracy process direct participants on what kind of ideas they should write down, and how they should judge those ideas. Carefully considered wording of the preamble can help to ensure useful outcomes from the session.

- **Involve stakeholders and likely participants in the authoring of the preamble and questions.** At a very minimum, have a sample of stakeholders review and give feedback before finalizing the text.
- Brainstorm the key points that need to be included in the preamble, and then combine and refine them down to just a few essential sentences.
- **Define how the results will be used, and by whom.**
- Consider including information such as: key background facts, details about the current situation, future goals, related opportunities and limitations, and other important contextual considerations.
- Be sure to mention some of the important factors beyond the Dotmocracy results that will impact the final decisions, such as legal, technical, and resource-based limitations and opportunities.
- Brainstorm a large number of possible questions; shortlist questions to those few that you and the stakeholders believe will most likely draw out the kinds of responses needed to make the session most productive.
- It is often useful **to have more than one question**—such as two or three closely related questions—presented together, or multiple distinct questions presented separately. Separate questions may be presented at the same time or in sequence, e.g., once question number one has been answered, start question number two.



A participant reviews the posted question, instructions, and preamble before dotting her first sheet



Representatives of a host organization and other stakeholders brainstorm ideas for conference planning

- **Number multiple posted questions for easy reference.**
- When preparing the preamble text and questions, you may also want to prepare the text for the other required posted information (see *page 16*) within the same document.
- **Include in the preamble an explanation of what will be done with the Dotmocracy results**, e.g., where copies of the results will be published, who will be reviewing the completed sheets, what kind of weight will be given to recognized agreements, and what next steps may grow from the outcomes.

Keep the wording clear, concise, and use plain language.

- **Use very large lettering when printing out the preamble and questions for posting on the wall.** For example, the preamble text font could be 72 points (2.5 cm or 1 inch tall) and the question text font could be 216 points (7.5 cm or 3 inches tall).
- If the Dotmocracy wall is very long, you should post repeat copies of the preamble and questions every 5 meters (16 feet) or so.
- Once the session is in progress, if you find many people are confused or their ideas are not on target, you may need to quickly consult the hosting organization representatives and alter or present new questions, and/or a revised preamble. This can be done through announcements and hand-written signage, which is why I recommend bringing blank chart paper and markers.

Keep in mind that although you may tell participants to address a specific question, they may also write ideas that are off topic, but are important to them. These kinds of ideas should not be discouraged or censored, as they may help address underlying issues or hidden challenges. You may want to group such ideas under an “other” label.



Facilitator Jason Diceman repeats key points from the preamble before inviting participants to start dotting the ideas they have generated



The question “How should we improve our community?” is posted on a cardboard sign during a rural community meeting in Cumaná, Venezuela

Supporting the Writing of Good Ideas

During a focused meeting session, considerable time should be allocated to small group discussion and writing down ideas on Dotmocracy sheets. As a facilitator, you can promote quality contributions in many ways.

- Before the meeting ask some informed participants and/or members of the hosting organization to **author a few ideas to seed the process**.
- Make sure participants understand the question(s) and are informed on the topic. **Provide opportunities for participants to ask questions of clarification.** Have experts available to answer questions.
- **Provide scrap paper** for drafting ideas before writing them on a Dotmocracy sheet.
- In small groups, invite participants to quickly **brainstorm, i.e., write down a list of ideas without stopping to discuss and consider any of them.** Once they have a good list they can discuss, refine, and then record their favourite ideas on Dotmocracy sheets.

Have co-facilitators help small groups stay on topic and encourage equal participation, while remaining neutral on the topic.

- Encourage small groups to seek consensus on proposal texts, and to also **invite alternative and independent proposals**.
- Remind participants of the specific questions to be answered and key points from the preamble.
- Stress the need for a wide range of ideas. Push participants to go beyond conventional thinking. Use radical examples to demonstrate how far an idea can be taken.



Students brainstorm ideas in small groups at the two-day 2006 Ontario Council for International Cooperation Youth Symposium



Discussing the wording of an idea in a community workshop, Bolivar City, Venezuela

- Encourage building on ideas and seeking ideal solutions for all stakeholders.
- Suggest that groups do not get bogged down on one idea; encourage them to write down each idea and move on. At this stage, the goal is not to produce one perfect proposal, but rather a variety of good ideas.
- Watch the clock and **frequently remind participants of how much time they have left** in total, and how soon they should start dotting.
- If time permits, **have small groups break up and form new groups** one or more times during the discussion phase. This will allow participants to hear more perspectives and experience different group dynamics.
- If you find that many people are talking and writing similar ideas, announce some repeated ideas and challenge participants to suggest alternatives.
- If you notice participants are discussing ideas but not writing them down, remind them to write each idea on its own Dotmocracy sheet. Ask “Who is writing down ideas in this group?”
- If there are multiple questions being asked, request that participants **write the question number at the top left of the ideas box** on each Dotmocracy sheet.
- **Do not stifle debate** or the expression of critical perspectives within small group discussions. Explain that disagreements do not need to be resolved right away. Invite disagreeing groups to **write out the different ideas that capture their differing views**, and to also **write ideas that express some common ground**, and additionally, to **seek alternative “third-way” ideas** that are acceptable to all.

If you feel that the ‘best ideas’ have yet to be written, you may need to seek additional time, use a more inspired approach, and/or plan an additional session.

The image shows a Dotmocracy sheet with handwritten text. At the top, it says "Focus on saving water" and "Replace out-of-date council laws for people there to adopt pre-existing legislation". Below this is a section titled "Do you agree?" with a scale from "Strong Agreement" (smiley face) to "Strong Disagreement" (frowny face), including "Agreement", "Neutral", "Disagreement", and "Confusion". The sheet is divided into two columns: "Strengths & Opportunities" and "Concerns & Weaknesses". The "Strengths & Opportunities" column has handwritten notes: "Good idea", "SHUT", "GET PROPOSITIVE CHALLENGES TO AVOID CONFLICTUAL PROPOSALS", and "Work up with committee before any final policy report (30)". The "Concerns & Weaknesses" column has handwritten notes: "All water users important?", "Explain and give alternatives?", "How to be able to plan to be able to do", and "Explain, Explain to".

This clearly written idea was well supported by almost every participant that read it

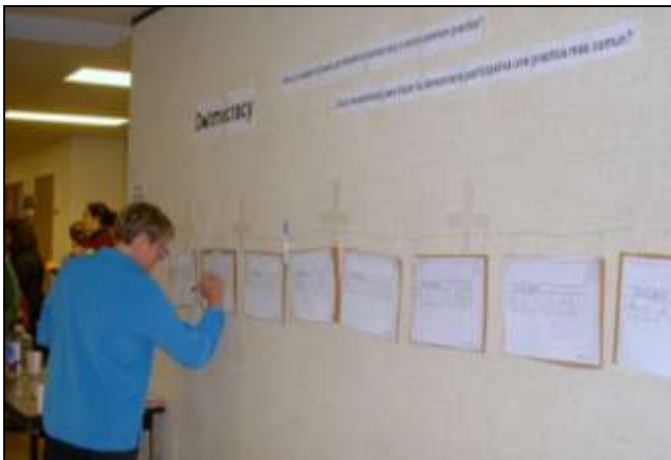


Breakout groups that are engaged in a passionate discussion may need to be reminded to also write ideas down on the Dotmocracy sheets

Helping the Dotting Process

Once dotting starts, it is your responsibility as a facilitator to make sure that participants follow the rules, to manage time efficiently, and to promote a relatively equal distribution of dotting across ideas.

- Select a location for the Dotmocracy wall that will be easily accessible to all intended participants. For an out-of-meeting process, ensure that participants know where the wall is and are requested to use it.
- Make the wall as visible as possible and **reduce all barriers, obstructions, and distractions surrounding the wall.**
- **Hand people pens and invite them to record their opinions.** Let them know that if they read an idea, they should dot and sign it too.
- Randomness and some chaos in how people go through the sheets is a good thing as it helps to deter systematic bias. **Try to avoid letting participants dot the sheets all in the same order.**
- Arrange the sheets so that ideas that answer the same question are posted together.
- In a focused meeting, the transition from small group discussions to writing and then dotting can be fluid, with some participants continuing discussions while others are dotting. As dotting progresses, keep an eye on the time. Encourage more people to start dotting when appropriate in order to **ensure all sheets get a good number of dots** before the end of the session.
- If the total number of participants is less than 15, you should plan to have all participants dot all sheets. With larger groups, each sheet should receive a minimum of 15-20 dots, with the maximum being 40.
- Ask participants to distribute themselves evenly along the wall, i.e., not to bunch up around only a few sheets.



A lack of participation caused the results of this Dotmocracy wall to be incomplete



Many engaged out-of-meeting participants produced useful insights for the hosting organization

- If space permits, post sheets in a single horizontal line, with gaps between sheets. This will reduce the chance of people becoming crowded while dotting.
- Remind people to take their dotting seriously as a representation of their true opinion and to not just ‘follow the crowd.’ They should not hesitate to dot differently than others.
- Remind participants to dot “confusion” for ideas that they find unclear.

Encourage new ideas to be written based on emerging patterns and important comments.

- Invite participants to write new ideas sheets to clarify confusing statements.
- **Bring attention to newly posted ideas and sheets that lack much dotting.** You can use coloured sticky notes to invite more dotting to such sheets, or move them to a spot on the wall that seems to have more participation.
- Refinements and combinations of ideas should be posted as soon as possible.
- If an idea includes many elements and receives mixed dotting results, suggest that each element be given its own Dotmocracy sheet, so that you can recognize which elements are the most supported.
- During dotting, no one should be “selling” one idea over another. Let each idea statement silently represent itself.
- Watch for sheets that may have fallen off the wall, or off their clipboards.
- If someone is not comfortable or not able to write on a sheet, an assigned co-facilitator can complete sheets for them.
- When you find posted ideas that do not seem to correspond with any specific question, either leave them or move them to a designated space on the wall for “other” ideas. Do not remove statements from dotting just because they may seem too off topic—otherwise, people might feel censored and restricted and less likely to support the process as being inclusive.



A Dotmocracy wall within the corridors of the University of Toronto



Smiles at a Dotmocracy wall in Caracas, Venezuela

- If there are more participants than sheets, creating duplicates of some ideas (especially those that look promising) can help confirm results.
- If a sheet includes inappropriate comments, but the idea is good, you may want to cover up the offending comment using tape or marker. Otherwise you may need to post a new version of the idea on a blank Dotmocracy sheet.
- When there are more sheets posted than the number of participants, **you can save time by removing duplicate and confusing ideas**, along with any sheets that have been sufficiently dotted.
- Always announce and document your reasoning for removing a sheet so that participants know you are not unfairly censoring contributions. For example, when you remove sheets from the wall before they have been sufficiently dotted, state and **use a sticky note to write your reasoning**, e.g., “inappropriate” “illegible” “duplicate to sheet #...”

Overall, your goal for facilitating the dotting process is to promote fair and efficient participation, while being transparent and consistent in your use of judgement when manipulating posted sheets.

Organizing the Completed Sheets

There are many possible approaches for sorting and organizing dotted sheets during and at the end of a Dotmocracy session. One key suggestion is to make sure each sheet has its own unique identification number for referencing. These other techniques will help you to recognize useful patterns in the ideas proposed, and levels of agreement.

- As sheets are posted on the wall, **write a unique number in sequence on each sheet**, in the number space at the bottom left.
- If there are multiple questions being addressed, you may want to use a numbering system that refers to the numbered questions, e.g., sheet #2-15 is the fifteenth idea to answer question #2.



Participants discuss the wording of a posted idea



Students crowd around Dotmocracy sheets posted above each other

- If co-facilitators are helping you number sheets, assign each co-facilitator their own range (e.g., 100-200) so that there are no repeat sheet numbers.
- Ideally, all sheets are numbered in the approximate sequence of being posted, with no gaps between numbers, however this is not always possible. The most important thing is that each sheet has a unique number that can be referenced, and that gaps between numbers are noted so that others do not assume sheets have gone missing.
- To quickly find the most popular ideas among a large number, work with co-facilitators and participants to collect all those ideas that have, for example, less than 25 percent disagreement, and then **arrange them in a line prioritized towards the strongest agreement, with minimal disagreement**. Remember: it is not the number of dots that matters most, but rather the pattern of agreement.

Use clearly labelled piles or folders to help sort sheets by question and/or level of agreement.

- To find themes in the ideas, place all the sheets on a clean open space where all the sheets can be read. Then work with a team to **arrange sheets into groups of related or similar ideas**. Once groupings become clear, write out theme labels for each group using sticky notes or scrap paper.
- To archive and/or copy the sheets, sort them by sheet number and make photocopies and/or scan them into digital files. Most modern scanners have a paper feed option that can make it easy to turn a stack of sheets into a single PDF file. Unless coloured pens were used with some significance (e.g., colours represent stakeholder types), greyscale (black and white) is usually fine and makes for a smaller file size. A scanning setting of 200 DPI works well.
- Recognize joke ideas by marking them with a “Ha ha” or funny face sticky-note to differentiate serious contributions.



Quickly sorting completed sheets on a table using prepared large labels



Reviewing and sorting completed sheets on clipboards on chairs

Prioritizing sheets by level of agreement can be done very quickly, and thus it is reasonable to plan to read out, for example, the top 10 ideas at the end of a meeting. Such superficial announcements should not be confused with detailed analysis and reporting, which may require several hours, or even days, to prepare.

Reporting on the Results

After a Dotmocracy session, all the sheets that were posted should be made available to all participants and stakeholders. Additionally, you may be required to work with members of the hosting organization and other stakeholder representatives to review the sheets and report a summary of the results.

- Have a named **results committee manage or oversee the development of a results report**. Ensure the committee includes trusted individuals from involved stakeholder groups.
- **All results should be available to view in full by the participants and stakeholders**. Copies of the completed sheets could be provided in a binder kept in an accessible location, and/or posted as scanned images on a website.
- A concise executive summary report of the results should also be prepared.
- Look for those ideas that have the **most united strong agreement with minimal disagreement**. These will be the key ideas that should be referenced in the results summary, and when making a plan that defines the next steps.
- Mixed, neutral, and disagreement results do not need to be explicitly addressed in the results summary, unless they relate to ideas that were previously discussed at a high level—for example, in the media, in the preamble, or by hosting organization representatives.
- A lack of clearly approved ideas may indicate the need for a different question, more information, or further brainstorming and deliberation.
- Note insightful comments, such as concerns that might provide good reason to disagree with a generally agreed-upon idea, or suggestions that should be considered when defining the next steps for putting an idea into action.

Pay attention to comments that may indicate the need for further research.

- If people write angry or hurtful comments, a conflict resolution process may be required to build understanding, trust, respect, and empathy among the participants, most likely as a separate process.
- Roughly **check that there are equal dots to signatures on each sheet**. It is not uncommon for participants to forget to sign, especially if this is their first time using Dotmocracy. It is your judgement call as to whether there are more dots than signatures because of fraudulent dotting, or forgetful participants.

- When there are multiple similar or related ideas, but with differing levels of agreement, try to recognize the differences that trigger the varied reactions.

The accurate and objective reporting of results, both in full and in summary, gives transparency to the process and accountability to the hosting organization. Deciding what actions to take as an outcome of the Dotmocracy results is a matter of judgement that will demonstrate the wisdom and nature of the hosting organization's leadership.

Concluding with a Clear Plan for Next Steps

As part of the session planning, usually an individual (e.g., executive or politician) or a group of persons (e.g., a committee, board of directors, or council) are defined as the decision-makers that will **decide on the outcomes and impacts of the Dotmocracy session**. Once the session is complete, these decision-makers will review all the results and announce the next steps.

- It is generally good to have a conclusion format in mind, such as the creation of a policy or the stating of goals for a project. That said, **decision-makers should be open to new kinds of conclusions that reflect unexpected results**. For example, participants may suggest the cancellation or redirection of a project, or the need for new work to address an underlying issue.

The final decision for action should be formulated based on the patterns of approval among many ideas, not necessarily the single most popular idea, or the least objected.

- In most cases, **decision-makers will require a few hours or even days to craft a wise plan based on the results**, and thus can not be expected to announce a decision at the end of a session. That said, popular agreements can be read out and decision-makers can announce their initial reactions, sentiments, and general intentions.



Organization leaders read out the most popularly agreed ideas among over 50 statements dotted at the end of a one-hour Dotmocracy session



Dotmocracy results are typed up, scanned and uploaded to an online database for organization members to browse and reference

- Generally, decision-makers should not be expected to move forward with any specific ideas just because they have a high majority of agreement. Rather, **decision-makers should be expected to respond to all those ideas with high agreement** and to announce a plan that takes all these agreements into account. In some cases, popular ideas may not be practical ones.
- An action plan that reflects popular agreements can come in many forms, such as:
 - The drafting of policy or other governance statements (e.g., mission, values, goals, objectives, terms of reference).
 - The assignment of tasks, deliverables, and/or budgets.
 - The crafting of a new publication.
 - Changes to an existing draft plan.
- **Rarely can all popular agreements be included within a plan of action.** Practical limitations usually require some agreements to be excluded. It is important for decision-makers to also report on such unused popular agreements, to recognize their value and hopefully suggest how they may be applied in the future.
- In some cases, **an unpopular idea may be required as part of a practical action plan.** If this occurs, decision-makers will need to clearly explain their reasoning.
- On occasion, the next step may be to host another Dotmocracy session; for example, if:
 - New or additional facts may be needed to inform participants.
 - A different preamble and set of questions needs to be answered.
 - More time and discussion is needed to better refine some promising ideas.
 - A different set of participants will check and confirm surprising results from the previous session.

As part of the session's posted information, participants should be told how the results and next steps will be announced, e.g., on mailing lists, in a newsletters or newspapers, at a meeting, on a website, or on a radio or TV show. Make sure there is follow through on this promise.

Organize a continental exchange between the Canadian ChangeCamp in Toronto and a Brazilian ChangeCamp in São Paulo (where I live and can organize something to happen in March this year)

Do you agree? *Fill your one dot below & sign on the right*

Strong Agreement	Agreement	Neutral	Disagreement	Strong Disagreement	Confusion
5 dots	4 dots	3 dots	2 dots	1 dot	0 dots

Strengths & Opportunities *Optionally add brief comments* **Concerns & Weaknesses**

Handwritten comments and signatures are visible in the bottom section of the form.

This suggestion for a “continental exchange” had clear support from ChangeCamp participants, but it would be up to organizers to decide if such an activity would be feasible



Facilitator and host show popularly ideas that will be reviewed by leaders of the Venezuelan cultural group who hosted the meeting

Evaluating the Quality of a Session

Beyond the actual results and content of a Dotmocracy session, there should be a critical review of how the session was conducted in order to confirm the legitimacy of the results.

Some key points to investigate when evaluating a Dotmocracy session are:

- Who participated, and did they appropriately represent the group being consulted?
- What information was provided to participants? Was the information accurate and unbiased? Did participants understand it?
- Was the preamble and question(s) open ended, or did it suggest a certain opinion?
- How much time was provided for discussion, drafting ideas, and dotting? Was this sufficient, considering the complexity of the issue at hand?
- How many ideas were dotted? Does this number reflect the number of participants and the possible breadth of answers to the question(s)?
- How many sheets had only a few dots (e.g., less than 15 dots in a group of 30 or more participants)?
- Were the Dotmocracy rules and requirements properly followed?
- Were the results fully and accurately published upon completion of the session?
- Were the participants, host, and stakeholders satisfied with the process?

The answers to these kinds of questions may be useful for inclusion in reports to the hosting organization and critical observers of the process. Insights from these answers can also inform the planning of future sessions.



A high quantity of posted ideas is a good sign, but without sufficient dotting, it is not possible to recognize which ideas are the most popularly supported



Participants can joke and have a good time while still contributing seriously to a productive Dotmocracy session

Facilitator Resources



Setting up a Dotmocracy wall is child's play, when you have the right resources

This last chapter contains a blank Dotmocracy sheet for you to photocopy and use in your sessions. It also includes a sample materials list, an example meeting agenda, and an example of posted instructions. Each of these items should help you prepare for your first Dotmocracy session. I hope you find them useful.

Find More Resources at www.Dotmocracy.org

The Dotmocracy website includes different versions of the blank Dotmocracy sheet, including a large 11 x 17 inch version, a children's version, French and Spanish translations, and much more — all free to download, print and copy.

Write one idea here in large letters:

Facilitator:

Do you agree?

Fill your one dot below & sign on the right:



Strong Agreement



Agreement



Neutral



Disagreement



Strong Disagreement



Confusion

Organization:

Strengths & Opportunities

Optionally add brief comments:

Concerns & Weaknesses

Date/time:

#

Dotmocracy Materials List

Below is an example checklist of the materials required for conducting a Dotmocracy session in a meeting of 50 participants, using a Dotmocracy wall with hanging cardboard clipboards. Use this list as an example when preparing your own materials checklist.

- ☐ **60 sets of topic information materials** (handouts for participants, plus 10 extra)
- ☐ **2 or more copies of the question(s)** (printed very large for posting)
- ☐ **2 or more copies of the instructions, preamble, how results will be used, and the host's and facilitator's contact information** (printed large for posting)
- ☐ **75 hanging clipboards** (i.e., letter-size pieces of cardboard with two elastic bands and two paperclips for hooks, 1-2 clipboards per participant)
- ☐ **120 blank Dotmocracy sheets** (2-3 per participant)
- ☐ **30 m (100 feet) of wire or string** (enough to hang all clipboards)
- ☐ **2-3 full rolls of masking tape** (green painter's tape may be preferred)
- ☐ **60 pens** (one for each participant, plus 10 extra)
- ☐ **100 pieces of scrap paper** (two for each participant)
- ☐ **4-5 sheets of chart paper and markers** (for making impromptu signs)
- ☐ **3-5 different coloured sticky note pads** (to notate and help organize results)
- ☐ **10-15 folders** (for collecting and organizing the completed sheets)
- ☐ **20-30 extra paperclips**
- ☐ **20-30 extra elastic bands**
- ☐ **1-2 "Dotmocracy" signs**

You will likely also have non-Dotmocracy meeting requirements such as signage, name tags, tables, chairs, a microphone, speakers, a projector, screen, snacks, etc.



An assortment of materials in preparation for a Dotmocracy session



With all the right materials at hand, facilitation can flow smoothly and participants can easily focus on content

Example Meeting Agenda

Below is an example of a generic agenda for a two-hour deliberative forum that uses Dotmocracy to find group agreements.

Agenda

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks (5 min)
2. Presentation on *[Topic of Meeting]* (20 min)
3. Presentation of Preamble and Questions to be Addressed (5 min)
4. Small Group Discussions and Drafting of Ideas (30 min)
5. Dotting, Discussing and Drafting of More Ideas (40 min)
6. Close Dotting and Sort Results (5 min)
7. Announce and Discuss Preliminary Results (10 min)
8. Next Steps and Closing Remarks (5 min)

As you can see, the majority of the time is given to the process of discussing and writing ideas, dotting, reviewing, and writing more ideas to be dotted.

At the end of a two-hour meeting there will likely be some obvious preliminary results, such as the recognition of ideas with the strongest agreement. **It will require many more hours by a small dedicated team to produce a complete report of the meeting's outcomes, including analysis and summary of all the dot patterns and written comments.** Decision-makers should only be expected to announce a plan once they have had a chance to review and discuss the session report and confirm what is practical for the group.



Participants of a community meeting review the Dotmocracy results together



City staff announces the most popular ideas in the last 10 minutes of a public meeting

Example of Posted Instructions

The following simple instructions could be posted on a Dotmocracy wall next to the preamble, questions, and other required information about the session (see page 16).

Dotmocracy Instructions

1. Read the statement on a Dotmocracy sheet below:
 - Fill in one dot to record your opinion
 - Sign the sheetOptional—add a comment.
2. You may dot as many or as few sheets as you please.
3. If you have new suggestions, clearly write each idea on its own Dotmocracy sheet and post it on the wall for dotting.

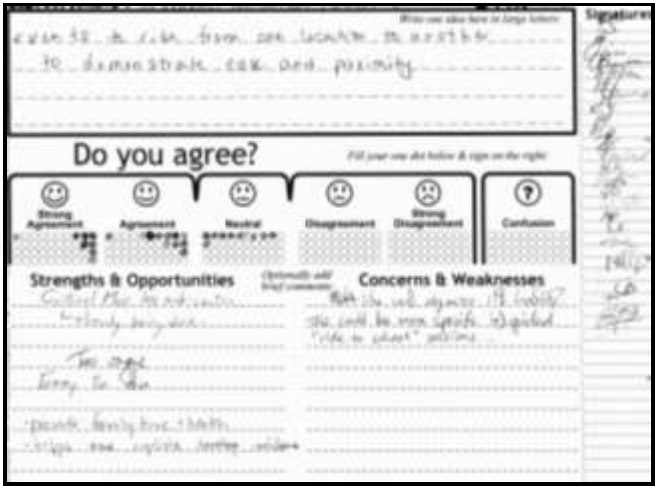

While further instructional details could be given, I have found that these short points are often enough to get people fully participating. Too much text may turn people off from taking part, especially in an outside of meeting situation. Of course, the question(s) being addressed should be the most prominent text posted on the wall, larger than these instructions.

If the Dotmocracy wall is very long, you should post repeat copies of the instructions and other information approximately every 5 meters (16 feet).

Appendix 1 — A Comparison of Dotmocracy vs. Multi-voting

Multi-voting, also known as “dot-voting,” “dot democracy” or “sticker voting,” essentially asks participants to place stickers or marks next to preferred ideas. Participants are often given a limited number of stickers to be applied as they choose. Sometimes sticker colours signify stakeholder types or strength of preference.

The Dotmocracy process and sheets defined in this handbook improve on the traditional multi-voting process in several key ways. Here is a comparison chart:

<h2>Dotmocracy</h2>  <p><i>Uses Dotmocracy sheets</i></p>	<h2>Multi-voting</h2>  <p><i>Uses dot stickers</i></p>
<p>Participants can read and dot as many or as few ideas as they please. There is no practical limit to the number of ideas posted.</p>	<p>Participants need to review all the ideas before dotting their favourites. The more ideas presented, the more impractical it is for any person to sensibly read and compare them all.</p>
<p>Participants can add new ideas at any time.</p>	<p>All ideas have to be presented at the same time.</p>
<p>The agreement scale makes clear the levels of agreement, disagreement, and confusion for each idea, relative or independent of any other.</p>	<p>Dots only give results relative to other ideas. Does not recognize levels of disagreement or confusion.</p>
<p>Similar, related, and hybrid ideas can each be dotted independently, which allows for the discovery of important, subtle differences.</p>	<p>Similar ideas can cause vote-splitting, so facilitators are forced to amalgamate variations of an idea, i.e., ideas are generalized and differences are lost.</p>

Dotmocracy



One signature per dot

Signatures validate that each dot represents one person's opinion. Pens are used so that dots cannot be altered.

One dot per person on each sheet means you can always recognize how many people have expressed agreement.

Documented rules and requirements promote consistency and reliability of results.

Each sheet includes space for recording comments.

Materials required: Dotmocracy sheets, pens, and a writing surface (typically a wall and/or clipboards).

Multi-voting



No signatures

It is impossible to recognize fraudulent dotting, e.g., adding extra stickers or moving stickers.

Allowing multiple dots per person makes it impossible to tell the difference, for example, between five dots from one person, or five people who put one dot each.

Each facilitator tends to apply her or his own set of rules, depending on the situation.

Typically, comments are not recorded on each idea.

Materials required: Markers, paper, stickers, tape and a writing surface (typically a wall or tables).

Looking for a Facilitator?

As simple as Dotmocracy is, having an experienced facilitator can make a session go all the more smoothly. Let an experienced professional take the lead in planning and managing a Dotmocracy process that will achieve your organization's objectives.

Find a professional facilitator in your city at

www.dotmocracy.org/facilitators

Visit the Dotmocracy website to download the latest version of this handbook, access other free resources, post comments and questions, share your facilitation experiences, and most importantly, **join our mailing list!**

www.dotmocracy.org

Need Training or Support?

If you are looking for professional training in conducting Dotmocracy facilitation, or if you just have a few questions about how to best plan your next Dotmocracy session, please contact:

Jason Diceman
jason@dotmocracy.org
416-538-2667 Toll-free 1-866-519-2667

I look forward to hearing from you!

