

BRAIN TRUST OVERVIEW

Brain Trusts are an informal opportunity for an Echoing Green Fellow to receive 90 minutes of advice and support on a specific challenge from a trusted group of Advisors.

Our goals for this session are that:

- the Subject of the Brain Trust benefit from articulating and thinking through a difficult problem;
- the Subject receive some specific, actionable advice or ideas to help them move forward;
- the Subject *and* Advisors build deeper relationships for ongoing mutual support (although not a requirement);
- all Fellows benefit from the learning that happens in every session.

Where possible, we will do our best to match Fellows with people who have either subject matter, technical or geographic area expertise, but most Brain Trusts Advisors are smart generalists who may or may not have experience in the Fellows' specific issue area.

Example challenges are as follows:

"We are establishing a revolving agricultural loan fund for community groups of people living with HIV/AIDS, with a patient repayment deadline and low interest rate; how can we best present this fund to donors with finance backgrounds, which is a new audience for us?"

"Our headquarters are in San Francisco, and we have a small full-time team in Nairobi, Kenya. Both teams are geographically located where they are most effective, yet it's hard managing both teams across such a distance. How do we communicate and collaborate with each other effectively to hit our milestones?"

"Developing and refining an evaluation system that helps us measure our impact."

"How do we continue to be a dynamic organization that produces extremely high quality work and chooses clients based on potential social impact (rather than revenue or org size) as we grow?"

Sample Agenda:

1. Introductions and Overview (10 minutes) – Review General Ground Rules and overview of the agenda; introductions of all participants
2. Situation Update from Subject (5 minutes) – Advisors should already have a basic understanding of the subject and their situation – so the Fellow should provide a brief update and clearly state what they hope to get out of this session.
3. Clarifying Questions (20 minutes) – This is an opportunity for Advisors to ask questions that can better help them understand the situation.
4. Brainstorming (10 minutes) – Ask Advisors to simply list as many solutions as might be possible, without any criticism or even analysis of these ideas. The goal is to generate as many ideas as possible. During these 10 minutes the subject is to remain completely silent.
5. Discussion and Analysis (30 minutes) – Subject decides which of the suggestions seemed most promising. The group then analyzes those selected ideas and suggests strategies to move forward, including possible outcomes for each strategy.
6. Conclusion (10 minutes) – Subject identifies the most useful ideas generated during the session and clarifies any next steps.