

Guidance for leading Problem Solving Circles

Explain that the purpose of the circle is to tap into the collective brain to find as many creative solutions to a problem as possible. The process is strictly timed and does not allow for discussion, so contributions may be cut short by the facilitator if they are straying into conversational territory.

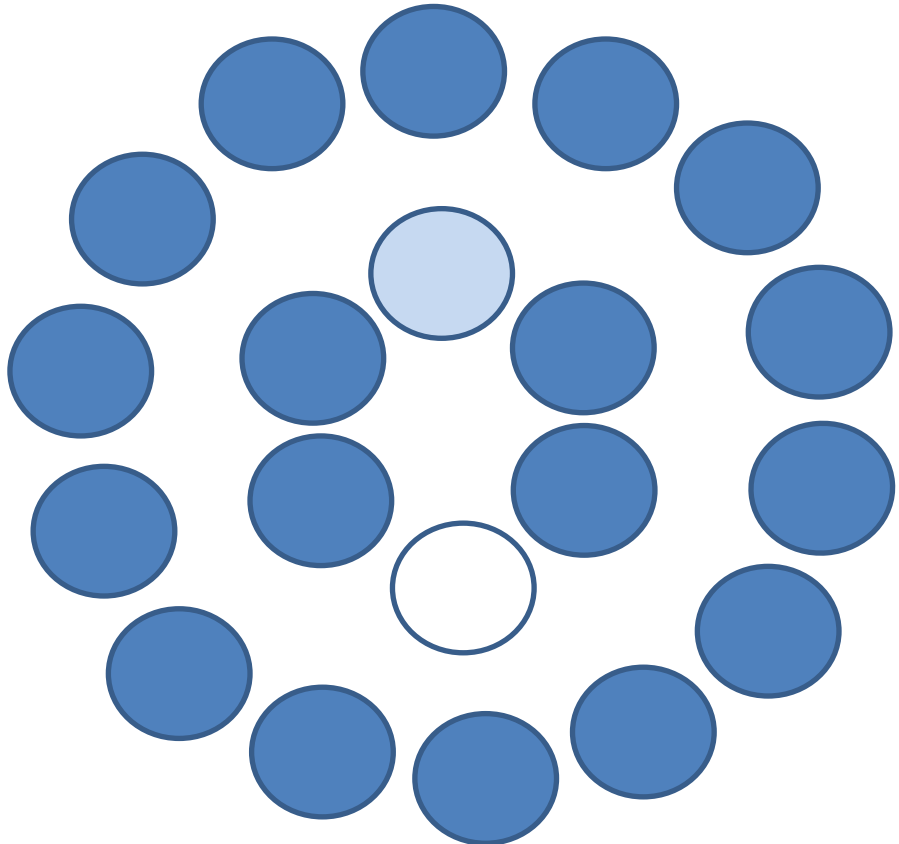
There are 3 clear stages: presentation, clarification and solutions.

- Ask the person with the problem to describe their problem in one or two sentences.
- Position the chairs depending on the size of the group (see diagram below).
- If it is a large group, ask the person with the problem to sit in the specified chair and explain the purpose of the inner circle and the outer circle. Be clear that only the people in the inner circle can ask questions or offer solutions. Anyone from the outer circle can move into the empty seat in the inner circle if they wish to contribute but should leave again to allow someone else to offer their opinion.
- Stage 1: The person with the problem has between 1 and 2 minutes to present the problem in greater detail. There are no other contributions at this point.
- Stage 2: This is the clarifying stage. The group are invited to ask clarifying questions to gain a better understanding of the issue. No solutions should be offered in this stage. (2 to 4 minutes)
- Stage 3: The group are invited to offer short, sharp solutions – no suggestion is too random – in fact the more random the better! The person with the problem writes down each suggestion and should not interrupt the flow of ideas. (2 to 4 minutes but allow longer if necessary).
- Stage 4: The person with the problem will go through the list of suggestions and choose at least 2 that they will action and use in the future. They then share them with the group so that the group can check in with them at a future date to see if they have been actioned.

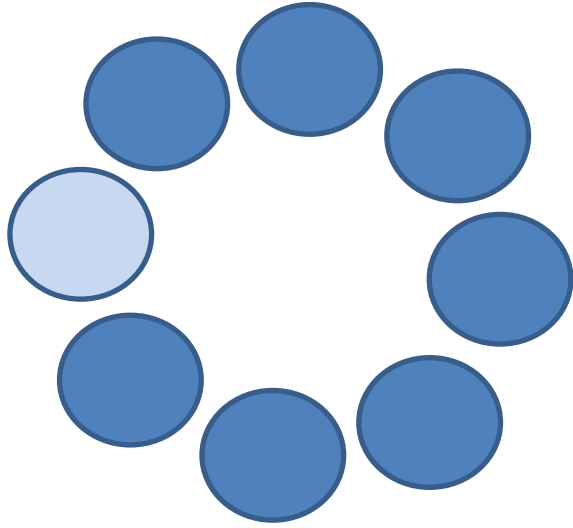
The facilitator needs to manage time keeping and stop people if they start to offer solutions in stage 2 or stop the person with the problem replying in stage 3.

Suggested Seating Plans

Concentric Circles
Large Group
(12+ people)

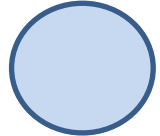


Single Circle
Small Group
(up to 12)



Key:

Person with the issue



Empty Chair

