choosing a project: brainstorming techniques

The Basic Brainstorm

You need: Large pieces of paper or a blackboard, markers, chalk, a record keeper and at least 20 to 30 minutes

The rules: There are no bad ideas; just get them all on paper. Don't pause to discuss the ideas; if you slow down, use the questions below to jump-start your brainstorm. Once you have at least 15 project ideas, stop and review the list.

Starting out: Divide your writing space into 3 areas:

- Care and Concern for the Environment
- Care and Concern for Animals
- Care and Concern for the Human Community

Remind the group that these are the three Roots & Shoots themes. All projects should fall into at least one of these categories.

Also remind the group that projects can be big or small, short or long term. This is just a brainstorm, and the best ideas will be sorted out later for further discussion and development. As you write down the group's ideas, it is helpful to place them in the categories of environment, animals and human community.

Warm up by asking a few open-ended questions. Remember, you are the experts on your local community.
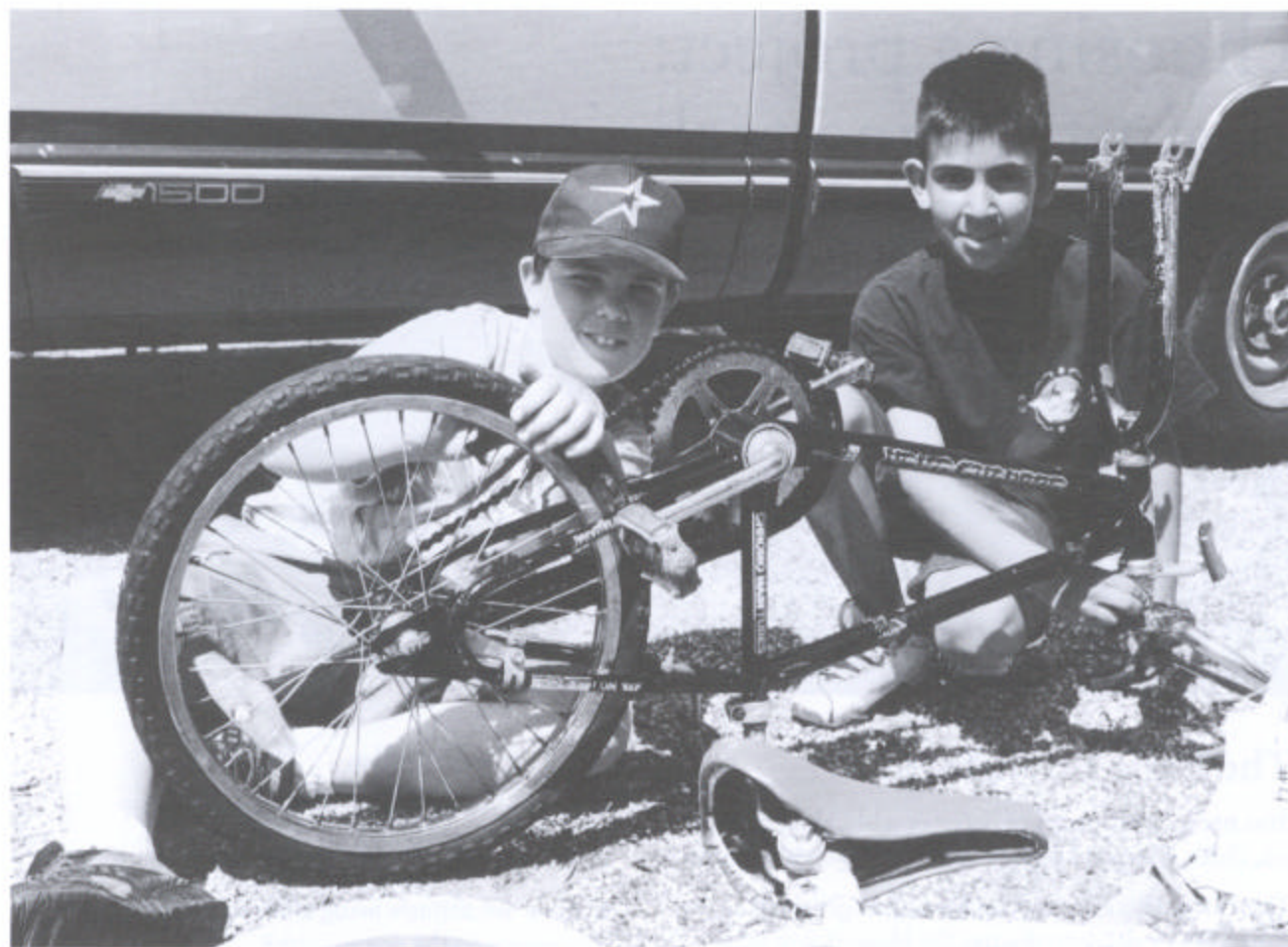
Here are some examples:

- What do you like about the community?
- What would you like to see changed?
- How are animals being affected by the human presence in the community?
- How are plants being affected by your presence?
- How is the environment as a whole affected?
- What are the most important human community issues that affect the way you live and the way you interact with the environment?
- Are there issues that you are personally committed to already?
- Finally, are there things you can do to change any problems that you see?

Once your brainstorm is complete, discuss the different project ideas. If you agree on which projects to do first, that's great. If there are disagreements, you may want to vote on the projects or discuss what resources it will take to accomplish them. Given a choice between a project that doesn't require much funding and one that does, you may want to start with the less costly idea (at least until the group raises some money).

Photograph Above: Four members of the Roots & Shoots Eagles at Buddy Taylor Middle School in Bunnell, Florida helped maintain the school's butterfly garden. The overall goal was to beautify the school location while providing butterfly habitat.

Here are some other creative ways to run a brainstorm session:

Personal brainstorming

Give all group members time to write their ideas in their journal or on a separate piece of paper. The guidelines of the group brainstorm still apply: don't stop to go in depth, there are no bad ideas, write down everything that comes to mind. Once individuals have completed a full page of ideas, come together as a group to discuss and narrow them down.

Popcorn brainstorming

Bring the group together in a circle. Give each group member a small piece of paper. Tell each member to write an important issue facing the community on one side and a solution on the reverse. Ask everyone to crumple up his or her paper and throw it into the middle of the circle. Each group member then takes one crumpled paper (they look like pieces of popcorn) and reads it aloud to the group.

Graffiti brainstorming

Take large sheets of butcher paper or poster board and tape them to the walls of your meeting place. On each piece of paper, put a question at the top, such as "What is one problem you see facing the environment, animals and your human community today?" You can use any of the questions listed above in Brainstorming 101 (a total of four to six different questions or sheets works well). Give each member of the group a marker and ask everyone to move around the room, writing answers to the various questions. After about 20 to 30 minutes, reconvene the group and examine each sheet of paper.

Photograph Above: In 2001, members of San Fernando Roots & Shoots collected used bicycles, repaired them, and then donated them to local children. Four members of the group traveled to New Mexico to donate some of the bikes to a Navajo community.