25/10 Crowdsourcing

Idea In Short

When a group needs a quick set of bold, actionable ideas, use 25/10 Crowdsourcing. Participants write one proposal and its first implementation step, then circulate cards so others can rate each idea independently. After five rounds, the group totals the ratings and surfaces the highest-scoring proposals, while still making space for intriguing long shots. Prepare an open room, index cards, pens, a clear challenge, and at least 15 participants. Demonstrate the card-passing and rating rules before starting. The score is a way to focus attention, not a substitute for discussion, feasibility checks, or a later decision about what to test.

A planning group can spend an hour debating a few proposals without ever discovering what the wider room might suggest. 25/10 Crowdsourcing uses independent idea generation and rapid ratings to surface proposals that resonate across a group. Each participant writes one bold idea and a first step, then cards circulate through the room for five anonymous ratings. The scores help identify ideas for further exploration. The process can bring energy to a conference, task force, or strategy meeting, especially when many people have useful knowledge and a clear question is available. It reflects the Liberating Structures principle “Include and Unleash Everyone.”

Ask for a bold idea and a first move

The invitation asks participants to imagine a bolder response to a shared challenge and name the first action that could get it started. Pairing the aspiration with an initial step helps keep ideas connected to action. “Become the most trusted provider in the sector” is a goal, not yet a proposal; “invite ten customers to test a new support model next month” gives the group something to examine. Participants write briefly on index cards. Spelling and presentation are irrelevant; clarity of the idea matters.

The facilitator should define the challenge in a way that participants can influence. If the

prompt is too broad, cards may contain unrelated ambitions that are hard to compare. If it is too narrow, participants may produce minor variations on a solution already chosen. A focused question gives room for creativity while keeping the ideas relevant to the work.

Use independent ratings

Participants stand and move around the room, trading cards with others without reading them first. At a signal, each person reads the card they hold and rates the idea from one to five. They write the rating on the back without looking at previous scores. The group repeats the circulation and rating process for five rounds. At the end, participants total the ratings on the card they hold. A maximum score of 25 indicates that the idea received five ratings of five.

The independence of each rating matters. If participants see previous scores, those numbers can influence their judgment. The facilitator should demonstrate the exchange, remind people not to peek, and explain how to signal readiness for the next round. Scores may not be perfectly uniform; if a card has fewer or more than five ratings, participants can average them and multiply by five as the official practice guidance suggests. The aim is a fast sorting signal, not a statistically rigorous evaluation.

Surface the strongest proposals

The group counts down from the highest possible score and identifies the top ten ideas. Participants can read them aloud so everyone hears the proposals. The host should avoid treating the list as a final ranking of value. A high score shows that the idea resonated with the people who rated it; it does not prove that the idea is feasible, equitable, or aligned with the organization’s constraints. The group needs a later process to investigate those questions.

The wrap-up asks participants whether they are holding a wild-card idea that did not score highly but remains intriguing, and where promising ideas might take root. This keeps the group from confusing popularity with the full range of possible value. An idea may be unusual, serve a smaller stakeholder group, or require expertise not represented among raters. The group can preserve such options for later exploration without claiming they have the same level of support as top-scoring proposals.

Prepare the room and the prompt

The standard design takes about 20 to 25 minutes and recommends at least 15 participants. It needs an open space without tables or chairs, index cards, pens, and a clear signal for each round. The exercise is designed for in-person movement. The official guidance does not recommend running it online because circulating cards and keeping scores independent can be difficult. A host can adapt the goal of the exercise with a different digital method, but should not claim that a static poll reproduces the same interaction.

25/10 works well after an Options Place session or at the start of a task-force meeting when the group wants to generate proposals quickly. It can also close a meeting with actionable ideas. The facilitator should be alert to status dynamics: people may rate an idea differently if they know who wrote it. Anonymous circulation reduces that effect, but cannot eliminate all bias. The host can remind participants to rate the idea itself and to make a genuine effort to read each card before scoring.

Research on crowdsourcing and idea evaluation highlights the benefits and limits of collective ratings. MIT Sloan Management Review has discussed how organizations can use crowdsourcing for innovation; research from the National Academy of Sciences examines how collective judgments can aggregate information under certain conditions; and Harvard Business Review considers how teams can improve brainstorming outcomes. 1, 2, 3

Use the scores as a beginning

After the session, select a small number of proposals for a more deliberate review. The next process might check customer value, cost, risks, ownership, or the first experiment needed to learn more. Explain how the selected ideas will be handled and when participants will hear back. If no idea is moving forward, say why. A group is more likely to contribute again when it sees that its ideas entered an honest decision process.

25/10 Crowdsourcing helps a group move quickly from a room full of individuals to a visible set of proposals. It does not remove the need for judgment; it gives judgment more material to work with. When the challenge is clear, the rules are understood, and follow-up is credible, the structure can surface options a small planning team might not have generated alone.

- 1The power of crowdsourcing
- 2The wisdom of crowds
- 3Why brainstorming works better in small groups

Summary

25/10 Crowdsourcing gives a large group a rapid way to generate and sift ideas. Participants contribute independently, and multiple anonymous ratings help the group notice proposals that resonate beyond their authors. The five-round process keeps the energy high, while the wrap-up preserves unusual ideas that may not receive the highest score. Use the results to choose what deserves exploration, then assign a separate process to assess feasibility and make decisions. The format is designed for in-person movement and can be difficult to reproduce online. Its speed is useful when the question is clear and participants understand that ratings are signals for further inquiry.