

## Crowdsourcing 101 for K12

### Takeaways from “Unleashing the Crowd”

---



Although crowdsourcing is not a new concept, it is only recently that the benefits are being realized for the K12 Education Sector. The following are key takeaways from experts Ann Majchrzak & Arvind Malhotra, via their authoritative title, [Unleashing the Crowd](#), on how and why K12 organizations can and should use crowdsourcing to support creative, constructive, and results-driven engagement with their respective communities and stakeholders.

#### **Questions School Leaders need to ask themselves**

- (1) Do we have a problem for which prior solutions have been tried and which have not been successful?
- (2) Is it a problem that a broad swath of the community would have something to say about?
- (3) Is the problem one for which multiple perspectives, multiple parallel solutions, and multiple ways to innovate exist?

#### **Adapt the situation to schools**

To ensure productive ideation, prompt with a question that focuses the community on the specific problem the school needs to address.

---

---

*Example of too general: How can we reduce poverty in America?*

*A better question would be: "What can individual school districts in the U.S. do to significantly raise reading proficiency rates over the next three years?"*

### **Invite stakeholders from across the organization, district, community**

There is no need to tightly define the crowd. Previous research has shown that most innovative ideas are brought to bear not by so-called "experts," but rather, by those with marginal expertise.<sup>3</sup>

### **The right incentives**

To avoid the challenges of grandstanding and collaboration disincentives, districts should decide on the rewards and recognition that draw in participants and signal the collective nature of the awards. The rewards should indicate the need to share knowledge and build on others' knowledge. The value for participants should be the impact on the sponsoring organization, school, or district.

Examples of rewards include an opportunity to discuss winning solutions with senior executive(s), receiving something of value from the school or district, and/or recognition in a school/district newsletter or communication. Top collaborators were identified by aggregating points for contributing a wide array of knowledge (including creative associations). The list (and scoring for top collaborators) emphasizes the importance of collaborative knowledge.

### **How best to evaluate solutions**

Our observations of various crowdsourcing events in practice, show that three distinct criteria for reviewing solutions can have the most significant innovation effects: 1) novelty, 2) usability and 3) implementability. These three criteria tend to be well balanced in terms of focusing attention on the community or stakeholder group to the newness and practicality of collectively produced solutions. Organizations must recognize that weighting of the three criteria is dependent on the context of the organization. However, no one criteria should be overly weighted or be the single criteria.

### **Give them a reason to participate and be a part of something big and exciting**

In addition to pre-crowdsourcing messages to the crowd, post-crowdsourcing feedback is needed, especially for internal crowds or external participants who might be involved in future crowdsourcing. Examples of knowledge fragments that constitute the chosen solutions and who contributed them should be highlighted as it is particularly helpful in setting the grounds for future participation.

---

## Checklist for organizations using crowdsourcing

### Pre-launch

- Scope and then craft the problem question.
- Decide on the rewards and recognition that draw in participants.
- Upfront choice of judge(s) from the organization.
- Gather a potential participants pool (email list, contact information database, etc.).
- Create an open call broadcast plan and any follow-up in-person events to get participants ready for the crowdsourcing event.
  - Iteratively develop a set of brief instructions to guide the participants.
- You may also need to develop a FAQ page on the crowdsourcing platform.
- Consider a “what will we do with the ideas” plan—which ideas were chosen, why and how will they be implemented.

### Launch of crowdsourcing event

- Broadcast your open call to various forums and communities where the most passionate and engaged participants might be found.
- Start to build a sense of excitement. Have a countdown clock on the platform and also rebroadcast open calls just prior to start.
- After some time has elapsed in the crowdsourcing event (usually hours), do one last open call broadcast blitz to get more registrants, telling them of what’s exciting about what’s been posted thus far and how many others are already participating.

### After the crowdsourcing event

- At the close of the crowdsourcing event, remind the judge that you’ll be sending them a list of ideas to evaluate.
- Filter out the collectively produced solutions that emerge (many times, inside the discussion threads) during the crowdsourcing events.
- Ask the judges to determine the winners based on a pre-established and published list of criteria. An objective scoring sheet (including all the criteria and weights) should be used.
- Close the loop with the participants by sharing with them a report containing the chosen solutions and the implementation plan.

### Value of internal crowdsourcing for staff

Your staff will benefit from and appreciate the process they have participated in. Surveys show participants in crowdsourcing experience the following:

Participating in the crowdsourcing event helped me:

- *Foster my creativity*
- *Learn about issues critical to my school and/or community*
- *Learn to collaborate in new and interesting ways*
- Strongly Disagree

As a result of the crowdsourcing event:

- *I was able to collaborate in new and interesting ways*
- *My voice and opinion were heard*
- *I feel that innovation and collaboration is important to my school*