Multi-voting

What is it?

This prioritization method is used to quickly reduce a list of options down to a manageable number.

It is one of the most frequently used methods of teams working toward agreement. It is not intended for deciding matters of great importance and does not reflect consensus by the group, but rather the group's general preference.

No other prioritization or decision-making method can handle more than 25 options. Use multi-voting to reduce an initial list, and then use another method to further narrow the list or make a final choice.

How do I use it?

❶ Clarify decision rights and allow 5 minutes to complete the process (longer if you have not already generated a list of options).

❷ List the options being considered. These could be solutions, process improvement ideas, possible problems or projects, investment options, etc. Make sure everyone understands each option and eliminate duplicates.

POINTER: To generate options, use Brainstorming or other methods from Chapter 4: *Making Ideas.*

❸ Give each team member an equal number of votes to distribute among the options.

HINT: One option is to give a number of votes equal to 1/4 of the total list, e.g., If you have 40 options, give 10 votes per individual (1/4x40=10).

Another option is to give a number of votes equal to 1.5 times the target number options. For example, if you have 40 options and want to reduce the list to 10, assign each member 15 votes (1.5x10=15).

❹ Decide as a team how many votes can be placed on a single item. It is usually best to limit the number of votes on any one item to between 2 and 4.

❺ Vote and tally. Look for a natural break to identify the top few options.

HINT: Have team members place their votes (checkmarks) right on top of the option being selected. This makes certain you know which option the vote is for when you begin the tally.

The example below shows Multi-voting by a team of five. Their objective was to identify the top 4 options from a list of 20 ideas on how to speed up the computer network in their branch office. Rules were as follows:

- Each member was given 6 votes (1.5x4=6).

- No more than 2 votes could be used on any one item.

The selected options have been circled.
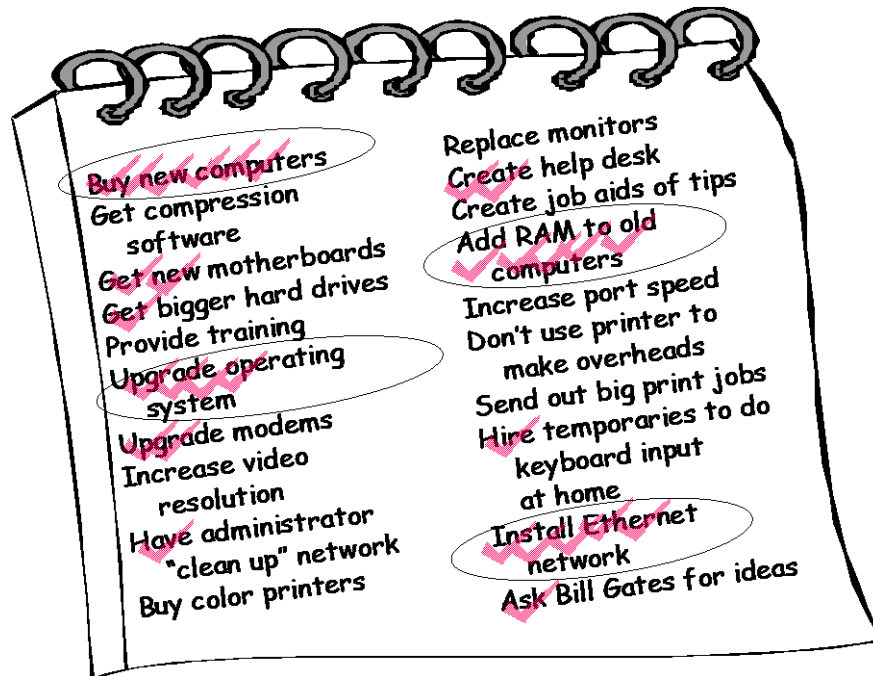
A variation is *Weighted multi-voting*, in which team members vote using numbers instead of checkmarks.

One approach to weighted multi-voting is the 3-2-1 method:

- Team members select three options.

- They rank these options by writing a 3 on their top choice, a 2 on their second choice, and 1 on their third choice.

- Add the totals to determine the group's preference.

- Repeat the process to identify second and third choices, etc.

Another approach to weighted multi-voting is to:

- Allocate a certain number of points to each team member, e.g., 20 points.

- They distribute these points among the ideas, giving as many as they like to any one idea. However, it is usually best to limit the number of votes you can place on any one item (e.g., limit 5).

- Add up totals to determine the preferred options.