

The IBPS Model

There are several steps in IBPS:

Step One: *Define the problem.*

Ensure that all group members agree on the problem to be solved.

Step Two: *Identify the Interests Involved.*

Interests refer to the needs or concerns regarding the issue or problem. It is important to understand, rather than debate, the various interests of those involved in attempting to reach a solution. Many of the interests may have been articulated during the process of clarifying and understanding similarities and differences.

Once everyone has articulated his or her interests in regard to an issue, the group members *explore* each other's interests and *determine* which of them are commonly held or *mutual* (commonly held interests). This is not a "matching" process requiring each interest to appear on all lists, but rather an acceptance and recognition process whereby the group members acknowledge the interests they share. Interests that are not shared are referred to as *separate* interests. Both mutual and separate interests must be considered during the problem-solving process. Even though they are not mutual, many separate interests may be satisfied by the final solution.

Step Three: *Develop options.*

Generate as many options as you can that might resolve the issue. This requires the participation of all group members. Everyone must remember that options generated during the brainstorming session are *not commitments* and are not binding on any member.

Options should be specific enough to be honestly evaluated later. After the brainstorming session is completed, it may be necessary to go through the options and ask questions for clarification so that everyone understands each option. Some combining may be done, but care must be taken not to combine too many pieces into one option.

Step Four: Agree on a comprehensive solution.

From the list of options, the group will work towards arriving at a mutually agreed-upon solution that everyone “can live with” and that meets as many interests as possible.

Often the list of options developed is long and unwieldy, and perhaps, while valuable input, not all options brainstormed in the heat of the moment are really workable or viable options for a solution in this instance. Workgroup members will often want to develop a “short list” of viable options that should be carefully considered and evaluated as potential solutions. To develop this short list, some work groups may first screen the list and highlight top choices. Others, in the interest of fairness and effectiveness, and recognizing that first glances aren’t everything, agree on *standards* or *criteria*.

Criteria are the values or yardsticks by which options are measured, compared, and judged. A consensus decision on the criteria to be used must be reached by the group. The criteria are, in essence, the characteristics of an acceptable solution.

For example, in fishing, one is faced with the options of either keeping a fish that has been caught, or throwing it back in the water. The decision to keep or throw back the fish will be governed by criteria such as the following: size of the fish, edible nature of the fish, taste of the fish, type of fish desired, or whether it is within the legal limits.

Although there are some general criteria that may be applied to the selection of any option, for example, timeliness, efficiency, reliability, cost-effectiveness, and adaptability, there may be other, more specific and useful criteria. The group will want to work carefully toward developing their list of criteria.

The best way to identify criteria that will help in the evaluation of the various options is to have group members go back to their list of interests and agree, by consensus, on which of them are crucial – that is, which of them must be met in order for an acceptable solution to emerge. These “agreed-upon, have-to-be-met” interests become the criteria that enable the IB problem-solvers to determine which of the options should be kept and (using the fishing analogy) which should be thrown overboard.

Selection of the options that meet the agreed-upon criteria is accomplished with the participation of all group members. Each option is evaluated and may be modified or combined with other options to meet the criteria. New options may

also be created during the evaluation process. Options which all members have agreed by consensus meet the criteria are identified as pieces of the final solution.

After evaluating the short list of options and narrowing down the list that meet agreed-upon criteria, groups may, by consensus, agree on one of the options as a solution or combine several viable options to craft a comprehensive solution.

In the end, the problem-solving session should conclude with everyone satisfied that they had the opportunity to be heard on all issues and committed to successful implementation of the solution.