

Effective Engagement: building relationships
with community and other stakeholders

Book 3 the engagement toolkit



3.68 Workshops

Description:

A structured forum where people are invited to work together in a group (or groups) on a common problem or task. The goals are to resolve issues and build consensus for action, rather than provide information and answer people's questions.

If the workshop is intended as a community event focusing on a community issue, the selection of participants is determined by knowledge, expertise or by selecting a cross-section of views. Alternatively, workshops can be organised to target particular groups (e.g. young people, or women).

Workshops require a facilitator who is able to engage all participants in the discussion. Workshops are a participatory tool that is best used with smaller numbers of participants.

The Ontario Public Consultation Guide suggests a workshop can meet three key objectives of the public consultation program:

1. Understanding the public: workshops allow you to learn in detail the views and suggestions of participants.
2. Discussing the issues. Other viewpoints and ideas and possible solutions can be heard in a non-confrontational atmosphere.
3. Building consensus for action. Participants can have a free-flowing discussion of new approaches that can lead to group decisions or positions.

A variety of tools can be used within a workshop. These include many of the tools listed in this toolbox (e.g. focus groups and/or visioning).

Objectives:

Workshops aim to bring participants together in a structured environment (that is, through large and small-group activities, discussions, and reflection) to plan, decide or overcome difficulties.

Outcomes:

Workshops can deliver a report, opinions, suggestions or plans that have been collaboratively developed and agreed to by all participants, on an issue or proposal.

Uses/strengths:

- Excellent for discussion on criteria or analysis of alternatives.
- Fosters small group or one-on-one communication.
- Offers a choice of team members to answer difficult questions.
- Builds ownership and credibility for the outcomes.
- Maximises feedback obtained from participants.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- Excellent for discussion on criteria or analysis of alternatives.
- Fosters small group or one-on-one communication.
- Ability to draw on other team members to answer difficult questions.
- Builds credibility.
- Maximised feedback obtained from participants.
- Fosters public ownership in solving the problem.
- Hostile participants may resist what they may perceive as the 'divide and conquer' strategy of breaking into small groups.
- Facilitators need to know how they will use the public input before they begin the workshop.
- Several small group facilitators are usually needed.⁴³

Resources required:

- Publicity
- Venue rental
- Catering
- Staffing
- Moderator/facilitator
- Experts
- Recorders
- Gophers
- Artists/photographer
- Audiovisual recording equipment and amplification
- Overhead projectors
- Data projectors
- Video
- Slide projector/screen
- Printed public information sheets
- Response sheets
- Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.)
- Furniture
- Children's requirements

Can be used for:

- Engage community
- Discover community issues
- Develop community capacity
- Develop action plan
- Communicate an issue
- Build alliances, consensus

Number of people required to help organise:

- Large (> 12 people)
- Medium (2–12 people)

Audience size:

- Large (> 30)
- Medium (11–30)
- Small (≤ 10)

Time required:

- Medium (6 weeks – 6 months)

Skill level/support required:

- Medium (Computer & other expertise)

⁴³ <http://www.iap2.org> [accessed 07/06/2005]

Cost:

- High (> AUD\$10,000)
- Medium (AUD\$1,000 – AUD\$10,000)
- Low (< AUD\$1,000)

Participation level:

- High (Stakeholders participate in decision)

Innovation level:

- Low (Traditional)

Method:

Responsibility of the organiser:

1. Engage and brief facilitator. Brief to comprise:
 - 1.1. Date, time and expected duration of workshop.
 - 1.2. Description of target participants.
 - 1.3. Relationships between participants.
 - 1.4. Topic to be considered.
 - 1.5. Clear definition of current situation, including decisions already made.
 - 1.6. Area of topic to be covered, with the questions and problems requiring participants to be involved in and developing solutions.
2. Identify and book appropriate location (including wall space for posting notes and cards, tea/coffee area, required break-out areas), tables and chairs.
3. Arrange suitable catering.
4. Arrange transport/child care/special facilities for target participants.
5. Supply of special equipment.
6. Approve facilitators running sheet design.
7. Enable and ensure target participants attend.
8. Introduce the facilitator on the day.

Responsibility of the facilitator

1. Collect brief from organiser
2. Ensure that participants are not expected to be 'rubber stamping' decisions already made, (other than confirming those decisions), or being expected to provide unrealistic outputs for the time available.
 - 2.1. Detail design of the day, identifying what participants will be required to consider, and methodology for this to be achieved (running sheet).
 - 2.2. Ensure that organiser has carried out all functional aspects as above.
 - 2.3. Run the event.
 - 2.4. Write up and provide organiser with proceedings within agreed timeline.

References:

- <http://www.iap2.org> [accessed 07/06/2005]