

Effective Engagement: building relationships
with community and other stakeholders

Book 3 the engagement toolkit



3.14 Design Charrettes

Description:

'En charrette' was a term used by architecture students in Paris to mean 'to draw at the last moment'. In recent years, the term has come to describe a design workshop in which designers work intensively on an issue and present their findings in a public forum.¹⁴

According to the Charrette Center website,¹⁵ 'A charrette is an intensive, multi-disciplinary ... design workshop designed to facilitate open discussion between major stakeholders of a development project. A team of design experts meets with community groups, developers and neighbours over a period from three-four days to two weeks long, gathering information on the issues that face the community. The charrette team then works together to find design solutions that will result in a clear, detailed, realistic vision for future development. The charrette process is an exercise of transparency, where information is shared between the design professionals and the stakeholders of a project area. In this way, trust is built between the parties involved and the resulting vision can be based predominantly upon the issues that stakeholders feel are most crucial to them'.

Charrettes are popular with architects, planners, designers and developers as the intensive nature of the process means results are achieved quickly.¹⁶

Charrettes are increasingly used by public and private sector groups and agencies as the chief design event in the urban design or town planning process. There are three stages in the charrette timetable:

- Information gathering, in which the design team listens to the views of the stakeholders and citizens.
- Design and review, a collaborative process engaging the design team.
- Presentation - The charrette ends with a final presentation of designs and findings.¹⁷

Objectives:

The charrette process aims to develop a vision for a geographic region on planning process which is based predominantly upon the issues that stakeholders have said are a priority.

Outcomes:

The design charrette process aims to be transparent, allowing information to be shared between the design professionals and the stakeholders of a project area. The information shared and the understanding gained by the participants is the most important product. The trust that is built between the parties ensures that the resulting vision is based predominantly upon the issues that stakeholders feel are most crucial to them.

Uses/strengths:

- A design charrette is a good idea when people need to cut across boundaries and work on a large, collaborative project.
 - Because participants are encouraged to offer design ideas and solutions to problems that are outside their areas of expertise, charrettes are particularly helpful in complex situations calling for new ways of looking at things.
 - Can save money where many drawings are needed in a short time. Rather than commissioning expensive drawings without input from the community, a charrette offers an inclusive, less expensive process.
 - A highly specialised participatory tool, usually applied in planning and design projects.
 - Attempts to bring together project stakeholders to facilitate fast and interactive decision making.
 - Provides joint problem solving and creative thinking.
 - Effective for creating partnerships and positive working relationships with the public
- Sarkissian et al¹⁸ have identified the following uses/strengths:
- Can open up horizons for local people to imagine and visualise possibilities.
 - Allows a problem to be analysed holistically, attempting to resolve community problems and encourage consensus building.
 - Enables the initiating agency to understand how a proposal appears to a community.
 - Allows the desires, attitudes and preferences of special interest groups to be tabled so that conflicting issues can be resolved by consensus.

- Can energise community participation by introducing new perspectives through introducing multidisciplinary teams.
- With expert facilitation, can provide a transparent and accessible process, giving voice to all participants, including those that may not be as self assured and confident as others.
- Can stimulate community momentum through the intensity of the process.
- Encourages people to become actively involved because the process promises immediate feedback.
- Properly facilitated and with extensive community contact, can function as a community education process.
- Provides an opportunity for the community to have input at a number of points in the process.
- Can save money by being an effective use of time and resources.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- This specialised tool is only applicable to certain scenarios (e.g. where a short-term resolution is needed, or where a high level of public awareness and input is needed and welcomed).
- The process is intensive, and usually lasts 5–14 days.
- As specialists are required, the process is costly.
- Ideally, the break-out groups should contain a cross-section of people in the various disciplines represented in the design team.
- A compressed time period means a number of stakeholders may miss out.
- Inadequate time provided for reflection and refinement.
- The process can be 'railroaded' by vocal stakeholders if not run by a trained design charrette facilitator.
- The process limits the input of children.
- Participants may not be seen as representative of the larger public.
- The effects may not last if this is seen as a 'one shot' technique, rather than part of a large planning and decision-making process.

¹⁴ <http://www.washington.edu/research/showcase/1985c.html> [accessed 02/07/2005]

¹⁵ <http://www.charrettecenter.com> [accessed 02/07/2005]

¹⁶ Sarkissian, W, Perlgut, D & Ballard, E (eds.) (1986) 'Community participation in practice', *The community participation handbook: resources for public involvement in the planning process*, Impacts Press, Roseville, NSW

¹⁷ <http://www.charrettecenter.com> [accessed 02/07/2005]

¹⁸ Sarkissian, W, Perlgut, D & Ballard, E (eds.) (1986) 'Community participation in practice', *The community participation handbook: resources for public involvement in the planning process*, Impacts Press, Roseville, NSW

Resources required:

- Publicity
- Venue rental for final presentation
- Catering
- Staffing
- Experts for design process and expert panel
- Trained green charrette facilitator
- Recorders
- Gophers
- Photographer
- Audio and visual recording and amplification
- Overhead projectors
- Data projectors
- Video
- Slide projector
- Projection screen
- Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.)
- Children's requirements

Can be used for:

- Showcase product, plan, policy
- 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)
- Individual

Audience size:

- Large (> 30)
- Medium (11–30)

Time required:

- Short (< 6 weeks)

Skill level/support required:

- Medium (Computer & other expertise)

Cost:

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

Participation level:

- Medium (Opinions noted)

Innovation level:

- High (Innovative)

Method:

1. Identify an architectural, urban design, or planning policy issue of community and/or environmental importance.
2. Select a suitably cross-disciplinary team or teams (e.g. architects, landscape architects, urban designers, engineers, biologists and/or students in these fields).
3. Select an Expert Panel who can help assess the designs at the end of the process.
4. Hire a trained design charrette facilitator, who can help form teams and small groups, obtain quick agreement on desired outcomes, and keep everyone involved in the process.
5. Brief the teams on the charrette process, which aims at delivering feasible and creative solutions for real clients within a short period of time.
6. Plan for a workshop that provides sufficient time for the designers to work intensively on a problem and then present their findings (often five days).
7. Book a venue (indoor or outdoor) with room for the design team as a whole to work, as well as areas for smaller, break-out groups.
8. Encourage the team to begin each day with a whole-group discussion of issues, goals, findings, and approaches. These help to define subsequent goals and issues for break-out groups to discuss and analyse.
9. Encourage break-out groups to join the larger group regularly to present ideas and approaches. These can then be integrated or adapted into the overall design concept.
10. Record ideas using on-site graphic recording in a somewhat standard format that can easily be compiled in a report. Examples include 'fill-in-the-blanks' flip charts that can be scanned into booklets or files for internet distribution.
11. At the conclusion of the charrette, allow each team to present its proposed solution to a large audience of the public, planning professionals, and business and civic leaders. The goal is not necessarily to prepare a final design but to explore and understand all the design issues. The information shared and the understanding gained by the participants is the most important product.
12. Invite questions from an Expert Panel and questions from the audience.

References:

- Sarkissian, W, Perlgut, D & Ballard, E (eds.) (1986) 'Community participation in practice', *The community participation handbook: resources for public involvement in the planning process*, Impacts Press, Roseville, NSW
- Victorian Planning and Law Association (1992) 'The charrette process: an analysis of the process and its future use', paper presented in public seminar, 13 August, 1992, Victorian Planning and Law Association, Melbourne
- Wates, N (1999) *The community planning handbook*, Earthscan, London
- <http://www.charettecenter.com> [accessed 02/07/2005]
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