

PARTICIPATORY METHODS TOOLKIT  
A practitioner's manual

Charrette

## Colophon

Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual  
Method: Charrette

This is an extract of the publication 'Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual', a joint publication of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (viWTA).

The full version of the manual includes:

- Introduction about participatory methods
- General guidelines and tips for participatory methods
- Complete description of 13 participatory methods: 21st Century Town Meeting® ; Charrette ; Citizens Jury ; Consensus Conference ; Deliberative Polling® ; Delphi ; Expert Panel ; Focus Group ; Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation ; Planning Cell ; Scenario Building Exercise ; Technology Festival ; The World Café
- Brief descriptions of 50 methods and techniques

All publications are available free of charge, online via [www.kbs-frb.be](http://www.kbs-frb.be) or [www.viWTA.be](http://www.viWTA.be).

### Editors

Stef Steyaert (viWTA) and Hervé Lisoir (King Baudouin Foundation)

### Author

Nikki Slocum (United Nations University – Comparative Regional Integration Studies)

### Layout and printing

Belgian Advertising (B.AD)

### Legal depot

D/2005/2893/19

### ISBN

90-5130-506-0

With the support of the Belgian National Lottery

September 2005

# CHARRETTE

## **I. DEFINITION**

Charrette is an intensive face-to-face process designed to bring people from various sub-groups of society into consensus within a short period of time. The pre-Charrette planning breaks the main issue into component parts, to which sub-groups of people are assigned. The subgroups periodically report back to the whole group and feedback from the whole is then addressed in the next round of sub-group discussions. This sequence is repeated until consensus is reached at the final deadline for a report. Charrettes vary in size, from 50 to over 1,000 people, and in time, from four days to two weeks.

## **II. WHEN TO USE**

Charrettes have often been applied to development, design and planning projects at the local community level, but can be adapted to address other topics and geographical areas. In general, a Charrette will:

- assemble practical ideas and viewpoints at the beginning of a planning process
- encourage input and collaboration from a wide range of participants
- facilitate decisions on difficult issues when a process is mature
- resolve indecision or deadlocks between groups toward the end of a process
- develop feasible projects and action plans with specific practical steps for the successful development of projects based upon citizen input
- identify potential funding sources for projects.

## **III. PROCEDURE**<sup>1</sup>

### **A. Overview**

**The Pre-Charrette:** The pre-Charrette phase focuses on developing and working with a steering committee that will determine the primary focus of the Charrette and handle the logistics for the next two phases. It is suggested that the steering committee work with the Charrette facilitator to identify a preliminary set of issues to be addressed during the Charrette.

**The Charrette Workshop:** The Charrette workshop is an intensive planning and design workshop involving participants in assessing needs, interviewing stakeholder groups, prioritising issues, developing recommendations, identifying specific projects and generating implementation strategies.

**The Post-Charrette:** The post-Charrette phase comprises the preparation of a final document that outlines strengths,

<sup>1</sup> This section is largely a reproduction of Segedy, J. and Johnson, B. *The Neighborhood Charrette Handbook: Visioning and Visualising Your Neighborhood's Future*. (See references.)



challenges, recommendations, specific projects, actions steps and potential funding sources. It also includes preparing and delivering a formal presentation that is open to the public. It is during this phase that implementation begins.

## **B. Realisation**

### **1. PERSONNEL AND TASKS**

#### *(a) Project Manager*

The project manager can be one person or a team. The responsibilities of the project manager are as follows:

- oversee the entire process
- identify citizens who will be in charge of establishing the steering committee
- printing and disseminating the final report
- serve as a contact person for post-Charrette activities.

#### *(b) Steering Committee*

**TIP:** To begin the process and to see it through to its ultimate fruition it is usually best to identify a diverse group of citizens who can serve as the coordinators and facilitators of establishing a strong steering committee.

This is a community effort. Create a citizen action group that represents a broad base of community interests (which will vary depending upon the issues addressed) according to the following guidelines. The Committee should:

- comprise between 9 to 15 persons
- ensure diversity of opinions and ideologies
- include people actively interested in the issues and their solutions. For example:
  - members of the business community
  - neighbourhood/citizen/homeowner associations
  - elected officials (local, regional, national, supranational)
  - academic specialists
  - technical experts
  - church/religious organisations
  - youth
  - service groups
  - public/private schools (faculty, staff, students, administration, etc.)
  - senior citizens
  - persons from adjoining cities, regions, etc. (as applicable)

The responsibilities of the steering committee include:

- coordinating Charrette activities
- establishing timeline and meeting schedule



- establishing a preliminary list of issues/the Charrette focus
- arranging for financial support and managing the Charrette budget
- assisting in workshop facilitation.

## 2. THE PRE-CHARRETTE

### *(1) Issue/problem identification*

This is a very important step in the process. The stakeholders must first determine that they want to get involved in this process and are willing to do something with the results. While the Charrette workshop itself is a community-wide endeavour, it begins with the efforts of a few dedicated leaders that will establish the foundation. They must:

- define the primary and secondary issues related to the project
- determine the scope of the project
- identify the geographic area of the project (if applicable).

### *(2) Identify and invite Charrette participants (team)*

Arrange to have an appropriate facilitator.

The Charrette 'team' is usually a group of individuals with a broad range of skills and backgrounds. The team will be primarily responsible for producing the tangible results of the workshop. Sometimes, all interested persons are welcomed to participate in the Charrette, either as members of the Charrette team or more casually as observers.

**TIP:** There are advantages and disadvantages to having local and outside team members. Local members bring unique insights to the process while outside members can bring a fresh, and objective, viewpoint to the activities. It is important that the team be assembled for its skills, not just for the interests of the individual members.

### *(3) Develop community relations and public awareness*

The key to making the Charrette an integral part of a successful community effort is an informed public. Please refer to the suggestions provided in the section of 'General guidelines and tips'.

### *(4) Assemble support information*

An effective process begins with good information. Much of the Charrette process builds on public input, but a solid base of technical information is critical to having accurate information. The type of information required will depend upon the topic. However, often existing plans and historical profiles are especially useful. It will always be necessary to:

- identify key players in the community and
- document existing conditions. Some possibilities include:
  - governmental regulations

- reference materials and examples of related projects
- photos
- maps
- previous planning documents
- studies or reports
- demographics and/or statistical information
- video/photographs/sketches
- surveys
- historical profiles (newspaper files, photos, archives, historical societies, books, etc.)

**TIP:** It is strongly suggested that the Charrette has a strong visualisation component. This means that the products of the Charrette will include an ample amount of pictures and drawings to help illustrate the issues and ideas that arise from the process. To facilitate this, slides and/or prints of the study areas (if applicable) should be taken prior to the actual Charrette. These snapshots can then be used as the basis for before/after comparisons. Aerial photographs can also be very helpful in illustrating large-scale and site associated issues.

#### (5) Logistics

The actual Charrette workshop is the most visible aspect of the process. If the planning is well executed beforehand, the Charrette itself – while often an example of ‘organised chaos’ – will be a fun and productive opportunity for the community to build and visualise its future.

#### Several months prior to the Charrette:

Hold an organisational meeting with the steering committee and the Charrette facilitator to set goals and arrange a basic schedule. The steering committee should hold regular meetings to ensure that all necessary preparations are being made.

*The following need to be arranged:*

- Establish dates.

It is not possible to find a ‘perfect’ date, but every effort should be made to minimise conflicts. It should also be noted that the ‘days’ do not have to be contiguous. In some cases it is better to have several days between sessions to allow the team and community to ‘catch its breath’. However, spreading the process out over too long a period of time will lose momentum and public interest in the process.

- Establish the location for the Charrette workshop.
- Prepare the schedule for the Charrette workshop.



The actual schedule must be flexible. Public meeting times should be firm and closely adhered to, but you do not want to miss out on spontaneous opportunities or stop creative energy just to keep on schedule.

- Make a list of participants to be invited (particularly experts and specialist interest groups) and send out invitations.

**TIP:** Charrettes require discipline and may become difficult when particularly vocal individuals – who do not respect others – are invited to attend.

- Meals should be arranged for the Charrette team/participants.

**TIP:** Some food can be catered to the location and some can be off-site. Local restaurants and/or service groups can donate/prepare meals. It can be motivating to invite participants in the morning sessions to stay for lunch.

- Arrange accommodation for out-of-town participants and transportation to and from the Charrette facility location.
- Provide materials and supplies.<sup>2</sup>

One month prior to the Charrette:

All plans should be finalised.

- Send out first press releases.

### 3. THE CHARRETTE WORKSHOP

The following is a sample schedule for the Charrette workshop; it can be varied.

Session #1: Steering Committee Meetings/Charrette Team Meetings

Goal: to develop a working relationship between the Charrette team and the steering committee.

This can be held the night before the workshop, at or after dinner or at a breakfast meeting. The steering committee and Charrette team should introduce themselves, providing a short background and some interests. Then the steering committee can share and explain their issues list with the Charrette team.

**TIP:** An informal setting and casual conversation is more effective at this stage.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the General Guidelines for a list of commonly required supplies.

### Session #2: Context Development

First day, morning.

Goal: to get a first-hand look at the community for the Charrette team and provide the Charrette team with an of the background information and – if applicable – a first-hand look at the issue being addressed.

If the issue being addressed has a physical component, a tour of the area can be arranged for the Charrette team and the steering committee. The following should be done in this session:

- The steering committee summarises its interests. A list of these interests should be attached to the wall so that it is easily visible in the room.
- View any videotapes or slides on the issue.
- Study maps, photos, etc. (if applicable).
- Review planning reports and other technical documents.

### Session #3: Interview and Input Sessions

First day, morning.

Goal: to provide the opportunity for diverse citizens' and public groups to discuss issues with the Charrette team.

- Divide the study team into small groups to facilitate interaction and effective communication.
- Schedule interview times so that each group can be properly heard. Each interview session should run approximately 45 minutes; multiple groups can be interviewed simultaneously, each with its own facilitator and recorder.
- Allow time for questions from the Charrette team (about goals, needs, liabilities, assets, etc.).
- After the interview session, give each participant a strip of colour dots and ask them to 'vote' for the most important issues by placing the dot next to the issue(s) on the list that is on the wall. They can put all their dots on 1 issue or distribute them as they see fit. This helps prioritise the issues.

### Session #4: Team Analysis and Issue Clarification

First day, afternoon.

Goal: to provide an opportunity for the Charrette team to assimilate and discuss observations and prepare for the public meeting.

This is a critical regrouping of the Charrette team to brainstorm, share ideas, do initial analyses (such as SWOT), develop preliminary observations and recommendations and prepare for the evening public session.



### Session #5: Open the Doors -- Community Discussion and Feedback

First day, evening.

Goal: to summarise the Charrette team's initial impressions in order to provide the community with preliminary assessment and analysis and to obtain broader citizen input and feedback.

Charrette team: summarise input and analysis:

- Present SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and/or any other analysis results.
- Present goals, objectives and priorities (from dots exercise).

Community:

- Provide feedback on the Charrette team's initial impressions.
- Confirm or redirect the focus.

### Sessions # 6 - ? : Development of Goals and Objectives/Recommendations

Goal: to develop proposals and solutions in response to the specific issues.

- Create a smaller working group for each priority issue and divide participants into each group. Each sub-group should contain at least one specialist/expert on the specific issue.
- The sub-groups meet to generate proposals and solutions for their specific issue.
- The whole group comes together to present the ideas of the sub-groups, discuss, make suggestions and coordinate their sub-projects, etc.
- The sub-groups meet again to revise their proposals/plans, incorporating the input received from the whole group. This process of pulsing between the sub-groups and the whole continues as necessary (or as time permits).

**TIP:** Ideally, the workshop should comprise at least four days to allow time for enough feedback cycles.

- At the end of this pendulum process, the whole Charrette team and the members of the steering committee meet to finalise their ideas, coordinate their projects and recommendations and prepare action plans for each project team.

*The final session will be the presentation of the Charrette workshop results to the community. Here, this is presented as part of the post-Charrette activities.*

#### 4. POST CHARRETTE WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

The post Charrette activities can be broken down into three steps, each of which will be elaborated below:

1. the document and presentation preparation
2. presentation and approval
3. implementation and benchmarking.

##### *(a) Document and presentation preparation*

Following the completion of the Charrette workshop the Charrette team should first complete the following items:

- a newspaper 'tab'
- a reader/user friendly document
- formal presentation materials.

The newspaper 'tab' (a specially printed newspaper insert) should be printed and delivered with relevant newspapers or other community media. This insert should include a summary of the findings, ideas, projects and recommendations. The newspaper tab has several purposes: first, to give the general public a chance to learn about what is happening in the community; second, to further solicit input and information (a planning process is never finished) and third, to interest and encourage people to attend the final presentation. Make sure there is at least a week between the publishing date of the newspaper tab and the final presentation.

The 'final document' should be completed using the information and ideas collected to date and should be finalised after the final presentation (there will surely be some minor changes following the presentation). It is critical that the final report be:

- action oriented
- user friendly
- positive
- free of jargon
- highly visual
- in 'bulleted' format
- explanatory (not just descriptive).

Formal presentation materials should include slides and a handout. Slides of drawings, project concepts, character/design samples and existing conditions are most useful. The handout should summarise the entire project for those who may not have been involved prior to the presentation (the newspaper tab can be used for a handout).

##### *(b) Presentation and Approval*

Goal: to present Charrette findings to the community.



Hold a public meeting and conduct the graphic and verbal presentation. Present the challenges of following through with the projects. Following the presentation, ask for questions and comments. Assign someone to document all of the comments.

**TIP:** The final presentation must be thoroughly advertised and take place in a politically neutral facility which is easy to find. A verbal presentation in conjunction with a slide show is generally the best format.

Following the presentation, the final document should be modified, if necessary, according to comments at the final presentation. The document should then be approved and adopted by the steering committee.

#### *(c) Implementation and Benchmarking*

Finalising the Charrette is only part of the overall process. For tips on implementing the results of the Charrette, refer to the general section.

## **IV. RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS (TIME, BUDGET)**

Advance preparations are extensive. At least two to four months may be required to gather background materials and expert participants. The process itself usually takes a day (but at least four days are recommended). A shorter Charrette (two or three hours) may yield only a limited number of ideas.

Cost factors include ample meeting space, background materials, an experienced facilitator, resource people and on-site supplies. It may also be necessary to cover travel and accommodation, hospitality and compensation for individuals who must take time away from their regular jobs to participate.

The following items listed are the main budgetary items in a Charrette:

- Personnel
  - project manager
  - steering committee (9-15 persons)
- Travel
- Accommodation
- Food
  - meals for Charrette team and participants
- Recruitment and promotion
  - invitations to participants
  - Charrette promotion and advertising
- Communications
  - printing of draft and final report
- Facilities

- location for Charrette event
- location for public presentation of the final report

- Materials and Supplies  
(See detailed list provided.)

## **V. ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS**

- Depending on the definition of 'expertise', an emphasis on specialist participation in a Charrette may exclude community voices from the process. This could cast doubt on the credibility of the overall public involvement plan of which the group is a part.
- The continuous nature of a longer Charrette may exclude some participants who are hindered by a disability.

### **References and Resources**

Corporate Consultation Secretariat, Health Policy and Communications Branch (2000).

*Health Canada Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Glenn, J. (Ed.) *Futures Research Methodology*. Version 1.0. AC/UNU. The Millennium Project.

Segedy, J. and Johnson, B. *The Neighborhood Charrette Handbook*:

*Visioning and Visualising Your Neighborhood's Future*. Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods.

University of Louisville. [www.louisville.edu/org/sun/planning/char.html](http://www.louisville.edu/org/sun/planning/char.html)

Newer version available at: [www.bsu.edu/cbp](http://www.bsu.edu/cbp)

The Charrette: A Uniquely Effective Way of Defining A Proposed Projects' Viability.

<http://home.att.net/~visualizer/Charrette.html>

<http://www.Charretteinstitute.org/Charrette.html>

