

Charrette/ enquiry by design

A Charrette or Enquiry by Design is a workshop designed to:

- raise awareness of the principles of best practice and sustainable urban design and
- explore and demonstrate how these principles can be applied to develop solutions to designs.

The process is iterative and interactive where ideas, solutions and outcomes are developed in real world planning and design situations.

Charrettes are generally used in urban design and planning including land use, landscaping, architecture and transportation design. However, the principles of the Charrette may be applied to the design of various programs or services. For example, it could be adapted to design and plan a health care program using the determinants of health as outlined by the [World Health Organisation](#).

What is to be achieved?

- Charrettes can generate positive interest from a broad and representative cross section of the community.
- They can be used to draw on the skills, knowledge and experience of local people to develop a better understanding of local urban design requirements.
 - *For example, the requirement for high density housing will continue to increase as our population growth continues. Understanding what this involves increases awareness and reduces resistance to this type of urban living.*
- They can ease some of the public's concerns by introducing them to the features and benefits of high density sustainable design.

What is the format?

The purpose and objectives to be achieved and the key elements of the design will determine the type of Charrette to use.

Different types of Charrettes are designed to support the iterative nature of the process and to allow participants to opt in or out at end points such as:

- a half-day workshop focused on setting high-performance goals
- a mini-Charrette to develop strategies to achieve the high performance goals and identify issues that will affect their implementation
- full 2-to-3-day Charrette to:
 - o develop an understanding of the principles of best practice and urban design
 - o set high-performance goals and the strategies to achieve them
 - o work through the process to develop a sustainable design.

Online use of the tool?

During these challenging times where social distancing is part of the new norm, organisations have had to adjust and adapt. Traditional engagement tools like Charrettes which were used offline, are now being successfully adapted to online formats.

RS&H, an Urban design organisation in the US, [gives some tips and an example of an innovative Charrette delivered online](#). It is a matter of having the right tools and the right people leading the process.

What to consider?

Time	It can normally take from 4 hours to several days.
Preparation	Start at least 8 weeks before the event.
Awareness	Consider providing an awareness session for the multidisciplinary team on balancing tasks and relationships with participants.
Support staff	Facilitators and note takers will be needed to support the process .
Level of influence	Be clear about the level of influence participants will have in the decision making process and communicate this clearly.
Decision makers	Include decision makers in the Charrette to respond to ideas, share their point of view and make their case openly and transparently on points of disagreement.
Observe	If people are unable to attend a Charrette over a number of days, you may choose to set up a space for them to come along when they can and observe the process.
Participant	20 participants is normally a good number.

How to use the Charrette tool?

Before the Charrette

- Prepare the Charrette workshop plan at least 8 weeks ahead the scheduled date.
- Select and book a date, suitable venue, and equipment.
- Assemble a multi-disciplinary team and sort tasks and responsibilities throughout the process.
- Prepare all your communications materials (invitations, documents, etc.), print them if needed and distribute them.
- Promote the Charrette, monitor registrations and send a reminder a couple of days before.

During the sessions

- Meet and greet participants as they arrive.
- Facilitate introductions between the design team and participants.
- Follow the Charrette workshop plan.
- At the end of the workshop thank everyone for their contributions and tell them how their input will be used and the next stages of the project.

After the sessions

- Provide feedback to all participants on how the designs have been progressed as a result of their input.
- Provide information on decisions made in relation to the designs and how they will be used.

Resource Required?

- A multi-disciplinary team.
- Workshop materials including information, plans, designs, maps, display boards, computers, design software, data projectors, screens, flip charts, whiteboards, workspace/tables/chairs, pens, paper, internet access, etc.
- A large venue with space to spread out maps, plans and recording paper catering.
- Facilitators and note takers, technical support staff.
- Promotion/advertising/information materials.

How to Evaluate?

- Ask participants for verbal feedback at the end of the Charrette or to complete a written evaluation form.
- Contact participants after the session debrief with the facilitator and multi-disciplinary team and use the feedback to make improvements to future Charrettes.
- Assess the stage reached in the design process and determine if any follow up work is required with participants.
- Assess the overall acceptance by the team and participants of the outcomes from the workshop.

Tips and hints

Summarising the materials

At the beginning of the Charrette go over the materials sent to participants in case they didn't receive or read the information.

Ice-breaker activity

Organise an ice-breaker activity for the team and participants to help establish working relationships.

Breaks are good

Provide regular breaks and mix the activities to keep energy levels high.

Use easy language

Help participants focus at a planning/design level ask designers to use language easy to understand.

Prepare a Frequently Asked Questions sheet

Research all related legislation, technical, environmental, financial aspects, design trends/ innovations and emerging issues before the workshop and have information on hand to deal with questions that may arise such as a "Frequently Asked Question" (FAQ) sheet.

Explain that ideas may change through the design process

Designers will meet on their own at different stages in the process to review ideas and produce updated designs. The participants will not be included in these reviews so it is important for the facilitator to explain the process and for the designers to show how ideas have been incorporated into the design or not, and why.

Examples

See our case study Bowden Redevelopment from Renewal SA, which explains how a Charrette was used to gather feedback from stakeholders on this project.

[See how the City of Geelong held an Enquiry by Design workshop to assist the development of a draft urban structure plan](#)

Further resources

[Involve UK provides further information about Charrettes.](#)

[Participedia.net also shows the key components of charrettes.](#)