

Charrette/ enquiry by design

A Charrette or Enquiry by Design (as they are becoming more commonly known in Australia) is a workshop designed to raise awareness of the principles of best practice and sustainable urban design, and to explore and demonstrate how they can be applied to develop solutions to designs. The process is iterative (repeating and improving) 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 which may include land use, landscaping, architecture and transportation design. However, the principles of the Charrette may be applied to the design of programs or services that are structured around principles. For example, an Enquiry by Design process could be adapted to design and plan a health care program or service using the determinants of health as outlined by the [World Health Organisation](#).

What is to be achieved?

If used early enough Charrettes can generate positive interest from a broad and representative cross section of the community. They can also 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 high density housing involves increases awareness and reduces resistance to this type of urban living. People are becoming more aware of the impact of development on their lifestyles as the housing infill increases around them. Charrettes 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 type of Charrette will depend on the purpose and objectives to be achieved and on whether the design involves for example, a building complex, an urban village, or a transport orientated development (TOD). 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 limited to developing strategies to achieve the high performing goals and identifying issues and questions that will affect the implementation of the goals
- full two-to-three-day Charrette that follows through on developing an understanding of the principles of best practice and urban design, setting high-performance goals, setting the strategies to achieve them and working through the process to develop a sustainable design

On-line use of the tool?

No examples of the Charrette or Enquiry by Design technique were available during the research for this toolkit. This presents an opportunity for innovation.

What to consider?

Time	The time demands on participants for a Charrette can last from 4 hours to several days
Preparation	Preparation needs to commence at least 8 weeks before a Charrette
Awareness	Consider providing an awareness session for the multi-disciplinary team on balancing tasks and relationships with participants
Support staff	Facilitators and note takers will be needed to support the process as to allow the team and participants to focus on the process
Level of influence	Clarify with decision makers the level of influence the outcomes from the Charrette will have in the decision making process and communicate this to participants
Decision makers	Include decision makers in the Charrette where they can choose 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

How to use the Charrette tool?

Before the Charrette

- prepare the Charrette workshop plan 8 weeks before the scheduled date
- select and book a date, suitable venue, and equipment
- assemble a multi-disciplinary team and sort through contractual arrangements
- draft pre-Charrette information and invitations, attach the draft documents to a “communications form” and forward to the Marketing, Creative Services and Media Department for review, editing and approval
- organise printing and distribution of information and invitations to key participants
- promote the Charrette and monitor registrations to determine if a cut off point is necessary or if more effort is required to increase the number of participants (around 20 participants is a workable number)
- send a gentle reminder and any updated details to registrants the day before the Charrette

During the sessions

- be ready to greet participants as they arrive
- facilitate introductions between the design team and participants
- follow the session 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 and further refinement of the designs
- provide information on decisions made in relation to the designs and how they will be used

Resource Required?

- management and financing of 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
- a large venue with lots of space to spread out maps, plans and recording paper and
- catering throughout the day
- facilitators and note takers, technical support staff
- promotion/advertising/information materials
- transportation for everyone if a site visit/field trip is part of the Charrette

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 and ask for feedback
- 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

Case Study – Bowden Village Master Plan

A three-day intensive Design Charrette was held on the site of the proposed Bowden Urban Village, in August 2010, in one of the old factory warehouses, to develop master plan options leading to a Preferred Site Plan. The process involved an intensive brainstorming forum to share ideas and be creative. It was structured to provide input from key stakeholders at key sessions on each of the three days, resulting in a robust iterative process between the

design team and key stakeholders which included community group leaders. At an Open Day held at the City of Charles Sturt Civic Centre, the refined designs from the Charrette were presented to the broader community for feedback.

The Bowden Village site has been transforming into a vibrant inner-city destination blending history and culture with high quality architecture and sustainability.

Tips and helpful hints

Summarising the materials

At the beginning of the Charrette use a PowerPoint presentation summarising the materials sent to participants as in many cases they will not have read the information

Use a reminder

A reminder sent out the day before the Charrette helps people to commit to attendance

Ice-breaker activity

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

Breaks are good

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

Use lay language

Use facilitation skills to help participants focus at a planning/design level and to help designers and techniques to use lay language and explanations

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

Develop a checklist

Develop a checklist for materials and equipment and check with team members about who is bringing what

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 suggestions and produce updated designs. The participants will not be included in these reviews so it is important for the facilitator to explain to them why, and for the designers to show how ideas have been incorporated into the design or not, and why.