

7. Bring Stakeholders Together to Plan

Success in advocacy requires careful planning. To adequately plan for one or more of the options you find promising, you need to involve a diverse group of stakeholders.

Consider the groups of people who will be affected by the project. List their “stake” or interest in the project, discuss what you think would be a “win” for them and identify someone who fits the description. Giving a voice to potential obstructionists can turn them into eventual champions for the project.

According to the National Charrette Institute, “Stakeholders should include final decision makers, all people who will be affected by the outcome, people who have the power to help the project, and people who can block a decision.”¹ Tools to identify and involve stakeholders in planning are also found in the literature of project management and conflict resolution. Bill Lennertz and Aarin Lutzenhiser suggest that you list the diverse points of view that need representation and then identify individuals with these views.

The working session in which stakeholders articulate a vision or design solutions to problems in urban space is often called a ‘charrette.’ The Walkable and Livable Communities Institute defines a contemporary charrette as “a collaborative session to solve urban-design problems that usually involves a group of designers working directly with stakeholders to identify issues and solutions,” adding that “it is more successful than traditional public processes because it focuses on building informed consent.”² For the National Charrette Institute “charrettes are a positive way to channel public interest that can otherwise manifest itself as uninformed opposition and protest.”



Public Toilets in Kawakawa New Zealand. Photo by Reinhard Dietrich "Hundertwasser-WCaussen"- Wikimedia Commons

¹ Bill Lennertz and Aarin Lutzenhiser, “Charrettes 101: Planning for Community Change.” Fannie Mae Foundation, 2003, http://www.charretteinstitute.org/resources/files/BuildingBlocks4_1.pdf, accessed October 9, 2015.

²AARP and Walkable and Livable Communities Institute. “From Inspiration to Action: Implementing Projects to Support Active Living.” 2012. <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/act/transportation/inspiration-to-action-implementing-projects-to-support-active-living-2011-aarp.pdf>. Accessed October 12, 2015.

Begin by articulating a vision to guide the charrette process. Invite participants to identify the issues, voice their views, anticipate challenges and create a shared vision. If resources allow, consider doing this in a separate session.

- Choose a time, a venue and plan for refreshments and equipment. Select a moderator and a note taker.
- Bring together 8 to 20 stakeholders who have different perspectives and types of expertise.
- Provide background information on the purpose and desired outcome of the event.
- After introductions, the moderator summarizes the background, sets goals and leads the discussion.
- Brainstorm in the full group or in break out groups. Generate as many ideas as possible without discussion. Encourage creative thinking and notions that seem wild or unfeasible.
- Record results of group brainstorm so everyone can see them.
- Discuss and prioritize the ideas brainstormed until you have several actionable ideas for individuals or small groups to work on.
- Develop your group's vision. Look for similarities among views of the issues and write a short vision statement.
- Email participants a summary of key themes, issues and the vision. Let participants provide feedback before making anything public.

While creating a shared vision might require only a couple of hours, moving a design to the point it can become an actionable proposal might take a full day or two. The vision helps keep the group focused until a suitable design emerges.

Guided by the vision statement, charrette participants work together to create visual representations of ideas and architectural sketches of

physical projects. If resources allow, engage a facilitator and architects or illustrators who can quickly transform key ideas into images.

During ongoing planning and site identification, you can likely mobilize commitment and resources for a charrette with professionals who can produce more detailed drawings and advise on technical options. Urban planners and designers are trained to turn ideas into images. City officials may be able to help identify an appropriate person. The American Institute of Architects sees pro bono work as part of its professional practice and encourages individual members and firms to serve their community.³ Engineers Without Borders and Architects Without Borders may also be interested in your project.

³ AIA Best Practices. "Pro Bono Services: Improving the Profession." April 2002. <http://www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/secure/documents/document/aiap017690.pdf>. Accessed October 12, 2015.