



Charrettes

Description

A charrette is an intensive planning session usually held at the community level. A small group of participants spend a series of meetings, often over the course of several days, discussing a particular problem or set of problems and develop strategies or plans in response. Participants usually try to achieve a level of consensus or agreement about the actions required.

The method provides an opportunity for accelerated processes of problem analysis, strategising and putting together an action plan. The method allows in-depth discussion and the development of relationships amongst participants.

The technique requires skilled facilitators, and has unstated similarities to aspects of soft-systems methodologies.

How and when the tool is used

The technique has been pioneered in New Zealand by Lucas Associates as an approach to planning for local areas such as town centres. Places where the technique has been used include Waitomo, Arrowtown, Reefton and areas of Christchurch. More lately it appears to have been used as well by Boffa Miskell in Fort Takapuna, Takapuna Head, as a “one day collaborative workshop” or visioning exercise ([visioning](#) 🍯). “The result was a clear vision statement ... along with a number of principles and a series of actions plans to achieve the vision”.

It is important to monitor ongoing activities and outcomes to ensure they are consistent with agreed strategies and action plans.

Application

There are potential flaws in the participatory nature of the charrettes. While facilitators might aim for a representative group to take part, in many circumstances the self-selecting nature of participation means that the people that take part are those who are able to commit the necessary time. They may not represent a cross section of the community.

There is potential, as with any workshop situation ([focus groups and workshops](#) 🍯), for particular interests or voices to dominate. There is also potential for participants to rely on the technical skills of the facilitators or resource people present.

The crucial issue, however, is that while the charrette might generate great energy and a detailed action plan, these often do not translate into action. This is often because clear designations and responsibilities are not established. Local government can have a key role seeing plans through to action.

Many community planning exercises are superficial or highly legalistic or based on formal submissions processes ([submissions](#) 🍯). Also, there tends to be a predominance of technical people with local knowledge involved, with local people standing aside in favour of technical people with technical knowledge.

Integrated planning of tourism for localities or small host communities can potentially be based around in-depth discussion and detailed analysis of issues.

Resource Management Act (RMA) processes ([Resource Management Act Framework](#) 🍯) do not appear to be meeting the needs of host communities in many circumstances, with proposed developments far outside the dimensions of change envisaged through community processes such as community visioning or even expectations of the approved district plan.

Our evaluation

The technique is a useful way to bring host communities into a decision making process. They have the opportunity to define the types of tourism development they want and the limits they wish to impose, on development.