

### Techniques for bringing people together (in-person sessions)

There is no simple solution or one size fits all approach to identifying an effective outreach method. To be most effective, it will often be necessary to combine a range of complementary methods.

If you decide to proceed with in-person outreach we suggest you keep the following in mind when planning events.

- Avoid a date that falls on Statutory Holidays; Long Weekends; Friday, Saturday or Sunday Evenings; and Federal / Provincial / Municipal Election Days.
- Choose a venue that is centrally located within the community, reachable by transit and accessible for those with mobility limitations.
- Tell stakeholders about your session, using a variety of promotional methods and provide a minimum of one week advance notification. Step Four in the Outreach Toolkit, outlines some considerations for raising awareness.
- Have a few people on hand at your session that are prepared to answer questions on all aspects of the proposal and are willing to listen and respond to concerns.
- Consider meeting stakeholders in places or spaces that are familiar to them, especially when engaging with stakeholders that are hard to reach (i.e., Drop-in centres, community-based organizations, etc.). Where are stakeholders most comfortable? How can you bring engagement to them?
- In-person outreach can also include 'popping-up' at already existing events in the community like; Stampede Breakfasts, Community BBQ's or at high-traffic community destinations like recreational centres or libraries. This approach can be helpful in reaching people where they are at and can alleviate potential outreach fatigue that may exist within the community.

The following is a high-level overview of various techniques for bringing people together, and how to best select the right technique based on the situation of the project.

#### Open House

An informal setting with multiple displays where participants rotate through stations and discuss specific topics with project staff and provide input on decisions.

#### Tips:

- Use to improve public understanding about a project, particularly for a complex project
- Should be used when the focus is on seeking input on specific options or alternatives

### Considerations:

- Make sure displays are visually appealing and only share information that is important
- Staff at the open house should be well briefed prior to the event
- Staff should discuss the issues and options with the attendees but not show bias while gathering input
- Plan for how to capture the feedback (flip charts, comment forms, designated notes takers, sticky notes etc.)

### Workshops

A structured public event to facilitate discussion on specific topics where participants work together in small groups on defined assignments. Provides an opportunity for participants to learn from each other and about each other's views.

### Tips:

- Use to focus participants on providing input that can be fed directly into the decision-making process.
- If the process is complex, have engagement practitioners or project team members facilitate each small group
- Use graphic tools (maps, diagrams, etc.) to help small groups work on assigned tasks

### Considerations:

- An expert facilitator is required
- Ensure there is a clear idea of the desired outcome, both when planning the event and when communicating with participants.
- Materials need to be effective at conveying information
- Provide participants with useful tools and equipment to record their ideas – flip charts, markers, post-it notes, sticky dots

### Charrette

A charrette is an intensive, multidisciplinary workshop with the aim of developing a design or vision for a project or planning activity. Stakeholders work together to make decisions about how to achieve a set of pre-determined goals and objectives through a process of creative thinking and consensus building. Involves community, project team and technical experts that work in small groups to design a solution.

### Tips:

- Useful for pulling together comprehensive lists of ideas, scenarios, alternatives, plans or designs for making a decision

- Decision makers must have the ability and willingness to use the decisions made with the charrette. Failure to do so erodes public trust and can jeopardize future involvement of participants

### Considerations:

- Plan for a minimum of 4 hours for a modest issue to several days for a complex issue
- A trained facilitator is necessary
- Use to reach a decision (consensus) within a timeframe with many stakeholders collaborating

### Focused Conversation

A focused conversation is a guided conversation technique based on a specific method of questioning. Focused conversations involve answering a series of questions arranged in four stages:

- Objective – Review facts
- Reflective – Review emotional response
- Interpretive – Review meaning
- Decisional - Consider future action

### Tips:

- It's important to include a diverse group of participants to ensure a wide range of views.
- Best to involve the group in a structured discussion on specific activities, documents, or events.
- The process can be done with small groups or with larger groups by dividing them into smaller circles and sharing the results of the small conversations with the whole group

### Considerations:

- This process can be used in situations where there is controversy, where there is limited information, or where information is misunderstood
- The process provides an excellent way to focus people on a topic long enough to determine what direction is needed.

### World Café

A meeting process featuring a series of simultaneous conversations in response to predetermined questions. Participants change tables during the process and focus on identifying common ground in response to each question.

### Tips:

- About 2-3 hours is needed for this technique

- Particularly useful when you want to be sure to explore a topic from multiple perspectives
- Allows for people to work in small groups without having to provide staff facilitators
- Nominate a table host for each table who will remain at the table when others leave and briefly share insights from prior conversations so others can link and build on ideas
- Make the space actually look like a café, with small tables that seat four or five people

### Considerations:

- Use to gain a high quantity of responses on specific topics in a short time.
- Useful for gathering collective intelligence on experiences or ideas around an issue
- Room set up is important. The room should feel inviting so that people feel comfortable to be themselves
- Encourage participants to write, doodle, and draw key ideas on tablecloths/flip charts/sticky notes

### Focus Groups

A special type of group interview designed to listen and gather information from a pre-defined group on a particular issue or topic for a clearly defined purpose.

### Tips:

- Use to interview several people simultaneously
- Usually last between 1-2 hours
- Help to generate a dialogue about an issue in a small forum
- Consider how you will capture the dialogue/information provided by participants
- Questions should be concrete, specific, focused, simple, and open ended

### Considerations:

- Can be a powerful method to gain a deeper understanding of an issue or topic
- Participants may be more comfortable talking in a group than in an individual interview. Interactions oftentimes generate more discussion and, therefore more information
- Group discussion allows participants to build off each other's responses

### Town Hall

An organized large group meeting usually used to make a presentation and give the public an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments.

### Tips:

- Only use in strategic circumstances. Town halls can escalate out of control if emotions are high.
- Use a strong facilitator/moderator to facilitate discussion and questions from the audience and keep the meeting on time and flowing

### Considerations:

- Has the potential to only focus on the negative and to only hear from vocal people that have the confidence to speak up

### Information Session

An informal setting with multiple displays where participants rotate through stations and discuss specific topics with project staff and the purpose is to learn about the project.

### Tips:

- Use to improve public understanding about a project, particularly for a complex project
- Should be used when the focus is on information sharing.

### Considerations:

- Make sure displays are visually appealing and only share information that is important
- Staff at the information should be well briefed prior to the event

### Meetings

An organized meeting with an invited or target stakeholder group to make a presentation and give the attendees an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments. This can include attending a regularly scheduled Community Association meeting or having a one-on-one meeting with a neighbour.

### Tips:

- Prepare an agenda in advance
- Assign someone to take meeting minutes and share minutes with group following the meeting so there is record of the conversation.

### Considerations:

- Needs a strong facilitator/moderator to facilitate discussion and keep the meeting on time and flowing

*Note: this has been adapted from the International Association for Public Participation: Techniques for Effective Public Participation*