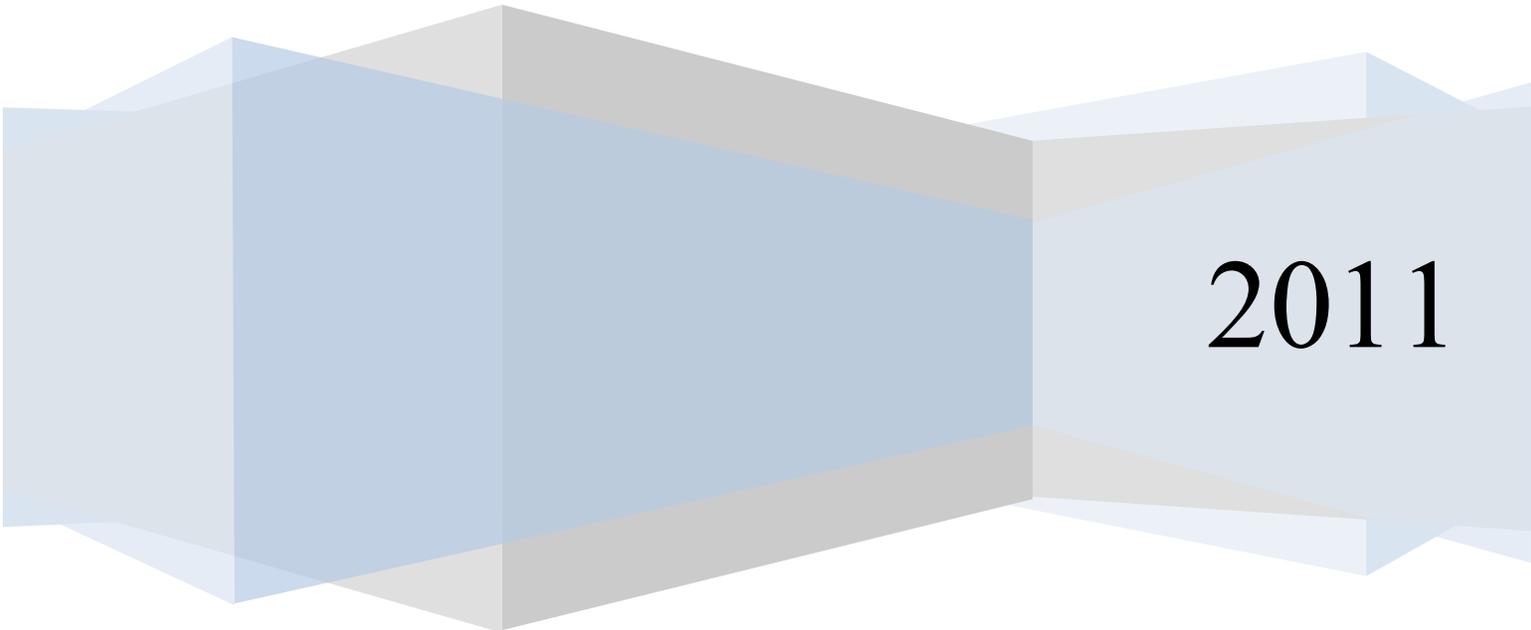


Virginia Polytechnic and State University

# The Charrette Process

Perceptions among Major Stakeholders

**John W. Laughead, IV**



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## Introduction

Open community input meetings, also called charrettes, are vital to the success of sustainable design and planning decisions. In the past, the status quo regarding designing was to have only a small group of selected stakeholders at the design table, without leveraging the end user for their expertise. This small group would then evaluate the owner's program and build a design constructed on what they thought was the optimal solution based on their assumptions of occupancy usage and their individual experience. Thus, often these facility's designs do not meet the needs of their end users, over a long period of time.

Recently, a move toward bringing the end users to the decision table has increased and is now viewed as a positive trend. Some of those reasons include:

- 1) Project decision makers are becoming tired of meeting disappointed residents when large-scale, controversial projects or plans are presented to them at public hearings attended by crowds of angry residents complaining about having little prior input (Lennertz et al. 2008).
- 2) A study showed that when end users are engaged in the design process, they have better buy-in (Grudin & Pruitt 2002).
- 3) Charrettes are sometimes requested by owners, governments, and other governing bodies as part of planning and design (Lindsay et al. 2003).

With the increase in the number of charrettes and the decrease in the old way of doing things, there is anecdotal evidence that charrettes lead to a better overall occupant designed projects with greater acceptance among end users . However, their effectiveness is vulnerable to a variety of problems that include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Charrettes can be expensive, costing between \$75,000 and \$250,000, which make them difficult to justify on smaller design or planning projects (Lennertz et al. 2008).
- 2) When the charrette host has to cut cost, they sometimes do this by having volunteers facilitate community meetings with little to no experience facilitating; these volunteers are in a vulnerable situation that could affect the charrette's consensus. Research has shown that highly trained facilitators are more effective than facilitators with less training, and it has also been found that meetings are more effective when group members and/or leaders are provided with some facilitation training (Hoffman 1959; Maier et al. 1957).

- 3) Lastly, community input can suffer from a general lack of communication between the charrette host (management) and the constituents, who are enlisted for their expertise for a variety of reasons (Holman 2007). This can lead to a poor design or plan because participants are misaligned with the charrette's goal.

This point is illustrated by an example from a charrette hosted in the New River Valley, VA in July 2011:

“I would have wished for better use of the time. I understand the personal need to wear a tie, draw attention to oneself and expound on the benefits of the occasion, but it wasn't necessary. We could have been told to get right to work, and the ‘volunteer’ facilitator could have gone over the rules, and we could have gained more time. Yes, the folks who made it happen were important, but not nearly as important as getting this important work done.” –  
Charrette Participant Placematter.org

There is no lack of complaints and problems with the overall open community charrette process when one looks closely. However, if there is no effective input at charrettes, design and planning will suffer and as a result end users could experience less-than-desirable outcomes. We need a better way to get public input through charrettes.

## **Background**

This section introduces the charrette process and history and purpose of this type of event.

### ***What is a Charrette?***

The history of traditional Charrettes dates back many years. The word Charrette is a French word that literally means "cart" and it is used to describe the last minute final push that youthful architecture students used to meet a project deadline (Lennertz et al. 2008). As the story goes, these young French architecture students had to put their work into the Charrette or cart as it rolled by, or their assignment would be late. Stories account for these students hanging on the sides of these carts, trying to finalize the smallest of details on their project (Lennertz et al. 2008).

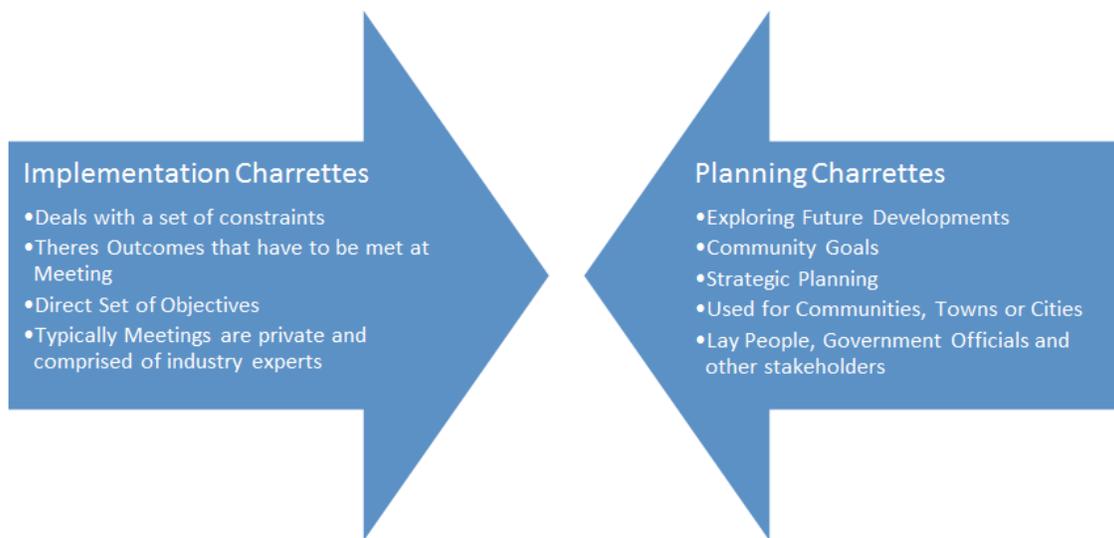
Charrettes traditionally use a time limit to help decision making. Time is one of the



important elements to Charrettes because it accelerates the decision-making process and reduces unconstructive negotiation tactics (Lennertz et al. 2008). Time can be the facilitator's best friend at charrettes because it can create an environment of quick rewards.

### ***Types of Charrettes***

In the simplest terms, charrettes are of two kinds: visioning and implementation charrettes (Figure 1). Visioning charrettes create illustrations of what a community, project, or region would look like if it were to be built per the results of the charrette (Condon 2008).



**Figure 1:** Types of Charrettes

Implementation charrettes are conducted when there is a need for an implementable plan and associated regulatory documents. The participants should include developers, municipal planners, engineers, public safety officers, state and regional regulators, utility providers, and advocacy groups. These people are classified as stakeholders (Condon 2008) and these events could last up to four or five days in length.

Visioning charrettes are speculative explorations of a possible future not directly tied to a government-regulated development or redevelopment proposal. These charrettes are most commonly conducted at the scale of the urban district (Condon 2008) and they provide an opportunity for citizens to work to address public interest, values, or issues. Visioning charrettes ask participants to answer four basic questions about their community:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?

Visioning charrette efforts can last for several months to a year or more. However, the initial meeting takes about four to eight hours depending on the involvement. Each charrette meeting can be either open to the general public and any interested parties, or may be closed and limited in participation to invited stakeholders only. The output of the visioning charrette is a series of compelling but speculative drawings or documents for a real site. Visioning charrettes should have both design professionals and nonprofessional stakeholders at the table. These charrettes “make words real, create a common language of solutions, and expose policy contradictions while under an umbrella of a ‘no-risk’ process of sharing” (Condon 2008). It is very important to clarify roles with each group member. However, at times, group members may be responsible for multiple roles in a single charrette. Facilitators are advised not to play any role but facilitator (Mitchell & Dunn 2003).

In this research, the focus will be on visioning and not implementation charrettes, since there are many opportunities to improve the process and outcomes of these charrettes to support the design process.

## **Research Design**

This section describes the key elements of the research design, including the scope, research question and hypotheses to be tested, problem statement, and objectives.

### ***Scope***

This research will explore the strengths and weaknesses of open public visioning charrettes in the U.S. from four different stakeholder perspectives: Professional Facilitator, Untrained Facilitator, Public Participants and Owners. Open public visioning charrettes have a number of participants such as regular hosting staff, professional facilitators, untrained volunteer facilitators, participants who are members of the general public, owners who commission the charrette events, and other public officials depending on the charrette’s purpose. All of these participants are needed to develop strong community consensus, but some are more important when it comes to drawing conclusions in this research. Regular charrette hosting staff is important to have at charrettes because it makes some of the tasks, exercises, and behind-the-scenes consensus



work much simpler. However, in this research, this group will be excluded because their roles in the charrette can be substituted for, replaced, or sometimes eliminated by other groups of participants. This research will include perspectives from professional and untrained facilitators, public participants, and owners (Charrette data solicitors).

Professional facilitators bring a unique perspective to the research because they have been trained to observe, redirect, and keep the charrette on pace. As their title suggests, they have experience in great and not-so-great charrettes, which can give the research further strength. These qualities are important to the charrette process and can very much aid in triangulating the strengths and opportunities for improvement in public open visioning charrettes in the U.S. Furthermore, professional facilitators have been exposed to some types of training or certifying programs that will give a further uniqueness to their perspective.

Untrained Facilitators, sometimes called Volunteer Facilitators, are asked to take and perform often unfamiliar roles and tasks. Some of these roles include having to remain unbiased while developing consensus where the outcomes may affect them, to learn on the fly to redirect and motivate participants, and to organize ideas efficiently. Untrained facilitators may also be local residents and have relationships with participants who they are facilitating, creating a unique situation of possible conflicts of interest. These attributes further validate them as important stakeholders to the research.

Owners (Charrette Data Solicitors) are perhaps one of the most important stakeholders in the charrette process because these are the people who set the charrette in motion. In this research, an owner is defined as a person or organization that commissions the charrette to be done and underwrites the cost of the charrette in exchange for the results and insights it provides. An owner's definition of a successful charrette may be very different than the other three types of stakeholders involved in the research because their expectations may be more data-driven and less about the process used to obtain the data. This stakeholder group brings an unrivaled insight to the research.

It can be argued that the most important stakeholder at open public charrettes is the public participants. They are the group that all the other stakeholders are there to assist and develop their ideas and thoughts to form a consensus. Their perception of the event is anticipated to be much different than the other three stakeholders because this group has little "behind the scene" work and more of a participation role.

These four types of participants are the focus of this research, and the differences and similarities among their perspectives are explored throughout. It is important to note that



many charrette participants, particularly those playing facilitator roles, have also participated in charrettes as owners or public participants. Therefore, it is possible that one person can represent more than one of the four roles being explored in this research.

### ***Research Question and Hypotheses***

The questions addressed in this research are as follows:

1. From the perspective of the major stakeholders, including professional facilitators, volunteer facilitators, public participants, and owners, what are the perceived opportunities for improvements and the strengths that exist now in open public visioning charrettes in the U.S.?
2. Are there significant differences among different stakeholder perspectives in terms of these strengths and improvement opportunities?

In this exploratory research, the aim was to uncover areas of opportunities and strengths that already exist and can be leveraged to create better communication. The researcher expected to find common themes across the semi-structured interviews within stakeholder groups such as perceptions of communication deficiency among the stakeholders, possible undertones of political motives coming from public participants directed toward the other three stakeholder groups, and a lack of charrette process understanding from public participants. These expectations were used to develop interview questions that would allow interviewees to frame their experiences in ways that answered the research questions.

### ***Problem Statement and Objectives***

Public open visioning charrettes can be both problematic and successful for a number of reasons. The goal of this research is to identify opportunities for improvements and also discover the areas in which the process is successful from the perspective of the different stakeholder groups. To achieve this goal, specific objectives include:

1. Identify key populations of charrette participants to interview.
2. Develop an interview process that captures participant experiences from multiple perspectives.
3. Interview the participants to determine their experiences and viewpoints on the charrette process.
4. Analyze the interviews to identify key themes, similarities, and dissimilarities among stakeholder groups, and identify improvement opportunities and things that work well about charrettes across all participant groups.

The following sections describe the approach used in the research for achieving these objectives.

## **Methods**

This section addresses the process of how the research was completed and how the data was collected. The researcher broke the research down into four major phases, corresponding to the four objectives of the research. Subtasks were used to further detail some of the more important steps in the research. The subtasks were very important to this process-driven approach because they added further clarity to the overall process of developing, analyzing, and presenting the findings.

### ***Task 1 - Identifying and Recruiting Participant Stakeholders***

The first step in the research was to identify and began recruiting the participants for the semi-structured interview process. From the start of the research the researcher identified this step as one of the critical path tasks because of the relatively small number of acknowledged experts in the subject matter who were accessible to the research team for interviews. The completion of this task was broken down into four subtasks as follows:

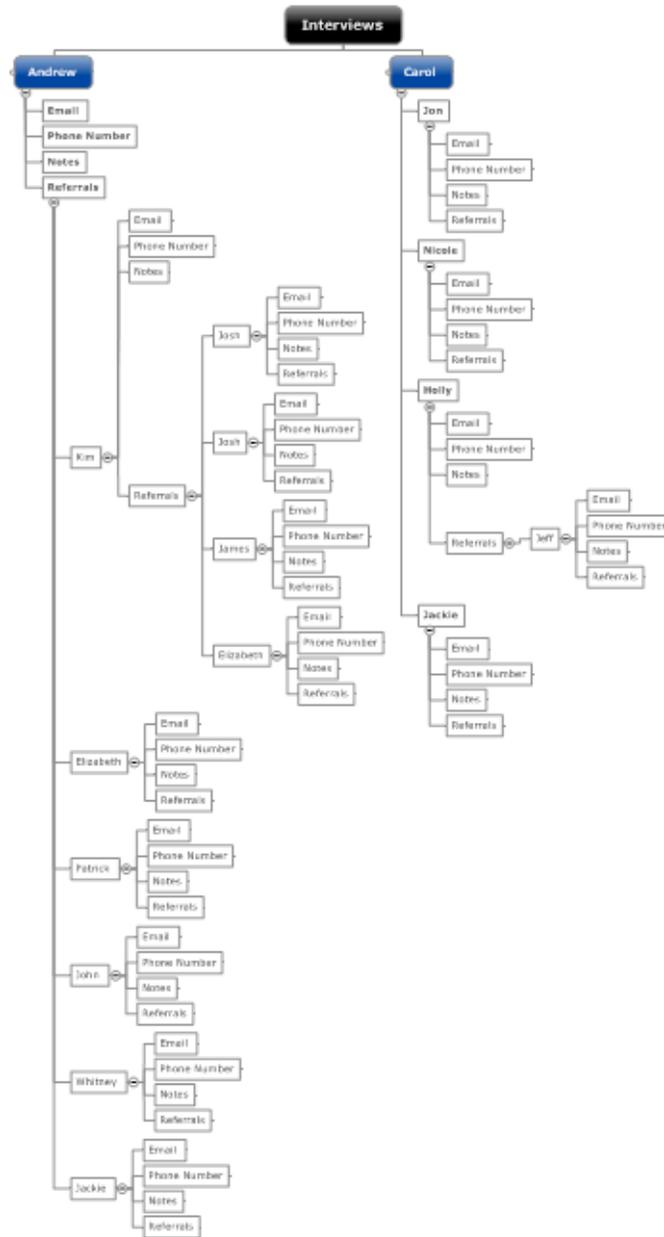
1. The researcher built a participant database.
2. The researcher leveraged professional contacts and relationships to initially populate the recruiting database.
3. The researcher attended professional trade events to further populate the recruiting database.
4. The researcher developed recruiting materials per the Institutional Review Board's mandates.

#### **Subtask 1.1 - Building the Participant Database**

Building the participant database was only the first component of the overall successful organization of the entire project. The database was built to control and protect the prospective interview participants' personal information and keep a record of participant information for the future interview soliciting opportunities. Figure 2 is an example of the simple but effective participant database mind map structure the researcher created and then utilized in the study. One unique aspect of this database of participant information was that the researcher created it in a way that it was apparent who were the key persons or opinion leaders to know in the participant fields by how many successful referrals they



were able to refer as key people to interview. In Figure 2, all names and contact information has been removed to protect participants' personal information. This Sub-task set the stage for executing the subsequent tasks.



**Figure 2:** Participant Database Mind Map

### **Subtask 1.2 - Populating the Participant Database: Professional Contacts and Relationships**

Once the database in Sub-task One had been completed it was important to begin the

critical path step of populating the Participant Database. This Sub-task started with leveraging professional contacts and relationships that could yield interview participants. The professional contacts consisted of persons the researcher met at past charrette events or networked with that had experience in the charrette process. These contacts proved to be slightly less effective in volume than the contacts leveraged from professional relationships. In this research professional relationships consisted of professors and committee members who have extensive experiences in charrettes in the greater Blacksburg community. Their community expertise proved to be a major success in the future interview recruitment of participants in the next subtask.

### **Subtask 1.3 - Populating the Participant Database: Professional Charrette Events**

It was important for the researcher to attend professional charrette events in the New River Valley for many reasons but in this subtask the most important reason for attending these events was to identify more persons for the interview participant database. Meeting the people who were initiating and promoting these events proved to be also very effective for the research because the researcher was able to both add interview participants to the database and also develop a better mental framework for the development of the semi-structured interview questions in later tasks. At this point in the research, no participants had yet been contacted about participating in the interviews.

### **Subtask 1.4 - Developing Institutional Review Board Materials**

At this point in the research, the researcher focused on building the recruitment materials for the Institutional Review Board's (IRB's) application (see Appendix X). This material consisted of an e-mail script that was later sent to the individuals in the Participant Database. The IRB was helpful by giving guidance to the researcher to complete the initial outline of the e-mail script. The approved recruitment script is located in Appendix (X).

After the recruitment materials were developed and pools of potential participants were identified, the next task focused on developing materials to conduct interviews and obtain data from charrette participants.

### ***Task 2 - Developing the Interview Materials***

Tasks 1 and 2 were completed concurrently with one another, to allow the researcher to take advantage of the time savings it provided. The researcher was able to complete these

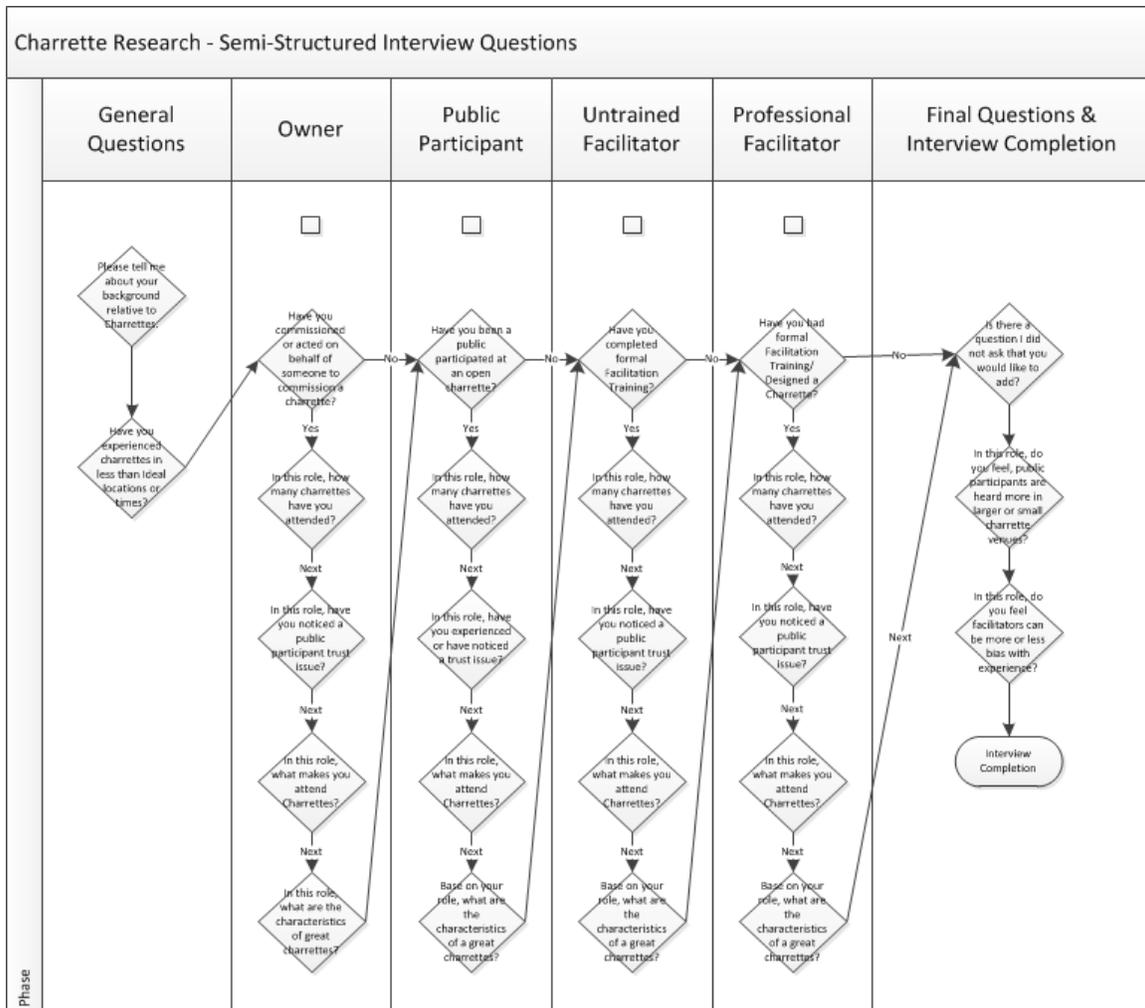


steps this way because the two tasks did not share any type of start to finish relationship. Semi-structured interviews were selected for data collection because they afforded flexibility in the interview process to pursue areas of particular interest while still obtaining answers to a predefined set of questions. The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to delve into greater detail on certain topics during the interview. Developing the interview materials was a process that required a greater sense of understanding and input from committee members. This process took three weeks and required the following subtasks to complete:

1. The researcher created the initial semi-structured interview questions.
2. The researcher pilot-tested the semi-structured interview questions.
3. The researcher completed interview materials per the Institutional Review Board's mandates and submitted the official IRB application.

### **Subtask 2.1 - Developing Initial Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

The initial semi-structured Interview questions were built and revised multiple times. They were first revised based on the suggestion of the researcher's committee and further revised as the research progressed but not after they had been approved by the IRB. The initial set of seven questions was first revised to be more relevant to the major stakeholder groups that were within the scope of the research, including Owners, Public Participants, Untrained Facilitators and Professional Facilitators. Additionally, the research team determined that many participants that would be taking part in the research would qualify to be classified in more than one stakeholder group. Accordingly, it would be vital that the researcher be able to collect data from each of the multiple perspectives represented by each individual. Therefore, the researcher developed the interview instrument in Figure 3 to permit classification of each interviewee and easy visual organization of questions that must be completed for each perspective. Questions were organized using a swimlane format (Ambler 2005) to segregate questions according to stakeholder role.



**Figure 3: Swimlane Interview Protocol**

The interview instrument in Figure 3 was a key instrument that allowed the researcher to capture all the data from each multi-qualifier participant, while minimizing the face to face time required of each interviewee. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked each interviewee a very broad question about their experience in the charrette process. Based on their answers to this question, the researcher was able to better understand what stakeholder groups attend charrettes and could classify them into one or more stakeholder groups. Then the researcher would check the box(es) corresponding to the roles the in which each interviewee had experience, and during the interview the researcher would know what set(s) of questions to ask the interviewee.

### Subtask 2.2 – Conducting the Pilot Interviews

The researcher pilot tested the interview questions twice with a peer and member of the advisory committee who had experience in multiple charrette participant roles and received great and immediate feedback for the study. Revisions were made accordingly and the pilot test was deemed successful. The questions were formed in a fashion to be

able to allow the interviewee the freedom to speak at high levels or low levels of knowledge about a particular subject, and the researcher was able to guide the interview as they progressed.

### **Subtask 2.3 - Institutional Review Board Application**

The semi-structured interview questions were completed and inserted into the fourteen page IRB document that was sent for approval. The University approved the research and sent the researcher an approval letter. This application and letter is located in Appendix (X), along with the interviewee consent form. This process took six days to approve.

Having developed and received formal approval to proceed with the interview protocol, the next task involved actually conducting interviews with charrette stakeholders to obtain the research data.

### ***Task 3 - Completing the Interviews***

Task 3 was the first time the researcher contacted the interviewee from the database developed in Task 1. This was by far the most critical part of the research as it was the first time the research method was used to collect data for the research. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled and completed at the convenience of each interviewee. The following subtasks were completed in this step:

1. The researcher contacted the interviewees
2. The researcher scheduled the interviews with each interviewee
3. The researcher completed the interviews.

### **Subtask 3.1 - Contacting the Interviewees**

The researcher contacted interviewees primarily through e-mail. This approach was the most effective way for the interviewees and also the most convenient. The researcher used the approved recruitment script outlined in the previous tasks that had been approved by the IRB. The researcher received some immediate responses to the request for interviews and noticed that some recruited participants forwarded the recruitment e-mail to other potential interviewees. Each individual to which the e-mail was forwarded was added to the participant database created in Task 1.

### **Subtask 3.2 - Scheduling the Interviews**

The researcher scheduled interviews in two ways, first by e-mail and secondly by phone. Scheduling the interviews over the phone was a more difficult process than was expected because most potential interviewees did not have their schedules handy. This led the researcher to create a Doodle poll (see <http://www.doodle.com>), which is an online graphical schedule, which displayed the most opportune times for the completion of the interview. The Doodle poll enabled the potential interviewees the flexibility to make their own schedule for the interviews.



### **Subtask 3.3 - Completing the Interviews**

After interviews were scheduled and confirmed, the research met each interviewee at their worksite or home and conducted the interviews. One interview was conducted over the telephone for the convenience of the interviewee: all the interviews but this one were completed in person. In-person interviews were the primary method of completing the semi-structured interviews because this format allowed the researcher to understand the body language of the interviewee. An audio recording of each interview was digitally recorded per the IRB application, and would later be deleted after the data was captured in Task 4. No interview lasted over forty minutes, and all the interviewees selected for interviews multi-qualified for several stakeholder groups.

A total of five individuals were interviewed using this process, of which three were selected as representative case studies to be developed in the next step. After all interviews were completed, the next step was to process the interview recordings and capture and analyze the resulting data in Task 4.

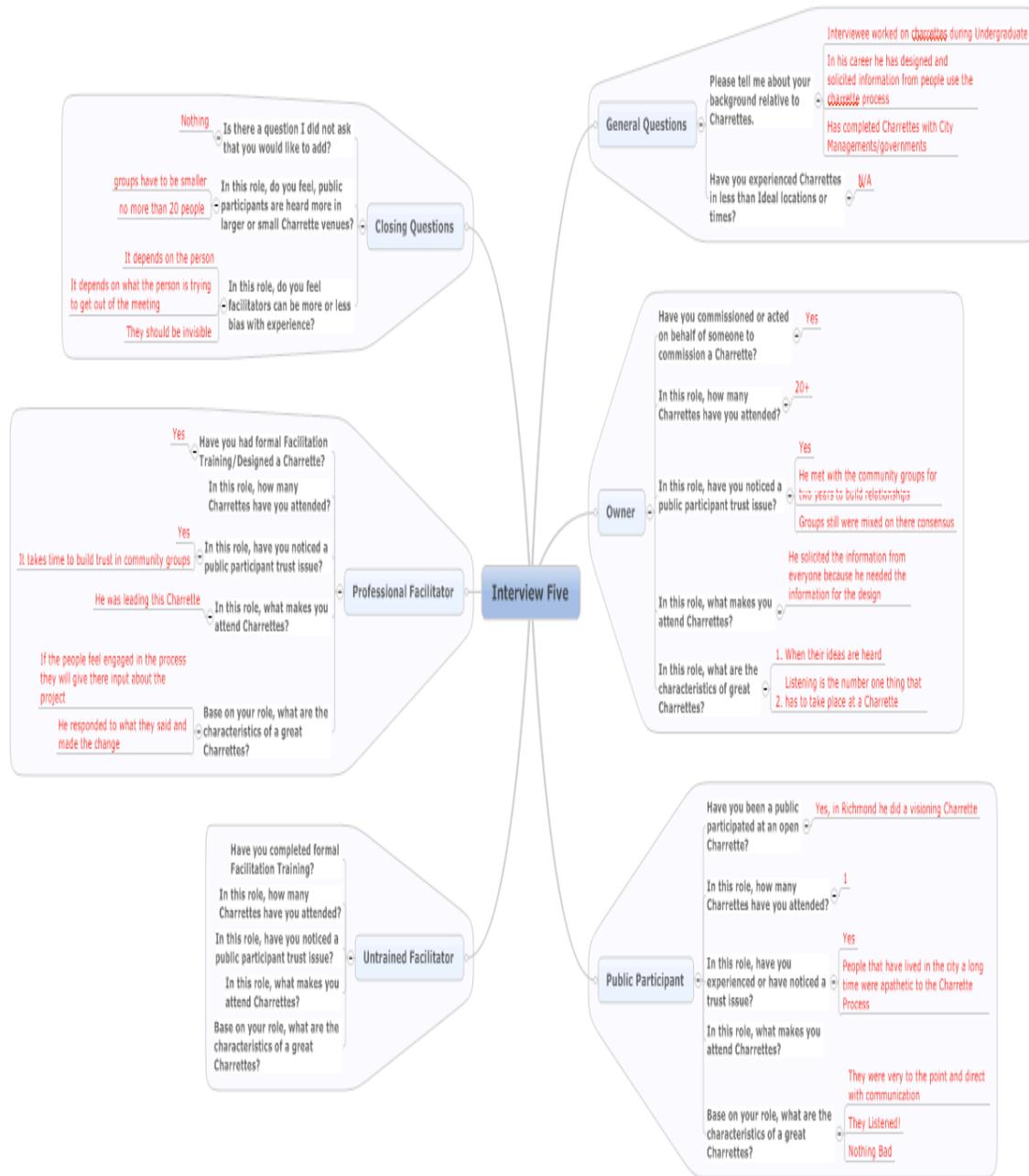
### ***Task 4 - Analyzing the Data***

Task 4 involved processing the digital recordings of the interviews and extracting data that could be further analyzed to answer the research questions. Four subtasks comprised this task as follows:

1. The researcher captured the data using thematic analysis and mind maps
2. The researcher used a detailed narrative approach to capture selected interviewees as case studies
3. The researcher completed a cross case comparison by stakeholder role
4. The researcher drew conclusions about the hypotheses of the research based on the data.

### **Subtask 4.1 – Capturing the Data**

After completing the interviews, the researcher was left with digital audio recordings of the interviews as a source of data for the research. The qualitative method *thematic analysis* (Howitt & Cramer 2008) was used as a technique to extract key themes from the interview recordings to capture the respondents' answers to interview questions. The researcher constructed a radial diagram or mind map (Burgess & Smith 2010) to capture the themes while listening to the audio recording, and answers were coded to each question directly onto the mind map. Figure 4 shows an example of a mind map from the thematic analysis.



**Figure 4:** Example of a Mind Map used for Thematic Analysis

## Subtask 4.2 – Developing Case Studies

After each transcript had been processed and themes captured in a mind map, case study narratives were developed for three interviews representing a spectrum of the people interviewed and roles they played. Cases were developed by creating a narrative to correspond to the mind maps that would highlight the key themes that emerged. Cases

were purposively selected from the set of five interviews to form a cross section of the population of charrette participants interviewed.

### **Subtask 4.3 – Conducting Cross-case Comparison**

After the narratives for the three cases had been developed, a cross-case comparison was developed by stakeholder role to look for commonalities and dissimilarities across cases. Portions of each case corresponding to specific stakeholder roles were grouped, and the answers of each respondent were compared with other respondents in similar roles to determine similarities and differences. These comparisons were written up in narrative form and used as the basis for conclusions in the final subtask of the research.

### **Subtask 4.4 – Drawing Conclusions**

The final step of the research was to revisit the research questions and hypotheses based on the analyzed data and determine what conclusions could be drawn and with what strength. These conclusions are detailed in the final portions of this report. The next section of the report presents the findings of the research, including case studies, cross-case comparisons, and conclusions.

## **Findings**

This section presents the findings from the research in three primary formats: selected interviews captured as case study narratives, a cross-case comparison by stakeholder role, and conclusions with regard to the original research questions and hypotheses.

### ***Case Studies***

Three case studies were selected to provide a spectrum of findings out of the set of all interviews conducted in the study. These three cases were selected because all of the charrettes attended by these participants were independent of one another, and they represented the broadest range of experience levels and experiences with different types and contexts of charrettes of all participants. Mind maps were completed for the other two interviewees, but were reserved to validate conclusions drawn from the other three interviews.

#### **Case Study One: Brent (Owner, Public Participant)**

Brent has a military background and has performed and participated in over twelve charrettes in Iraq. One of his job responsibilities in the military is to host neighborhood charrettes to solicit information from the populations in the countries in which he served to learn how the United States (U.S.) forces can better serve them through the issuance of Micro Grants. In this context, Brent experienced working

with charrette participants only one or two times for each participant, and thus did not have extensive opportunities to build relationships with his constituents like some of the other stakeholders interviewed. Brent remembers this task as being challenging and frustrating at times, but overwhelmingly gratifying when both sides were able to reach a consensus that was mutually beneficial for both parties. In this study, Brent qualified for two of the four stakeholder groups, Owner and Public Participant, through his military charrette experience.

As a Public Participant, Brent has participated in two charrettes that were both in Iraq while he was serving in the U.S. Military. His primary motivation to attend these two charrettes as a public participant was to develop better understanding and learning of what being a public participant was like in a charrette. Some of his key observations in this role included a focus on facilitators. In his experience, the facilitators failed to partner well with the public participants. Public participants distrusted the motives of the owners and facilitators, and any type of follow up was rarely completed.

Brent was asked if he experienced or observed a distrust within the public participant ranks while in the public participant stakeholder group. His answer was that he did and “it seem to stem from the public participants”, which were primarily Iraqi nationals. He explained that this made it difficult for both parties to develop any type of consistent consensus because in most instances they shared an adversarial relationship. When Brent was asked about the characteristics of a great charrette from the public participant role, he had several responses, including the observation that great charrettes are characterized by the validation of participants’ thoughts, ideas, and motives by the directing charrette body. Also, Brent reported that small charrettes are better than larger ones and organization is key.

Brent has experience in over ten charrettes where he participated as part of the owner stakeholder group. In this capacity Brent was asked similar questions to those of the public participant groups. He felt that his motivation to participate in the owner stakeholder group involved many facets of participation as he believed that he could make a positive difference in the lives of the people he was representing. The researcher asked if the trust issue remained a factor from the owner’s stakeholder prospective. Brent believes that the trust issue among public participants was even more evident from the owner’s perspective than the public participants’ perspective. He recalled events that made his duty especially more difficult because the public participants simply did not trust the owners and therefore they were less likely to create a consensus, even though it was mutually



beneficial for both parties to do so.

Brent believed that charrettes could be more efficient, if the owners or the data soliciting party prepared for the event better. Brent's suggestions for improving charrettes included:

- 1) Reach out to the public participants before the charrette for their thoughts
- 2) Organize the event better to value the public participants' time
- 3) Follow up after the charrette with the opinion leaders from the public participants' stakeholder group

Overall, Brent felt that the charrette process was time well spent and with a few modifications, he could be more effective in the capacity in which he utilized charrettes.

### **Case Study Two: Paul (Professional Facilitator, Untrained Facilitator, Owner)**

Paul has had over fifteen years' experiences in several different stakeholder groups including owners, untrained facilitator, and professional facilitator roles. Paul's primary experiences in using the charrette process came while he performed his job responsibilities as a Capital Planning Officer for a University on the east coast, and thus he had the opportunity to do considerable pre- and post-charrette follow-up with charrette participants, especially opinion leaders. His job responsibilities included soliciting public feedback on several proposed programs for building maintenance and operations at a university.

Paul identified himself as an overachiever who served people through the charrette process because not only did he have to do it, he wanted to do it. Soliciting public input before the proposed planning process made his role much more predictable. As an owner, he went above and beyond his duty to recruit opinion leaders to attend his charrettes so that they could relay the mutually beneficial consensus back to their constituents. He believed that opinion leaders were the key to having an accepted mutually beneficial consensus among all parties involved because they are essentially the "de facto leader" regardless of their position or ranking in their department.

In the stakeholder role of the owner, Paul could recall organizing twelve events to solicit information that otherwise would have not been analyzed. Paul was asked to discuss if he noticed any type of public participant distrust issues and his immediate

response was, “Absolutely”. He expanded on his response by saying that it was very evident when a trust issue exists; however, it was not always a problem at all the charrettes. Paul stated that typically, the distrust issue is on the table at any charrette that has major implications without any pre-planning having taken place before the actual charrette has been hosted. Paul reiterated that proper identification of the opinion leaders can lead to a more productive and predictable charrette consensus.

Paul's reason for attending the charrettes he has participated in as an owner were because he intended to make his job responsibilities more predictable and therefore more successful for all the parties involved. His primary goal, among many others, was to implement successful capital projects through the charrette process. The charrette process gave him the data he needed to accomplish this task.

When asked, "What are the characteristics of great charrettes from an owner's perspective?" Paul responded that pre-planning is the one predictor that could separate bad charrettes from great charrettes. He added that in his experience, owners that "do not plan, plan to fail" and he stressed the importance of efficiently managing other peoples' time so they do not feel like it has been wasted.

Paul started his first charrette experience as an untrained facilitator, which classified him into the untrained facilitator stakeholder group. Paul recalled his first charrette experience and first untrained facilitator experience as an "a-ha" moment. It was his first time learning that obtaining public input can be done efficiently. Paul noted that he has also seen other facets of charrettes that can be improved upon.

Moreover, this motivated him to continue on with this methodology of obtaining public input data. Paul reported that his role in public input is critical for his success as it is a key way for him to obtain needed information.

In the untrained facilitator role, Paul did not remember seeing any trust issues among the public participant ranks but admitted that he wasn't too keen on looking for it because he was more focused on the meetings' operations than the pulse of the public participants. Paul was then asked by the researcher to describe the characteristics of a great charrette from this role. His response was that everyone should be respectful of each other's opinions and thoughts, and participants should make an effort to get along with each other.

The final stakeholder group Paul qualified for was the professional facilitator group. This group represents facilitators that have accomplished formal facilitator training or have designed a charrette event for implementation. Paul has taken part in acting

as a professional facilitator for many of the charrettes he has designed due to budget constraints and the convenience factor. This has given him a unique set of experiences that further validates his thoughts and suggestions about charrettes. Paul's primary motivation to take part in this stakeholder group is to obtain needed information. He mentioned that he had limited resources to hire anyone to facilitate. Paul felt that characteristics that made his professional facilitator role successful were similar to the characteristics that made his untrained facilitator experience successful. This included an element of respect among the participants and their thoughts and opinions. Paul noted that it was very important to follow up with participants once the charrette was completed to let them know if their input was adopted.

Paul's insight to the charrette field was very unique and important to the study. The research was substantially improved by his participation in the study.

### **Case Study Three: Nicole (Untrained Facilitator, Public Participant)**

Nicole is a resident of the New River Valley area who generously donates her time to local government and nonprofit groups in the New River Valley area. She has participated in over five charrettes in the area and is more acquainted with the terminology “public input meeting” than “charrette”. Most recently, she has begun increasing her role in the charrette process by volunteering for untrained facilitator positions throughout the region. Her motivation stems from a particular piece of local governance being debated in the public arena through the charrette process. In this study, Nicole qualified as both an untrained facilitator and a public participant.

As a public participant, Nicole has been motivated by many different factors including the reasons mentioned earlier. Nicole is also interested in participating in local charrettes, as she has been a resident of the New River Valley for her entire life. Nicole feels that her participation is important since she has a vested interest in where she resides. When asked about whether distrust existed between her, the public participants, and the leadership of the charrette, she answered no. Nicole indicated that there are not any distrust issues to report on. She recognized the leadership of the charrette to develop the consensus of the group and not to develop anything other than that consensus. She was very trusting of the leadership of the charrette. The researcher asked her whether she noticed distrust among other participants at any time and she paused and said, yes, some people were very politically driven in one particular charrette in the New River Valley. It seemed she

noticed that some participants had preconceived distrust of the leadership of the charrette before it took place.

The third question the researcher asked Nicole was what are the characteristics of a great charrette? Nicole stated that there are several characteristics that make a great charrette. The characteristics include:

- 1) Giving people the opportunity to have their voices heard to assist with facilitating community-based decisions
- 2) Promote respect for peoples' opinions
- 3) It's simply a great way to be involved in the community.

It is also worth mentioning that Nicole stated that one characteristic that made the charrette process difficult is when people do not trust the leadership. Nicole recalled the example she gave earlier in the interview where she experienced a situation where the leader was not trusted by many of the participants.

Nicole also qualified in the untrained facilitator stakeholder group. When asked what motivated her to volunteer for this position she stated, "if not me, then who?" She stated that in her one-time experience in the role she did not witness any distrust among the public participant ranks. She felt that the best characteristics of a good charrette from the untrained facilitator role would be that the facilitator would be able to build a consensus that represented the group and that no one person would use this time to waste everyone else's time.

Nicole's input to the research gave great insight to the impact that one person can make when they are motivated and their thoughts and ideas are validated through the community charrette process. She also represented the person with the least experience in the more formal roles of facilitator or owner, and thus brought a different perspective to the cases.

### ***Cross-case Comparison***

Having developed each of the three interviews into case study narratives, the next step was to compare the findings across stakeholder roles to identify similarities and dissimilarities among the interviewees. The individuals that participated in the semi-structured interview studies were very different but yet shared several similarities. They all had a passion to be understood and the drive to be a part of the charrette process. Brent and Paul both have participated in more than ten charrettes and Nicole has participated in five charrettes. Brent has some of the most unique charrette experiences by serving overseas with the occupying U.S. Forces in Iraq, while Paul and Nicole are

locals who have decided to get involved in their communities. Nicole and Paul reported that they have had positive experiences during their involvement with charrettes. Nicole, unlike the others, has spent most of her charrette experiences as a public participant. The following subsections describe these comparisons by stakeholder role.

### **Owners – Brent and Paul**

In this research, both Brent and Paul have participated in the owner’s stakeholder group. They were asked similar questions based on their previous experiences in this role. The first question they were asked was focused on trust. Brent and Paul were asked to recall if they had observed trust issues among the public participant stakeholder group. Both Brent and Paul admitted that they observed an inherent trust issue with the public participant groups but for very different reasons. Paul experienced trust issues among the public participants that attended his charrettes. Paul reported that this was partially due to the participants feeling that their opinions were not important and would not be used in the planning process. Paul indicated that the lack of trust among the participants resulted in minimal progress in the initial phases of the charrette. Initially, Paul viewed this as a problem; however, with the experience he has gained, he now uses trust issues as a way of further developing relationships in charrettes. Paul has started pre- and post-planning and screening for opinion leaders to develop trust. This strategy seeks to enlist opinion leaders to get involved as public participants, and seemed to work well for Paul in this role.

Brent responded that he did observe trust issues among the public participant stakeholder group. However, the trust issues were much different than the trust issues that Paul observed in his charrettes. Brent is in the U.S. Military and his primary public participants involved in his charrettes are Iraqi nationals. This relationship is at times an adversarial one, creating trust issues without always having a specific, identifiable cause. Moreover, Brent reported that he is always challenged at charrettes to create a consensus that meets the needs of the people. He stated that it is difficult to pre-plan with the public participants because it is not a consistent group of public participants at every charrette.

Both Brent and Paul were motivated to perform their roles, but both were motivated by different reasons. Brent was motivated because he felt that he could make a difference in the lives of the people he served. He worked to earn the public participants’ trust at each and every charrette. Paul was motivated to be better at his

job. He felt that the better he worked at pre- and post-planning and identifying opinion leaders, the better he could be at his job. They both shared motivation to be better charrette leaders, but took different routes to get there.

In the owner's stakeholder group, Brent and Paul were asked, "what are the characteristics of a great charrette?" They were both very similar in their responses. They both felt that the more each owner worked before and after the charrette, the better the outcomes are in the charrette. Brent mentioned that he felt that whenever possible, owners should follow up with public participants after the charrette. However, unlike Brent, Paul relied on the opinion leaders to do much of the follow up.

### **Public Participants – Nicole and Brent**

In the Public Participant role Nicole and Brent both worked in two charrettes. Both of Nicole's experiences in the charrette process came from a sense of community and wanting to get involved. Brent became experienced in this stakeholder group because it was part of his job and he wanted to be prepared to run charrettes in the future.

Both Nicole and Brent were asked if they had experienced or noticed trust issues among the public participants when acting in this role. They both stated yes, but for different reasons. Nicole did not personally experience a trust issue in the two charrettes that she attended, but admitted she observed an issue among her peer participants. She felt that the trust issue among her peers stemmed from a political attack from some participants on the owners and facilitators of the charrette. Brent also did not experience a trust issue but rather observed one from his peers. Brent felt that this was due to the long-standing distrust between the public participants and the leadership of the charrette. Both Nicole and Brent agreed that distrust was a problem.

The last question that was asked of Nicole and Brent in the public participation stakeholder group was, "what are the characteristics of a great charrette?" Brent simply stated that people being respectful of others' ideas is the primary characteristic of having a great charrette. Nicole agreed, but added several other characteristics such as the idea that charrettes should be well thought out and organized.

## **Untrained Facilitators – Paul and Nicole**

Both Paul and Nicole qualified for the untrained facilitator stakeholder group through their charrette experiences. The two were motivated to get involved for similar reasons. Paul reported that his reason was simply to become better in his role. Nicole wanted to get involved in her community and stay involved. Their motivations are evident in all the stakeholder groups connected to this research.

The next question the researcher asked Paul and Nicole was whether they observed a trust issue in the Untrained Facilitator role. Both of them stated that they did not notice any trust issue while serving among that group. Paul added that he was more concerned with the successful operation of the charrette and could have been distracted from trust issues. This was the first stakeholder role in the data for which no trust issue was identified.

Nicole thought that the most important characteristics of a great charrette from this standpoint was that all of the participants' input should be heard and acknowledged to ensure that participants feel included and heard. Paul stated that the most important characteristic to a great charrette was that everyone respected each other and recognized each other's strengths and weaknesses. Both these opinions seem to be a consensus between the two.

## **Professional Facilitator - Paul**

Lastly, Paul was the only participant to qualify for the Professional Facilitator stakeholder group. Although Paul had received no formal facilitator training in his past experience, he qualified for this role because he had experience designing charrettes for implementation. He stated that his motivation to work as a professional facilitator was more needs-based than anything else because he lacked the funds to commit to professional facilitators. Paul stated that the trust issue did exist from this standpoint, but in this role he had more control over managing trust issues and developing a consensus despite it. He added that the some of the most important characteristics to a great charrette from the professional facilitator standpoint are that everyone respected each other and allowed the consensus to rule.

## ***Conclusions***

This research aimed to answer two major research questions, as follows:

- 1) From the perspective of the major stakeholders, including professional facilitators,

volunteer facilitators, public participants, and owners, what are the perceived opportunities for improvements and the strengths that exist now in open public visioning charrettes in the U.S.?

- 2) Are there significant differences among different stakeholder perspectives in terms of these strengths and improvement opportunities?

This section presents the results of the research in terms of these two questions.

### **Perceived Strengths of the Charrette Process**

The Charrette process was very beneficial to all the stakeholder groups for several reasons. One of the most basic reasons is that it gets people involved in the community planning process. Nicole listed this reason as one of her motivations to attend charrettes.

Another strength of the Charrette process is it gives people the opportunity to give back. Giving back to the greater good was mentioned as driving motivation for participants to engage into the Charrette process.

Furthermore, The use of one or more facilitators was noted as an important strength in the charrette process. Both untrained and trained facilitators have an important role in organizing charrettes. Untrained and trained facilitators are responsible for ensuring that participants' time is not wasted.

### **Perceived Opportunities for Improvement in the Charrette Process**

Based on the data from both trained and untrained facilitators, it appears to be important that the facilitator gains effective control of the group and sets the rules before the charrette takes place. This is an important improvement opportunity that should be considered in future charrette implementation. Some of the rules recommended in the interviews include the following:

- 1) Respect each other's opinions.
- 2) State your opinion but refrain from advocating for it.
- 3) If a trust issue exists, it is important to attempt to solve that first.

Having the right people at the charrette was a point that was reinforced many times in the research. Paul stated that identifying the right opinion leaders makes all the difference. Opinion leaders are the people who will take back the consensus and gain immediate buy-in from the groups they represent. Brett also agreed that it is important to find opinion leaders; however, he reported that it was difficult for him to find those individuals because of the area and circumstances in which he

facilitated charrettes.

The case studies also concluded that it is important that some type of post follow-up exist and in most cases it does not take place. The interview participants especially Paul felt that by completing post Charrette follow-up one could build better trust with the future Charrette participants.

## **Similarities and Differences in Perceptions among Stakeholder Groups**

Across all cases, a clear need emerged for participants to feel included and engaged in the early phases of the charrette process. Getting participants engaged in the early phases allows them to develop relationships and create a framework of trust and cohesion.

Ensuring that the facilitator made good use of time was a common theme for this research across all stakeholder roles. Many of the interviewees were concerned that the charrettes were not as organized as they could have been, which led to time management issues.

Also, the data tells us that first time untrained facilitators are less likely to notice trust issues among the public participants. This could be contributed to the untrained facilitators being more concerned with the process than focused on the groups pulse.

## **Discussion**

Having explored the data through case studies and cross-case comparisons, the report concludes with reflections on the findings and conclusions of the work, lessons learned during the process, and opportunities for future research that can be pursued.

### ***Reflections***

Several reflections emerged during data processing that were noted by the researcher as ideas that may be worth considering, as follows. First, the one case where trust initially was not raised as an issue was for the participant that had the least professional experience with charrettes. This participant may have had a relatively naïve attitude about the charrette process because she had not yet had negative experiences. An area for potential future investigation would be to examine the correlation between perceived distrust and past negative charrette experience.

The development of a set of best practices for pre and post follow-up for charrettes seems to be an immediate opportunity for future research. These best practices should include subjects such as, how to identify opinion leaders, types of follow-up

that should take place to gain trust, and acceptable follow-up media's.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Scheduling the interviews was an area in the research that could have gone smoother. The initial method devised was simply to call and hope the interviewee was ready to schedule a meeting. This seldom happened this way and most times it took several calls to schedule one meeting. If the researcher had it over to do, they would have used the doodle poll earlier in the process to schedule the interviews.

### ***Future Research***

One example of the way this research could be improved includes having more qualifiers in each of the stakeholder groups. Though the researcher believes that many of the consensus gained in the study would have been true of a larger study population, it is still an area of improvement that needs to be addressed in future research.

# Appendices

## *Semi-structured Interview Questions*

### *Structure*

### *Recruitment Material*

#### **Dear Potential Interviewee:**

I hope that you are doing well. My name is John Laughead, and I am a graduate student at Virginia Polytechnic and State University in the Building Construction Department. I am doing research on the positive and negative characteristics of charrettes in the NRV. This research was inspired for several reasons but most prevalent was each time I attended charrettes I noticed not all the people were happy about giving their opinions, and I wanted to learn why. Mr. or Mrs. Doe referred me to you because she thought that your insight could help my research. I hope to complete about 10 semi-structured interviews that last about 30 minutes, in the coming weeks and I was interested in knowing if you were willing to participate. This interview is voluntary and will be completely anonymous. Thanks in advance for your consideration.

Thanks, John

# *IRB Application with Content Forms*



DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Fall 2011

## **PROJECT & REPORT – CONSENT FORM**

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Dear Interview Participant:

The purpose of this research is to understand the positive and negative opinions people have about the charrette process through interviews. There will be about 7-10 interviews completed over a two-week window with persons in or around the New River Valley.

The interviewee will be expected to answer as many interview questions as they deem fit to the best of their abilities. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes, and at any time the interviewee can withdraw from the interview without penalty. The interviews are completely anonymous, and no promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage anyone to participate.

The interviews will be recorded with an audio device only for use in coding/ transcribing at a later date. Once the audio has been completely coded and transcribed it will be deleted. Until the audio has been deleted it will remain under lock and key. However, it is possible that the research will be audited by the Institutional Review Board and if that were to take place the IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of the data anonymity. Interviewees are not compensated in any way to participate in the research.

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent.

Participants Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

John Laughead, Investigator at 704-300-3662 or [Laughead@vt.edu](mailto:Laughead@vt.edu)

Dr. Annie Pearce, Faculty Advisor at 540-818-7732 or [apearce@vt.edu](mailto:apearce@vt.edu)





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