



How to Kick-off Your High-Performance Project with a Charrette

An Online Continuing Education Course for Engineers

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Introduction

The prerequisites for a sustainable and high-performance project design are to:

- Create a vision for the project and set performance goals.
- Form a strong, all-inclusive project team.
- Outline important first steps for the project.

The best way to achieve these prerequisites is through a high-performance charrette. A charrette is an intensive workshop in which various stakeholders and experts are brought together to address a particular issue. Charrettes are ideally suited for large scale complex projects that involve multi-disciplines, regulatory issues, and the involvement of elected officials. However, the process can be used for just about any meeting event. The charrette should result in good communication among project team members and help them develop unified goals.



The purpose of this course is to furnish guidance for planning and conducting a high-performance charrette. The course answers typical questions such as “What is a charrette?” “Why conduct a charrette?” “What topics should we cover?” “Whom should we invite?” and “What happens after the charrette?”

The course presents detailed information for every step of the charrette process, from initial planning, to conducting and facilitating the charrette, to follow-up. It gives recommendations for planning and logistics. It suggests the types of participants to invite, including technical, political, and community representatives, and how best to include key decision makers and stakeholders who can attend only portions of the event. It gives suggestions for the types of expert speakers who can motivate participants and answer their questions. It outlines the characteristics of good facilitators and offers advice for forming effective breakout groups.

This course is literally a step-by-step “how-to” plan to organize and conduct a charrette. And the first step is to understand what a charrette is. Chapter one answers this, and other questions.

Chapter 1

Charrettes for High-Performance Projects

Understanding the difference between a workshop and a charrette and knowing a charrette's expected benefits and outcomes are important first steps in the charrette process. It is also important to determine if the project is sufficiently developed to benefit from a charrette. In this chapter, we answer basic questions about charrettes and give guidance about whether your project is ready for the charrette process.

What Is a Charrette?

A charrette is a creative burst of energy that builds momentum for a project and sets it on a course to meet project goals. It can transform a project from a static, complex problem to a successful, workable plan. Usually, it is an intensely focused, multiday session that uses a collaborative approach to create realistic and achievable goals.

Charrette planners and facilitators use strategic planning to overcome conflict. Part of their strategy is to focus on the big picture and the details of a project to produce collaborative agreement about specific goals, strategies, and project priorities. Charrettes establish trust, build consensus, and help to obtain project approval more quickly by allowing participants to be a part of the decision-making process.

Charrette Benefits

As a project moves from inception to completion, it passes through pre-design, conceptual design, and design development phases. As the design process continues, more decisions are made about the final design (see Figure 1).

Charrette (shar-ette') n. 1. A small cart. 2. A collection of ideas. During the 19th century, students of l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris would ride in the cart sent to retrieve their final art and architecture projects. While en route to the school in the cart, students frantically worked together to complete or improve these projects. The meaning of the word has evolved to imply a collection of ideas or a session of intense brainstorming. 3. An intensely focused activity intended to build consensus among participants, develop specific design goals and solutions for a project, and motivate participants and stakeholders to be committed to reaching those goals. Participants represent all those who can influence the project design decisions.

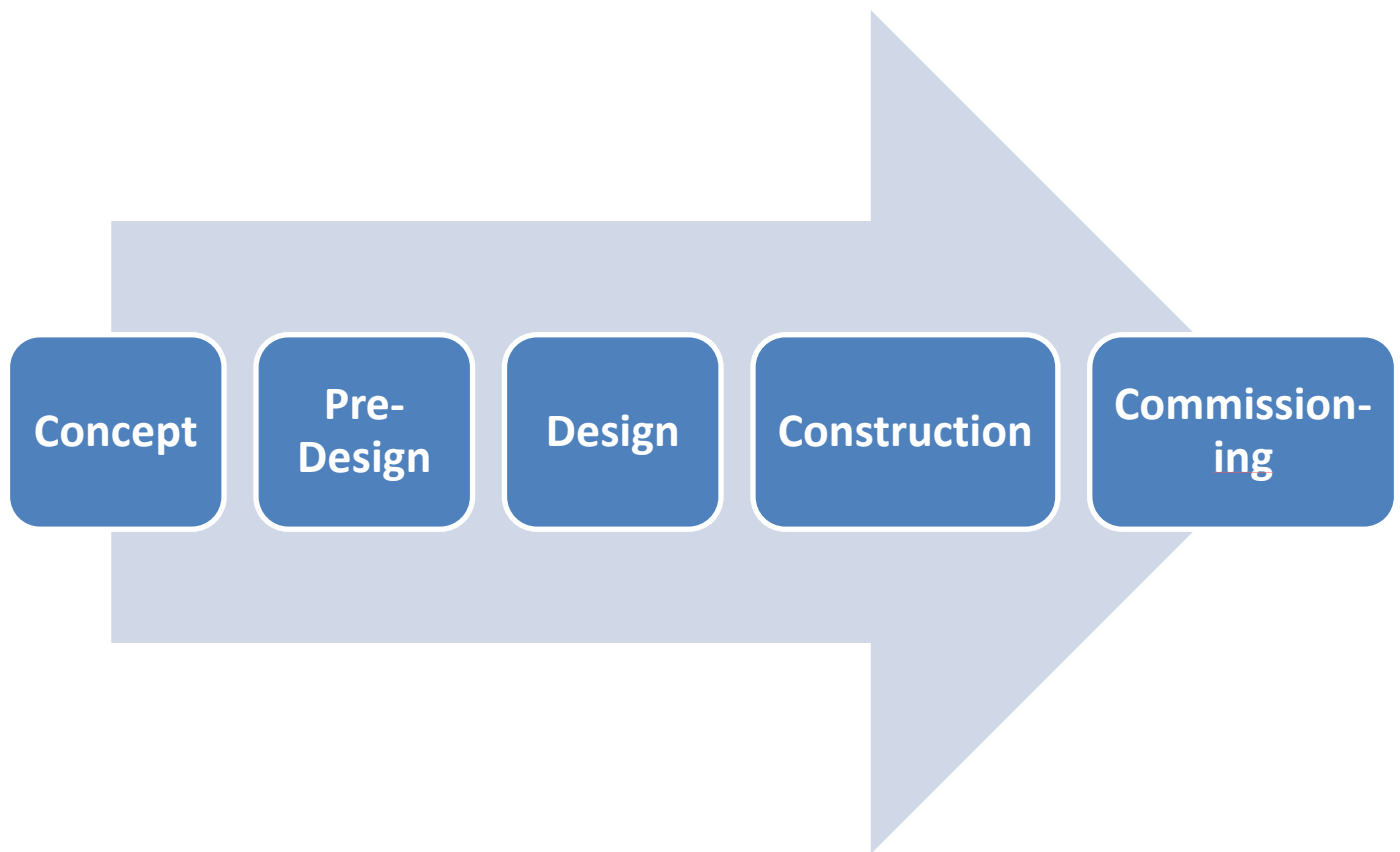


Figure 1

Charrettes are most useful during the pre-design phase. The benefits of using charrettes early in the high-performance design process are many. Most importantly, charrettes can save time and money and improve project performance. In general, charrettes:

- Provide a forum for those who can influence design decisions to meet and begin planning the project.
- Encourage agreement about project goals.
- Kick off the design process.
- Save time and money by soliciting ideas, issues, and concerns for the project design to help avoid later iterative redesign activities.
- Promote enthusiasm for a project and result in early direction for the project outcome.

Conducting a charrette early in the design and decision-making process will:

- Establish a multidisciplinary team that can set and agree about common project goals.
- Develop early consensus about project design priorities.
- Set performance goals.
- Generate quantifiable metrics to measure the final outcomes against the performance goals.
- Provide early understanding of the potential impact of various design strategies.
- Initiate an integrated design process to reduce project costs and schedules and obtain the best performance.
- Identify project strategies to explore with the project team, considering costs, time considerations, and needed expertise to align design and construction processes.
- Identify participants with the necessary expertise, funding, and credibility, and ensure they are comfortable following.
- Set a project charter that defines the project's purpose, goals, and scope.

What Is a High-Performance Project?

A high-performance project is one that reduces life cycle costs, and maximizes performance.

Starting the Charrette

Ask the following critical questions to guide the design process. Understanding where the project is currently and the likelihood of meeting the overall project goals will help you answer "yes" to these questions before planning the charrette.

- Is the project program developed? The program includes the estimated size of the project, functions, and requirements.
- Has the project requirements been selected or narrowed to a small number of alternatives? Having one or more alternative sites identified will increase the likelihood that participants can work out specific design solutions.
- Are staff members or volunteers available to support the planning and implementation of the event? Planning and organizing a charrette requires considerable staff support for tasks such as developing lists of participants, sending invitations and tracking responses, arranging for a meeting facility and refreshments, working with speakers, and preparing materials.

