

Shopfront

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium
Cost	Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To communicate an issue To discover community issues
Number of people required to help to organise	A small team of people (three - six) may be required
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months), Long (over six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Publicity; Venue; Furniture; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Audiovisual recording equipment and amplification; Overhead/data projectors and screen; Printed public information materials; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Response sheets; Children's requirements
Innovation level	Low to Medium

Description

Shopfronts (or site offices) are attempts to improve participation in programs by bringing a participatory venue into a heavily used public area, such as a main street or shopping centre. They are designed to allow people to drop in at their convenience and therefore display materials are usually provided along with project staff to answer questions. They have a relaxed atmosphere and can act as a semi-permanent meeting place / kitchen table discussion forum so providing refreshments is recommended. Shop fronts run for the duration of a participation program.

While many of the objectives and outcomes of shopfronts are similar to those of an open house, an open house is usually at an existing site or establishment, whereas shopfronts can be set up wherever they will attract the target audience. This may be in the main street, in a shopping centre, or in accommodation that is temporarily rented for the occasion.

Objective

- To provide a temporary 'headquarters' where people can come for information or to see and talk to the people who are knowledgeable about or planning about an issue or project.

Desired Outcome

- A better informed community, and allow people to feel greater ownership of a process, organisation or community.

Uses/Strengths

- To access participants who are not generally interested in formal participation programs.
- To improve public relations.
- For convenience.
- To facilitate informal participation.
- To locate project stakeholders.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Community members may not consider this a legitimate avenue to have a say.
- The shopfronts can be easily targeted by activists.

Step by Step Guide

1. Select a centralised venue that has a lot of passer-by traffic. Usually owners of vacant shops are very happy to lease over short periods of time.
2. Select staff/volunteers with strong public relations skills and knowledge of the project and participatory processes (i.e. who will encourage people to chat and discuss issues and be aware of offering different feedback options).
3. Provide display materials, printed public information materials, technical reports, maps, photographs etc. that will be provide all sectors of the community with a means to understand the issues or proposals.
4. Advertise the variety of opportunities for public participation throughout the participation program.
5. Provide a variety of opportunities for feedback, including speaking person-to-person, filling in feedback sheets and contacting email/website addresses.
6. Provide adequate seating and consider visitors comfort (e.g. drinks, toilets, childcare, and accessibility).
7. Staff should record visits to document participation process and to note issues, concerns and suggestions and report these to the organisation/organisers.