Planning Workshop

A Planning Workshop is a participatory method in which residents work together with planning professionals, public authorities, and policymakers on concrete planning projects. During collaborative workshop sessions, participants discuss ideas, identify challenges, and develop proposals that are visualised directly on maps, plans, or physical models.
The method is particularly suitable for urban development and design projects where local knowledge and community perspectives should actively inform the planning process.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Exchange & Discourse
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours, 1 Day
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30, Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Activating, Creative

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Planning Workshop is to involve residents actively and at an early stage of the planning process.

Together with planning professionals and other stakeholders, participants discuss ideas, challenges, and local needs while visualising them directly in maps, plans, or models. This results in concrete proposals that can inform subsequent planning processes. At the same time, the method encourages dialogue between different perspectives and makes planning processes more transparent and understandable.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Prepare the topics and guiding questions
Begin by considering:

- Which topics should be addressed?
- Which questions remain open?
- Which decisions can still be influenced?

The guiding questions should be:

- easy to understand
-

open enough to encourage discussion

- specific enough to support practical work

Examples include:

- "How should this public square be used in the future?"
- "What changes does this neighbourhood need?"
- "How can the quality of public space be improved?"

2. Identify stakeholders and target groups
Consider:

- Which groups are affected?
- Which perspectives should be represented?
- Which potential conflicts or needs should be taken into account?

Important:

Aim to involve participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

3. Organise planning professionals and facilitators
Invite appropriate experts, such as:

- urban planners
- landscape architects
- transport planners
- representatives from the public administration

In addition, appoint a neutral facilitation team responsible for:

- guiding discussions
- balancing participation
- structuring the workshop results

4. Prepare a site visit

A site visit can take place either before or during the workshop.

It provides an opportunity to:

- identify challenges on site
- clarify questions
- collect initial ideas

Helpful guiding questions include:

- "Which places work well?"
- "Where do conflicts arise?"
- "What opportunities do you see?"

5. Prepare the venue and materials
Provide:

- sufficient space for group work
- large work surfaces
- clearly visible maps and plans
- materials for visualisation and documentation

The workshop environment should encourage open collaboration.

Execution

1. Welcome and introduction
At the beginning of the workshop, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the event
- the overall process
- the guiding questions
- the scope for participation and influence

Important:

Participants should clearly understand:

- which topics remain open for discussion
- how the workshop results will be used afterwards

2. Site visit (optional)
If included, participants visit the planning area together.

During the visit they can:

- observe important locations
- discuss challenges
- collect initial ideas

The observations are then brought directly into the workshop discussions.

3. Group work
Participants work either in small groups or together in plenary on different topics or questions.

They may:

- develop ideas
- identify problems
- discuss proposals
- visualise possible measures

The results are documented directly on:

- maps
- planning documents
- physical models

4. Professional support
Planning professionals support the working groups by:

- answering questions

- explaining planning frameworks and constraints
- providing technical advice
- helping refine ideas

Important:

Professional expertise should support the discussion rather than dominate it.

5. Presentation of results
Each group presents its results to the plenary.

Participants explain:

- their ideas
- shared priorities
- differing viewpoints
- remaining questions

The facilitation team summarises the key findings.

6. Reflection and next steps
At the end of the workshop, participants discuss:

- Which ideas should be developed further?
- Which topics remain unresolved?
- What are the next steps in the planning process?

Important:

The following steps should be communicated clearly and transparently.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Document:

- maps and plans
- photographs of workshop materials

- discussions
- proposals
- priorities

The documentation should be clear, well organised, and easy to understand.

2. Analyse the outcomes
Analyse:

- frequently mentioned topics
- conflicts
- spatial priorities
- concrete proposals for action

The results can then:

- inform planning processes
- support political discussions
- be explored further through additional participation activities

3. Share the results
Inform participants about:

- which proposals will be taken forward
- the next steps in the process
- how unresolved questions will be addressed

Providing this feedback helps build transparency and trust.

Quelle: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- addressing concrete spatial planning projects
- residents should actively contribute to planning
- bringing together different perspectives and areas of expertise

- working on urban development or neighbourhood projects
- jointly developing concrete ideas and measures

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- key decisions have already been made
- the topic is highly abstract and has no spatial context
- there is insufficient time for preparation or discussion
- working with very large groups without adequate facilitation

TIPS

- Work as visually as possible using maps, plans, and models.
- Maps and physical models help make discussions more concrete and accessible.
- Allow sufficient time for dialogue and collaborative discussion.
- Encourage planning professionals to communicate in clear, accessible language and avoid excessive technical terminology.
- A site visit often helps participants better understand the planning context and contributes to more informed discussions.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- purely theoretical topics without a spatial dimension
- processes that offer no genuine opportunities for participation
- very short-term decision-making processes
- events without sufficient facilitation or documentation

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/planungswerkstatt