



Products and Services

About NCI

The National Charrette Institute (NCI) is a program within the School of Planning, Design and Construction at Michigan State University that is dedicated to transforming the way people work together by building capacity for collaboration. Prior to December 2016, NCI was a nonprofit organization founded in 2001 and based out of Portland, Oregon.

NCI accomplishes its mission in three primary ways: training others in the charrette methodology, providing coaching and support of others in their charrette processes, and conducting charrettes.

The NCI trains and supports professionals and community leaders in the NCI Charrette System—an accelerated, collaborative, design-based process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested stakeholders to create and support a feasible plan. Through research and publication, NCI continues to bring innovation to the process of transformative collaboration.

Collaborative decision-making that is based on shared values produces holistic solutions. The work of the National Charrette Institute is grounded in four fundamental values:

- *A holistic solution* requires a holistic process in which all viewpoints are represented.
- *Openness* about assumptions, process, and data builds trust and engagement in the process.
- When all relevant stakeholders are present at key decision points, *shared learning* leads to new understanding and to changes in people’s perceptions and positions.
- *Designing* a shared solution in detail is the best tool for resolving conflict and achieving a shared vision.

The NCI advocates a community engagement process and project management system that uses design-thinking and collaboration to break down barriers to resolving complex problems. Born out of urban design and architecture disciplines, its historical application has been among design problems related to the built environment, but the NCI charrette process can also be used to develop public policy and organizational strategic plans.

The National Charrette Institute at Michigan State University is part of the School of Planning, Design and Construction, which brings a wealth of expertise to both the built and natural environments in construction management, interior design, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning. The NCI is also affiliated with MSU Extension, which specializes in helping people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.

About the NCI Charrette Ideology

NCI’s foundation is the learnings of hundreds of charrettes spanning 30 years of practice. These multiple-day charrettes, conducted in the complex and often contentious world of community planning, provide powerful strategies and techniques for efficiently co-creating innovative, achievable solutions for any government or business project by bringing specialists together for an uninterrupted work



session to break through to a creative solution. What typically takes months, is accomplished in a fraction of the time.

The NCI Charrette System™ is a process for collaborative problem-solving and decision-making centered around a multiple-day charrette as the transformative design event. The System is a flexible three-phase framework that combines more than 20 process-based tools to ensure overall project success, while avoiding the fatal flaws that can lead to post-charrette meltdown.



Step 1: Preparation (1–6 months)	Step 2: Charrette (4 days minimum)	Step 3: Implementation (2-4 months)
<p>Preparation is about being people-, data- and place-ready. Everyone with a guiding influence on the project is involved from the beginning in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Relationships are nurtured throughout the process as the often costly assembly of base data is carefully focused on supporting charrette deliverables in order to minimize unnecessary expense. Place-specific tools are chosen to ensure that the charrette studio is set up for efficiency. The tools of the preparation phase are:</p> <p>Project Assessment and Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project start-up meeting • Project roadmap • Scope, budget and schedule <p>Stakeholder Research and Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder analysis • Interview process and start-up events <p>Base Data Research and Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis • High-tech modeling <p>Charrette Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charrette studio specification • Team assembly 	<p>The charrette—the central design event of the NCI Charrette System™—results in a feasible plan that requires minimal rework and is supported by all stakeholders through implementation. This support is generated by the ability of the charrette to transform the conflict among stakeholders into collaboration and a shared vision and implementation plan.</p> <p>A multidisciplinary charrette team of consultants and sponsor staff produces the plan. Stakeholders—anyone who can provide valuable information; approve, promote or block the project; or is directly affected by the outcomes—are involved in the design process through a series of short feedback loops or meetings. Tools and techniques used during the charrette phase are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Meeting and Community Vision • Alternative Concepts Development and Feedback Loop #1 • Preferred Plan Synthesis and Feedback Loop #2 • Plan Development and Feedback Loop #3 • Production, Public Presentation and Review 	<p>Momentum following the charrette is critical. The project management team works to ensure continued and expanded support, and to reduce the risks associated with changes in political or regulatory leadership. When presented at the final charrette meeting, the preferred plan is a work-in-progress. Following the charrette, more in-depth testing is needed to ensure the accuracy and feasibility of some of the plan elements.</p> <p>Once the necessary plan revisions are identified, a follow-up stakeholder meeting with a final feedback loop is advisable, four to six weeks after the charrette. The project team then works to finalize all plan revisions and to complete the project drawings and documents. The tools and techniques used to take the process through project adoption are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Status Communications • Product Refinement • Public Presentation and Product Finalization



Benefits of Using the NCI Approach

Strategic, Focused Collaboration Gets Results

Whether applied to a city's infrastructure project or a nonprofit's strategic plan, the NCI Charrette System transforms decision-making. By shifting out of single-interest silos and disconnected meetings, and into a cross functional, transparent and compressed design process, collaborative solutions are accomplished in a fraction of the time and receive broad support from stakeholders.

Save Time and Money

Time compression facilitates creative problem-solving by accelerating decision-making and reducing unconstructive negotiation tactics. Design at varying scales cross-informs the decision-making process and reduces the likelihood that a fatal flaw will be overlooked that could result in costly rework.

Build Trust

Communication among participants occurs in short feedback loops, building trust in the process and ensuring that all voices affect the outcome. By measuring progress against agreed-upon desired outcomes, the transparency of the decision-making process is ensured and participants can see that the project is being implemented as planned.

Turn Vision into Action

All relevant stakeholders and areas of expertise are included in the process. Participants work together from the onset to build a detailed solution, leading to a higher level of stakeholder support throughout implementation. From the beginning, feasibility is a focus of the discussion, bringing a level of rigor to the process for everyone involved.

Create Innovative Solutions

Uninterrupted immersion in a design effort leads to unexpected and creative outcomes. The best plans are made by many hands.



NCI's Trainings for Organizations

The NCI's primary focus is on educating others to bring transformative collaboration to any strategic design effort. The NCI Certificate Program provides both individuals and organizations with a path toward confidence in preparing for, participating in, or leading charrettes, and ensuring successful implementation and follow-through.

Training	Description	Length	CEUs	Certificate	Format	Maximum	Typical In-House Cost*
Complete Charrette Certificate Training	This newly updated training provides the core skills for planning, managing and facilitating a project with full collaboration.	3 days	18.50 AIA/CES 18.50 AICP/CM 18.50 LACES/PDH	X	In-person	32-40, after first lecture	\$18,000 + travel for 2 trainers, supplies, materials
Complete Charrette Certificate Training	This newly updated training provides the core skills for planning, managing and facilitating a project with full collaboration.	12 live hours over 2 weeks +~11 hours of independent content	20 AIA/CES 20 AICP/CM 20 LACES/PDH	X	Online	20	\$14,170 for 2 trainers
Charrette System Express	An overview of the basics behind the NCI Charrette System	1 day	5.0 AICP and AIA		In-person	60	\$4,000 + travel for 2 trainers, supplies, materials
Charrette System Lite	A quick but effective introduction to charrettes and the NCI Charrette System	2-3 hours	n/a		In-person	Unlimited	\$1,500 + travel for 1 trainer

*NCI will negotiate cost and customized deliverables for bundled trainings and services.



All of the above options are customizable for in-house trainings, which are the highest level of service and best value on a per person basis. NCI brings the trainer(s), curriculum, printing, and supplies; and our partner identifies and secures the venue, handles registration, provides training equipment, and may provide beverages and lunch for instructors and participants.

For the Complete Charrette System Certificate training, the first two hours of the training consist of an executive level seminar on the NCI System™ and have no attendance limit. This is an opportunity to educate project partners and stakeholders as well as your sub-consultants and prospective clients. For the rest of the training, your team will create project guiding principles, objectives and performance measures, a stakeholder analysis, charrette purpose and products, project roadmap, charrette schedules and estimate budgets customized for a case study. Organizations may choose to use a set of case studies provided by NCI or your organization may provide up to four case studies for the course. Clients that have chosen this route sometimes invite other agencies, departments, subcontractors/vendors, partners, and stakeholders to attend to help share the cost and fill the training with some nice synergy for future projects.

For the Express and Lite trainings, NCI can work to provide examples to fit the context.



NCI's Coaching and Assistance

If you've been through an NCI training but want a mentor as you conduct your first charrette, or you are a seasoned charrette manager looking to stay current and hone your craft, NCI can tailor a level of support and degree of involvement that will allow you to collaborate with confidence and ease.

Charrette Ready Workshop

Projects that are conceived of and organized collaboratively will run more smoothly — saving time and money. The Charrette Ready Workshop creates a focused team approach to project management that will guide the project through the inevitable hurdles that it faces on the way to approvals and implementation.

The project sponsor and project partners, such as governing agencies, come together for an intensive start-up meeting. In this 1.5-2 day meeting, the group completes a series of assessment and organization exercises to plan the project, beginning with high-level guiding principles and ending with a detailed project process roadmap. The resulting roadmap identifies how the project will be conducted, including who will be involved and how, a list of base data work, and a description of the charrette process and products.

This information can then be used to create a scope of work and estimated budget to guide management of the project or used to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for an upcoming charrette-based project. The NCI's support in developing your RFP through this effective method builds cross-agency and partner buy-in and cooperation, ensures that your RFP is informed by the essential viewpoints, and – critically – ensures that the budget is aligned with the scope. By developing RFPs that solicit qualified proposals that are easy to compare apples to apples, we ease the proposal review process.

Examples of Previous Workshops

Traverse City, Michigan

In 2015, the Traverse City planning and the Grand Traverse County planning directors took the NCI Charrette System certificate training course to prepare for a series of charrettes following the City's adoption of a Corridor Master Plan. The 8th Street Corridor was the first project scheduled for improvements. After the training, they engaged NCI to walk them through a [Co-Writing Intensive workshop](#) to assess and organize the project for a Request for Proposals (RFP). Participating in the 1.5-day workshop were City and County planning and transportation staff, along with a member of the project steering committee.

Completing a series of assessment and organization exercises, their work began with high-level guiding principles leading to a detailed project process roadmap. The result was an agreed upon project purpose, stakeholder engagement strategy, scope of work, schedule and estimated budget. This information was fed into the [NCI Charrette RFP Template \(a free resource\)](#) to develop the language for the 8th Street Corridor Charrette RFP. Following the workshop, the RFP was sent through the City's legal department and it hit the street two weeks later. The team received five proposals from qualified firms, all within \$10,000 of each other.



The resulting five-day charrette successfully engaged the community in co-creating a vision, plan and form-based code for 8th Street. The project was approved in the City's six-year Capital Improvement Plan and will be implemented in phases over the next four years. The team plans on repeating the process as it moves forward to plan the remaining corridors under the Master Plan. To learn more, visit [Envision 8th](#) (about half way down the page).

Twin Cities Harbor, Michigan

The Twin Cities Harbor is a deepwater port tucked between the cities of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph in southwest Michigan. In its heyday, the harbor bustled with activity, but today it is challenged by vacant land, empty buildings and underutilized waterfront opportunities. While there had been previous visioning engagement work done in the past, it was not representative of all the communities or stakeholders. So when city and community leaders in Benton Harbor, St. Joseph and surrounding townships became interested in reviving and reimagining their common gem, they turned to NCI to help prime the communities for a wider-scale engagement based on the NCI Charrette System.

To prepare them for this work, NCI led a diverse set of decision-makers including city, township, and county elected and appointed officials and staff; state agency staff; regional planners; developers; business owners; and faith leaders, along with the project steering committee in a 1.5-day [Charrette Ready Workshop](#) to assess and organize a joint visioning project for the harbor. Their work began with shared learning and discussion about the harbor and past redevelopment and engagement initiatives. They then explored high-level guiding principles and identified stakeholders important to creating the next vision. At the end of workshop, they had defined goals and project area and a charrette schedule that they will be implementing this fall. The pre-charrette work created a real sense of ownership among harbor leaders about the process to engage the larger community because they helped design it. More about the coming charrette is available at: <http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/smallharborsustainability/communities/st-joseph-benton-harbor/>.

Pre-Charrette Oversight and Assistance

Following the Charrette Ready Workshop, NCI can stay with the project team throughout the process, assisting staff in the execution of the stakeholder outreach and engagement and base data research. The NCI will check that all preparation and scheduling is on track and the team successfully becomes charrette-ready.

Charrette Coaching

The NCI can assist behind the scenes to coach and support staff during the charrette event. We monitor all phases of the charrette, including public meeting facilitation, studio set-up and management, public participation, design team process, production and presentation.

Strategic Planning

The NCI Charrette System is an effective tool for collaborative development of visionary strategic plans that are widely supported and rapidly actionable. All too often considerable resources are spent on creating strategic plans only to have them sit on the shelf. The NCI Charrette System brings its



collaboration-by-design model to the development of strategic plans that are innovative, measurable and result in action.

From the initial phase of building consensus on values and priorities through to Board approval of a Strategic Final Action Plan, the NCI Charrette System ensures a result that is rapidly actionable and supported by key stakeholders and donors. The NCI's unique three-feedback-loop system ensures extensive and efficient involvement by management, staff, volunteers, Board and contributors — resulting in broad support and a comprehensive strategic solution.

Key Strategies

- Feasibility checks at each review cycle.
- Prioritized implementation plans within strategic focus areas.
- Initiatives held accountable against agreed-upon metrics.
- Resource availability checks incorporated into the plan across focus areas.
- Implementation monitoring through an ongoing collaborative process.

Key Benefits

- Earlier entry to donors' funding cycles enabled by an accelerated planning process.
- Realistic plans based on timely input.
- Maximal review time with minimal meeting time.

Examples of Previous Strategic Plans

St. Mary's Food Bank, Phoenix, AZ

In 2016, NCI used the NCI Charrette System to facilitate a top-down, bottom-up restart of the stalled strategic plan for the oldest food bank in the U.S. The result was not only an activation of a set of five initiatives but also a transformation for how the organization's leadership and staff work together.



NCI Charrettes

If you aren't into DIY, don't have the time, etc., NCI can provide full service for your upcoming charrette. NCI provides project support and direct facilitation consulting services throughout the three phases of the NCI Charrette System™, ensuring project success while avoiding costly mistakes. In addition to providing project support, NCI consults with organizations to bring our vision-to-action capabilities to effective strategic planning efforts.

Examples of Previous Charrettes

The Capitol Corridor Plan, Lansing, MI

Completed in 2015, NCI led two charrettes with Dover Kohl and Partners and other consultants to develop a vision plan for the 21-mile Michigan Avenue/Grand River Avenue corridor. The plan included seven jurisdictions a major hospital complex and Michigan State University. The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission adopted the plan on the last day of the charrette. Sparrow Hospital began a major expansion in accordance with the plan within months of the completion of the plan and several mixed-use developments have been built since. The final report along with other project materials are available at: <http://migrand-charrette.com/>.

Memphis Fairgrounds Public Engagement, Memphis, TN

In 2015, NCI lead a team, including PlaceMatters, to help the Memphis community come together to provide a voice to the ULI panel concerning the controversial repurposing of the Fairgrounds site. NCI facilitated four public workshops across the city and created a website to gather public input. In total, over 600 people participated online and in the events. The results were summarized in a report that was delivered to the ULI panel for use in their study of the Fairgrounds site. Project materials are available at: <https://www.memphisfairgrounds.com/>

Arapahoe Square Neighborhood Plan, Denver, CO

NCI helped develop a neighborhood plan for the disinvested social services area north of Downtown Denver in 2013 with SERA Architects. The plan featured architectural and urban design strategies for integrating social services into a mixed-use neighborhood. The resulting plan became a component of the Denver Downtown Plan approved by City Council. More about this area is available at: <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/community-planning-and-development/planning-and-design/arapahoe-square-DAB.html>.

Center City Plan, Norman OK

In 2014, NCI was asked to facilitate a civil community process for a contentious debate over the form of neighborhood infill projects. NCI was able to reestablish trust among the parties though a series of tours, meetings, interviews and a five-day charrette. Working with Opticos Design and Alta Planning, the resulting Form-based Zoning Code was approved by City Council. More about the project and the Center City vision is available at: <http://www.normanok.gov/planning/norman-center-city-vision>.