

Virtual Open House

When the city of **Langford, British Columbia** (21,000), Canada, organized an open house to collect feedback from the community on its proposed wayfinding plan, meeting planners expected at least 50 participants. When only four people showed up, the organizers realized they needed to try something different. Their solution was an online open house.

Leadership/staffing

The online open house was coordinated by the city planner and developed by one of the city's information technology experts.

Timeline

The original open house was scheduled for September 2004. The virtual open house was posted shortly thereafter and was open for two weeks.

Budget/funding

The only cost of the virtual open house was the time of the technician, who spent approximately two days developing the site. Now that the frame for the site is available, it can easily be reused for future virtual open houses.

Program description

The virtual open house Web site included the proposed wayfinding plan, as well as examples of the different types of signs that were being considered. Residents were asked to respond to an interactive questionnaire on whether they supported the wayfinding plan and which signage formats they preferred. Visitors to the site also submitted questions, and the planning department posted all questions with their responses so that the information was available to everyone.

The virtual open house was promoted through ads in the local newspaper. In addition, notices were posted at several Internet-accessible computers that the city supports in various locations, including a coffee shop. Those visiting these

establishments could learn about the virtual open house and immediately visit the site and post their responses.

Results

The virtual open house received 200 hits during the two weeks it was posted. Of those who visited the site, 28 people answered all of the questions in the questionnaire, and an additional 39 posted some responses. Residents appreciated the flexibility of being able to participate in the process at any time of day or night, without having to be at a certain location at a specified time. The open house planners found another advantage—respondents with strong personalities could no longer dominate the conversation. The open house organizers plan to use the format again to solicit resident feedback on future planning efforts.

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