

## **Best Practice**

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# **Involvement of citizens and stakeholders by open space conferences and workshops**

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## **1. Summary**

This project shows how it is possible to involve very different groups with a high number of people in workshops.

## **2. Background and conditions**

Even before the EU services directive had to be applied in the public administration some communities realised the benefits of e-government and an integrated local development. Integrated in the context of the BIRD Project includes the implementation of broadband in all areas and at the same time taking innovation into account. Keeping in mind that especially in rural areas providers of services of public interest have to be supported with IT for economical reasons and furthermore sustainable solutions have to be found, instruments had to be created to allow citizen's participation.

## **3. Methodology**

A wide participation process was chosen for the problem mentioned above. This approach should bring the following benefits:

1. Coming up with new ideas for the future utilisation of the internet and a broad engagement with topic innovation.
2. Strengthening the acceptance of going into the topic of future development and knowledge society.
3. Checking own ideas
4. Initiation of sustainable working groups and networks on single topics on regional and transregional level.

## Involvement of citizens and stakeholders by open space conferences and workshops

To achieve a broad participation process and enough freedom for ideas the approach of "Open Space" was used.



Open Space is a method to moderate discussions with a high count of participants (70-1000). A characteristic attribute of this method is the forthrightness in content and formality. Every participant can open new topics and build a workgroup where projects get worked out. In the end all results are collected and evaluated by the initiators of the whole project. A steering committee takes care to implement the results.



Here you can find more information about Open Space:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/cqi/wiki.cgi>

<http://www.openingspace.net/>



European Community  
European Regional  
Development Fund



Interreg North Sea Region

## 4. Model of financing

The costs of one of the first big conferences were covered by the county of Osterholz, the federal state of Lower Saxony and proportionately to the specific subjects by the Interreg IIB-Baltic sea area project “Baltic Rural Broadband”, and by the Interreg IIB North Sea area project BIRD. Considerable cost factors for such conferences are mainly rooms, moderation and documentation. A second smaller conference on municipal level was held by the city of Osterholz-Scharmbeck. For this occasion the costs amounted to less than 5,000 Euros, however, because of the intensive support through regional actors they led to the desired results.

## 5. Work process (implementation)

While for the first conference [www.breitbandtage.de](http://www.breitbandtage.de) experts from different states and a wide interregional participation were necessary, for the second conference (T-day) other incentives were useful. Especially during the preparation of the first conference risks and benefits had to be explained often. Concerns about the size and the expected results, the own capability (see the organizer [www.broadband-days.com](http://www.broadband-days.com)) and the affordability had to be constantly removed. After finishing the conference the continuous future approach was discussed. Especially after the second conference the organiser, the city of Osterholz-Scharmbeck, developed sustainable workgroups without any further financial means.



In both cases the approach of Open Space was applied methodologically.

## 6. Highlights

The voluntary participation of associations, clubs and experts was a special highlight.



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While for the first conference European and national experts came to a small county in a rural area to help the local people and develop trust in this project, for the second conference the participation of the senior citizen's advisory board and the inter-generation-house was a big highlight. Both conferences were aimed on the application of broadband and innovation in the region so that particularly in the second event the effects of the demographic change were indicated.

### 7. Numbers

Total cost of the first event around 180.000 Euro  
Total cost of the second event around 5.000 Euro

### 8. Recommendations

Open Space conferences have not necessarily to be carried out with more than 1,000 participants – the most important aspect is participation of the citizen.

To make this happen incentives have to be created. Furthermore, the participation of experts and local decision makers that listen to the needs of the community and have its trust has to be secured.

The realisation of such events creates self-confidence among the organisers and develops acceptance for the issue. It is recommended to integrate the press at an early stage and not to forget the evaluation of the events. The conferences are just a kick-off – the networks and working groups that result from them should later be supported by the administration (e.g. rooms, discussions or through decisions). If this does not happen after making a conference the trust and good mood in the community can change into disappointment.

### 9. Contact

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