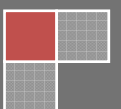


2013

# Richmond's Guide to Neighborhood Organization

A framework to organize and sustain  
a neighborhood association



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# Introduction

Congratulations on taking the first steps in organizing a neighborhood association! A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners, renters, apartment dwellers, and representatives from neighborhood businesses, religious institutions, schools, and other community stakeholders who organize to improve conditions in their neighborhood.

When you start a neighborhood association, the people in your neighborhood get a chance to decide what needs to be done and work together to make it happen. A group that represents the community will have the stability, and credibility, to be an effective advocate for their neighborhood's future.

This guide will assist you in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules that must be followed. It is merely a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize your group.

While organizing a neighborhood association may seem like a big job, this document breaks down the task into clear steps that are less overwhelming. It may seem difficult at first, but organizing an association will be an enormously exciting as people come together to address common problems and learn to work together as a group.

Remember, people join neighborhood associations for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get better acquainted with their neighbors and develop a sense a community. So, as you build your association, be sure to have fun.



## TIPS

### **Be patient.**

*Organizing a neighborhood association is a process that takes time to accomplish.*

### **Identify your priorities.**

*It is far more important that your association be successful than it is to try to address all issues at once.*

### **Set realistic goals.**

*Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, setting your goals higher.*

### **How you treat people is crucial to your success.**

*By treating people with respect and honesty, people will more likely get involved in the organization will be easier to do.*

### **Communication is the key to success.**

*Open, transparent, and frequent communications with government officials, staff, neighbors, and other community stakeholders is critical to a successful and respected organization. Use the tools that work for you.*

### **Adapt this guide to fit your association.**

*Please remember that the ideas and strategies outlined in this document are guidelines. Feel free to adjust these guidelines to the specific needs and circumstances of your community and organization.*

# Getting Organized

This section of the guide will assist you through the first steps involved in organizing a neighborhood association. Please remember that organizing a neighborhood association is a process. It will take some time to get the association up and running. Don't worry or get discouraged if it takes a few months to really begin to see the results of your efforts.

## ***Steering Committee Meeting***

A few enthusiastic people can successfully start a neighborhood association. As the primary person interested in starting a neighborhood association, it is important to understand that you cannot do it alone. Your first responsibility is to invite others to serve on a steering committee to help organize the neighborhood association. In addition to a few of your neighbors, remember to invite institutional leaders (e.g. re; religious institutions, fraternal organizations, etc.), business owners, and school principals to be a part of the group. Also touch base with your District Council person. The District Council person can be a wealth of information as you go through the process.

Host a meeting in someone's home or other comfortable setting. Begin the meeting by asking potential committee members to respond to a few basic questions:

- Why do you think you should organize?
- What are the issues that need to be addressed?
- How do you want to improve the neighborhood?
- What are the available resources in the neighborhood?

Next consider boundaries for your neighborhood association and a working name for your group. Once the steering committee has direction and issues to address, it is time to prepare for the first General Membership meeting.

## ***Boundaries***

Although this is most often formally decided by the general membership and adopted in the bylaws; the steering committee has a large say in defining the boundaries by discussing and deciding on tentative boundaries and publicizing these in the notice for the first general membership meeting or by limiting the publicity efforts of the first general membership meeting to a specific area.

The boundaries should define the area the association aims to represent. *Overlapping boundaries may result in potential conflicts and should generally be avoided. The City of Richmond's Department of Planning & Development Review can provide information on the boundaries of surrounding neighborhood associations.*

Associations should strive to truly represent all residents, property owners, and stakeholders within the selected boundaries, regardless of the use of the property. Some things to consider when trying to determine or define the boundaries of an association are:

- How do **you** define your “neighborhood?”
- Are there natural boundaries such as rivers, parks, or constructed barriers such as railroads or highways, that create clear boundaries or edges?
- Is an area more united by a particular issue?
- Who will you approach to be a part of the new organization?
- How will you work to bring diverse interests and individuals into the group?

The boundaries for the association should identify what the people feel comfortable with as defining their neighborhood. Some associations are geographically very large, others very small. In both instances, there are advantages and disadvantages, some of which are listed below:

*Geographically large associations:*

Advantages:

- Provides strength in negotiations. After all, there is power in numbers.
- Offers more people from which to draw members and leaders.

Disadvantages:

- Often there is a lack of a close-knit feeling among members.
- It can be difficult to cultivate personal relationships among members of the organization.

*Geographically small associations:*

Advantages:

- Tight-knit feeling encourages the development of personal relationships.
- Small size often makes the problem of one the concern of all.

Disadvantages:

- Not as much strength in negotiations when numbers are limited.
- Fewer people from which to draw members and leaders.

In general, boundaries should not overlap with those of other neighborhood associations, and established civic associations should not encroach on the boundaries of others.

If there is overlap, such as with condominium or small geographic homeowner associations, it is best to discuss the reasons with other involved neighborhood associations to minimize resident confusion.

***First General Membership Meeting***

The first General Membership meeting is the time to announce the formation of your neighborhood association, solicit new ideas, and discuss some ideas already developed. Plan to have hosts at the door greeting people as they arrive and ask people to sign in and wear a nametag. Give people a sticker dot and ask them to locate their home on a neighborhood map. Following are some tips for setting up a productive first meeting:

- Arrange for the use of a meeting room. The best source for a meeting room will be a church, school, or recreation center in your area. Make sure that the space is accessible to all. Accessible space is welcoming space.
- Avoid auditoriums and sanctuaries where people can feel lost and communication and dialogue is more difficult.
- Arrange chairs in such a way that people can get acquainted. A circle of chairs works well.
- Schedule the meeting during the early evening or on a Saturday morning to maximize participation.
- Consider providing baby-sitting services or some type of children's activities to encourage younger families to attend.
- Arrange to transport those who do not drive or who may be afraid to be alone at night.
- Have refreshments available and allow time for some mingling both before and after the meeting.

### ***Meeting Promotion***

Prepare a colorful flier that states the time, place, date, and purpose of the meeting. The core group should personally distribute the fliers throughout the neighborhood.

- Check with the principal(s) of the schools in your neighborhood about sending fliers home with students.
- Ask local merchants to display fliers in shop windows or community bulletin boards; if they have them.
- Contact local religious congregations and ask that the meeting be announced or listed in their bulletins.



**TIP**

#### ***Be prepared to talk...and listen!***

*Few things elicit more questions and comments than a flier announcing the formation of a neighborhood association. As the primary organizer or a member of the steering committee, you will have to explain the purpose of the association and why you feel its formation is necessary. Some residents will agree with you about the need and purpose of the association, but just want someone to listen to a particular concern of theirs.*

### ***Meeting Agenda***

Hand out and follow a prepared agenda. A first meeting agenda could include:

- Introduction of core group
- Introduction of City of Richmond representatives
- Discussion of issues/concerns/group projects
- Discussion of committee structure
- Announcement of the next meeting

# Characteristics of an Effective Meeting

The way meetings are conducted will affect how members become involved and, as importantly, stay involved in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and stop attending. When meetings are well-run, people's opinions are respected and the agenda is followed, members will be more willing to participate.

## ***Arranging the Room***

The best arrangement for a neighborhood association meeting is a circle of chairs. People sitting in a circle can communicate better. Tables often form barriers and are easy to hide behind. Avoid using tables unless they are needed for maps or handouts. Choose a neutral room that will just barely accommodate everyone. This will allow the energy of the group to stay within the group and add to your feelings of enthusiasm.

## ***Agendas***

Every meeting must have an agenda or purpose. Spend time before the meeting deciding not only what to discuss, but also how long and in what order you will discuss the items. It is sometimes useful to put emotional or controversial issues at the end of the agenda. This allows you to take care of small, but necessary decisions early in the meeting. When listing agenda items, it's always good to list a time limit. It's possible that you'll go over or under the limit on some items, but at best you'll have a frame of reference. Do not overload the agenda. Try to stay within 1-1<sup>1/2</sup> hours and allow some time for refreshments and mingling.

## ***Running a Meeting***

Start the meeting on time. Don't penalize those who arrive on time by making them wait for latecomers. Begin the meeting on time and re-arrange the agenda so that less important agenda items are addressed early. By doing so, you will reinforce the behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late.

Although Robert's Rules of Order is effective, it should not be used in community meetings unless everyone in the group understands them. In many instances, such formality can discourage meaningful input by intimidating members who are unfamiliar with them. As an alternative, consider using your agenda to provide structure and simply guide, encourage, and limit discussion where appropriate.

Make sure someone takes minutes or records the meeting. If you do not have a secretary, rotate this task.

## ***Dealing with Difficult People***

Everyone has encountered people who are hard to get along with at one time or another. Here are a few suggestions for managing those who attempt to monopolize a conversation or inhibit the flow of a meeting:

- When a point is being discussed for too long, summarize the discussion or suggest tabling it for a later time.
- When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize points made by each and turn the discussion back to the group. Invite the two to stay after the meeting to talk it over.
- When coping with the "one-person" show; interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution but politely asking him to hold his other points until later;

interrupt with "You have brought up many points that will keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"

- When a speaker drifts from the subject; interrupt, giving the person credit for the idea, but explaining that they are departing from the main point; or,
  - propose to the group the question of whether it wants to stray from the outline or follow it; or,
  - bring the discussion back to the topic by using the related idea as the transition.
- When a member has difficulty in expressing herself, build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then re-phrase her material with a preface, such as "Is this what you mean, Ms. Jones?"

### ***Participation***

Set realistic expectations about attendance; large attendance is not a requirement for every meeting. Don't focus on poor attendance, rather, concentrate on coming up with techniques to increase attendance. Set a tone at meetings where everyone's ideas are welcome and respected.

Consider establishing a membership committee to focus on recruiting new members. Be realistic about what people can do given the other responsibilities in their lives. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.

### ***Ending the Meeting***

It is surprising how many meetings are allowed to just fizzle out. Meetings should end with a plan of action. Ask members of committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on the date, time and place for the next meeting before members leave.



# Methods of Communication

The establishment of a good communications and publicity network is absolutely essential to any group. Whether it is a simple flier, newspaper announcement advertising a meeting, social media, or a short telephone call, groups must take advantage of all media (including word of mouth) to make people aware of activities. The most effective ways to establish a manageable and affordable network is to use one or more of the following forms of communication.

## Social Media

Today, the internet offers a wide variety of alternative means of communication; listservs, Facebook and Twitter are but a few examples. Social Media can be used to communicate, distribute information, or conduct surveys of community stakeholders on a large scale. It is important to understand the power of social media and be careful when using it. The article below provides a very good basis for the “rules of engagement” with regard to the use of Social Media and the potential consequences of its misuse.

### **So Social**

By Scott Kleinberg, Tribune Newspapers

November 8, 2012

Before social media went online and became mainstream, complaining about bad service at a restaurant or store was usually started with six words. "May I speak to your manager?"

Unless you were screaming at some employee, it was usually pretty low key.

Then, after we took to Twitter to make our voices heard, those six words to one or two people turned into 140 characters to potentially millions. Simply put, social media increases the power of our voice and changes the customer service game.

Just because you can potentially reach millions with your gripe doesn't mean you should. Responsible social media starts with thinking about what you tweet, before you tweet it.

I had a confusing experience at a restaurant recently. A few minutes after finishing dessert, a manager came over and asked if we'd accept a round of drinks in exchange for moving to the bar because they needed to free up the table. We politely declined because we were getting ready to leave anyway.

Without outing the restaurant or anything about it, I asked my social media followers on Twitter if they agreed with such a request. I received a few direct messages asking me to tell them the name of the restaurant in confidence, but I politely declined.

I was curious enough to take the topic to Twitter, but there was no reason to embarrass anyone. So how do you get your point across

without looking like a huge jerk? Here are some suggestions and points to ponder:

- **Constructive criticism is good, name calling is not.**

Some people simply aren't good at keeping things bottled up. If you must out a business in a complaint on social media, be careful not to insult. Be constructive and keep the conversation going. You wouldn't scream at a manager on the phone, would you? Don't scream online.

- **Don't let anger get the best of you.**

If you jump on Twitter the minute something bad happens, you're more likely to say something you'll regret. Your words matter. Whether you have 100 followers or 100,000, you never know when something you tweet or share will be shared by someone more influential. Before you tweet, take a deep breath and assess the situation.

- **Use social media, and then take the exchange offline.**

There's nothing wrong with using social media to find a store or restaurant manager and then making a phone call. Do you really need to battle this out in public? Are you gaining anything by having an audience? Probably not. When in doubt, ask yourself this: How would I react if social media didn't exist? If your answer is "with restraint," then apply that to your usage of social media.

*So Social is a social media tips column by The Tribune Media Group's Amy Guth and Scott Kleinberg. Copyright © 2012, Chicago Tribune*

### ***Fliers***

Any activity, project, or goal of the group can be announced in a flier. When designing a flier, be sure the wording is bold enough to be read from a distance of 10 feet. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for the use of a church or school copying machine. Better still, copied as a donation by a local print shop. Post fliers in markets, laundromats, schools, beauty shops, and any other places frequented by the people you want to reach.

### ***Newspaper announcements***

Many newspapers have an 'Announcements' section and allow neighborhood organizations to advertise their monthly meetings at no charge.

### ***Neighborhood walk-throughs***

This is one of the most effective ways to begin a relationship with your neighbors and get them interested in your organization. Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door-to-door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask those you speak with about their concerns and respond with how your organization can help them effect a change in their situation. Ask them to attend the next meeting to voice their concerns. Also, ask them to bring some of their neighbors. Have them complete a block representative form or an information survey. Thank them for their time. Visit or call them on a regular basis to keep communication flowing.

### ***Surveys***

Surveys are an effective way of bringing new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. Before your first general meeting, distribute a survey to residents to find out what issues are important to them and what direction they want the group to take. Distribute a survey at meetings and make it available at membership drives. When developing a survey, keep in mind the information you want to get from community residents:

- What are the most important issues in the community?
- What are the issues people are willing to work on?
- What kinds of skills do people have?
- What are the best meeting times and locations?
- What are people's work schedules like?
- Mention online survey resources, e.g., Survey Monkey or other's where it's easy to set-up or survey.
- These are just suggested questions. Brainstorm and come up with questions that fit your community.

### ***Telephone tree***

This method of communication may sound outdated, but think about this. How many individuals live in your neighborhood who would like to participate in the civic group, but don't feel comfortable using a computer, have extenuating circumstances that limit their mobility, or are too busy? These residents may volunteer to be on a telephone tree. Give each person at least six people to contact with a short message. This is an easy way to establish a communication network that is fast and very effective.

### ***Block representatives***

Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison to your organization. They can inform neighbors about what your organization is doing and how to get involved. They can also recruit neighbors to your organization and communicate to them by word-of-mouth or telephone. This is a great help when your neighborhood covers a large area.

### ***Newsletters***

A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communicating with your members. Short, informative articles that are of interest to the entire neighborhood will keep neighbors up-to-date. Newsletters can be paid for by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively and distribute both electronically and in hard copy format. A good newsletter might contain the following:

- Notices of important meeting dates and group events
- Information about city services
- Recent accomplishments of your group
- Notification of special events
- Recognition of volunteers
- Information about the schools in the neighborhood
- Profiles of neighbors
- Crime safety information
- Birth and death announcements
- Graduation announcements
- Anniversaries
- A welcome to new neighbors
- Articles of community interest
- Advertising

The newsletter editor will write articles, review articles submitted by others and set deadlines. The newsletter committee should assist with typing, soliciting advertising, and arranging for printing. Decisions will need to be made regarding the title of the newsletter, number of pages, paper stock, and the arrangement of copy. Consider asking a local printer to donate printing services. Decide how to distribute the newsletter. Newsletters can be sent home with students. Also, consider utilizing Boy or Girl Scout troops or block captains. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the U.S. Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.

A newsletter can be any effective tool, but only if it's timely. Newsletters can also be time consuming to create. It requires dedication and a team dedicated to its success. Here are some simple tips to creating an effective newsletter.

➤ ***Why create a newsletter?***

Newsletters are one of the least expensive and most effective public relations tools that exist for drawing attention to an organization. By sending out a quality newsletter on a regular basis, you can keep members and neighborhood residents updated about your organizations activities, builds familiarity with the organization,

and reinforces your commitment to the neighborhood. It also positions you as a leader and a valuable resource.

➤ *Naming the newsletter.*

Begin by choosing a format and naming your newsletter. Since I'm no expert at naming things like newsletters, the no-brainer advice I offer on the subject is 1) include the name of your neighborhood in the title and 2) use the word News or one of its synonyms that also indicate timeliness.

➤ *What should be the frequency of production and method of delivery?*

To save time and money later, not to mention your sanity; decide early on how often the newsletter will be published and the method by which it will be distributed -- will it be emailed or printed? If you choose to print it, decide if it will be 2 pages, 4, or more? Will it be printed in black and white or color? Do you need a logo? What about a designer to give the newsletter a stylish look? How will it be delivered? All these decisions can affect the total cost and success of any newsletter.

➤ *Do You Need to Do Background Research First?*

If you're going to write an article about a business in your neighborhood, you need to understand that business first. If you are not an expert on the subject, start by asking the clients to supply information that could quickly acquaint you with what they do.

➤ *Interview Your Client -- Or Yourself.*

After reading the background information, draw up a list of questions. The list of questions below will help you to get started.

- Research your subject first.
- Interview the client about the topic. Find out the most important message he/she wants to communicate.
- What's unique about your company or organization?
- Who are your clients? *(This tells you what kind of audience to whom you will be writing.)*
- What recent product/services/achievements are you proudest of? Show it to me. Describe it in your own words. *(This can be the core of a news or new-product feature in your newsletter.)*
- Have you won any awards? Have you earned any certifications?
- Are there any clients who would provide a testimonial about your services? *(Makes good filler material -- as long as it's short.)*
- What does your audience need to know about your business/service/product/idea?
- Are there any misconceptions the newsletter may help to clear up?
- What about your business/service/organization will interest your audience?
- At the end of any interview, always pose the question: Is there anything else to add? You may be surprised by what you hear. Often, you will get the essence of the entire story by asking this open-ended question. The interviewee knows what message he/she wants to convey far better than you.

➤ *Structure a Table of Contents.*

In developing a table of contents, try to assemble a diverse and lively assortment of newsworthy pieces. Some articles can be long, others short. All need to be different in tone and content. Think of all the elements you see in a newspaper:

- table of contents
- masthead
- news articles
- feature articles
- personality profiles
- editorials
- columns
- new product announcements
- good news/success stories
- Q&A
- puzzles
- coming-attraction ads

Now, adapt this mix to your subject matter. You don't have to write the full story at first. Just come up with headlines that reflect the content that will follow. Then map out which items will go on each page of the newsletter. Once you know the editorial line-up, it's time to start writing.

➤ *How Much information will fit on a page?*

Unless your newsletter is oversize, assume you'll have room for 3-6 items per page. Those items as short as a sentence or two might look better in a larger typeface, such as a "factoid." If you include photos or illustrations, you won't have as much room for text, but images will help attract your readers' attention. Take full advantage of those images by making sure each one has a descriptive caption.

➤ *Plan to Get a Response.*

Consider building a response mechanism into the newsletter. It could be as simple as an entry blank for a contest -- which traditionally lifts response -- or perhaps a new resident notification form that neighbors can complete when a new family or business moves into the neighborhood. Either way, reader responses build a database of potential customers who've expressed interest in the organization.

➤ *Issue I, Volume I.*

If you're starting your first issue, devote a column to introducing your newsletter and telling readers its mission and frequency. Include background on your own credentials and your organizations purpose. This can later be edited down and used as "boilerplate" copy that goes on the bottom of every issue.

➤ *The Masthead.*

Some newsletters carry mastheads, others just a return address. If promoting your name is important to you -- or you'd like to give credit to anyone who helped you with the newsletter -- list them in the masthead with a title.

➤ *Some final things to remember.*

- Decide on the name and frequency of your newsletter and stick to them.
- If you're the coordinator as well as the writer, work out a budget and a production schedule.

- Draw up a table of contents for each issue.
- Decide on a size, and how many articles can comfortably fit on a side.
- Allow room for photographs and other visuals.
- Vary the content to include different types of articles (news, features, editorial opinion, Q&A, letters to the editor, etc.)
- Keep articles brief and language simple. If necessary, include a glossary.
- Run items that won't be out of date in a month (or however long it takes to produce the newsletter).
- Include tips, site info, a calendar of special events, how-to's, profiles of successes.
- Provide a list of URLs where readers can find out more.
- Promote your site's "Coming Attractions"
- Build a "clip" file of information related to the subject that isn't particularly consumer-focused and use them to inspire ideas and as background information.
- Golden Rule: A headline for every article, a caption for every picture.
- Create a boilerplate paragraph (see part I) to include at the bottom of every issue that explains your newsletter's mission.
- Encourage readers to send you (e)mail.
- Create a contest.
- Double-check your spelling and grammar. If you're weak in these areas, have someone else read the newsletter with an editor's eye before mailing it.
- Carefully construct a mailing list. Keep it in good shape and work on expanding it. The more people who see your newsletter, the more involvement you'll get.
- Print enough copies and use them as promotional and marketing tools for your organization by offering them as 'take-aways' to attendees at community events.

# Recruiting Volunteers

Recruit people to assist with events and activities - not business meetings. Sign-in sheets, nametags, and follow-up recruitment calls should be standard procedures in your organization. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, serving on a committee, delivering the newsletter, stuffing envelopes, or contacting their friends to come to the next event. These activities should make the volunteer feel useful and productive. When recruiting volunteers for assistance with an activity, try to consider the volunteer's needs; provide child care, transportation, or a mentor if the volunteer needs it.

When recruiting volunteers, credibility is very important. Show confidence by knowing what you would like the volunteer to do and be enthusiastic about the task at hand. Practice explaining your request in a concise, up-beat fashion. In just a few sentences, you should be able to convey the essence of the organization, the purpose of the task, and how the task will enhance the organization and the neighborhood. Here are six steps to successful recruitment:

1. *Be Prepared*

Have a strategy for how you will explain your goal and what you want the person to do. Review what you know about the person, such as interests, experience, and family. Look and listen for clues as to what interests this person.

2. *Legitimize Yourself*

Gaining credibility quickly is essential. Find a common background or a mutual friend. Explain that you have the same problem that they do. Mention people that they might know. Explain why the person's participation will make a difference.

3. *Listen, Listen, Listen*

Draw people out. Listening is more than just not talking. It is asking good questions, providing encouraging remarks, and using body language that says you are interested. Be sure to listen for special skills, useful contacts, and organizational networks that can be useful to your organization.

4. *Challenge*

Encourage people to produce change. Challenge people to care about the organization's goals.

5. *Get a Commitment*

Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment with a firm deadline. Write it down, make a note for follow-up and clarify exactly what should happen next.

6. *Follow-Up*

There is nothing worse than making a big fuss over people while recruiting them and then ignoring them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to experienced volunteers, and keep the lines of communication between you and your volunteers open at all times.

Keeping volunteers is just as important as recruiting them. Recruitment has to be backed up by an organizational plan with clear goals and expectations of what volunteers will do. Have a committee or program designed especially for volunteer and membership issues. This program should include training, supervision, recognition, and leadership development. Always explain the organizational importance of each task and assign tasks to fit the time that the volunteer is able to give.

Recognize volunteers and make them feel a part of the team. Recruiting and keeping volunteers is something that is learned through practice and experience. Have your organization's leadership role-play or practice recruiting volunteers. Have fact sheets for each recruiter addressing such things as how to overcome objections to volunteering, the purpose of the task they are recruiting for organizational information, and a brief description of the task. Growing, thriving organizations must train leaders how to recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their on-going program work.



# Managing Projects

One of the best ways to form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your organization unless you are doing worthwhile projects for the benefit of the neighborhood. It's important that you determine the needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success.

Determine the needs of your neighborhood through meetings and personal discussions with neighbors during a walk-through. After you construct a list of possible needs, discuss them in reasonable depth to identify the issues. When you have identified the issues, discuss each one and agree on the priority of each issue. Sort the issues into short-term or long-term projects and begin to evaluate how your organization would like to approach each issue.

In developing your organization's projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action and results. Get the whole community behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or effecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your organization is an effective group. This establishes the credibility and worthiness of your organization, characteristics which are important to long-term survival.

Unfortunately, one problem with concentrating on a single issue or project is that when that problem is solved, everyone leaves. Therefore, it is important to introduce other issues or projects at the same time and get people to work on them in addition to the main issue. As each issue is resolved, focus on new short-and long-term projects.

In planning projects, keep the momentum by maintaining a list of projects and activities that will sustain participation and interest. This requires a lot of anticipation and organization by the board of directors. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Do not suffocate your members with more projects than time will allow. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Slow progress is often better than no progress at all, but keep in mind that one large gap in activity could cost you the participation of a large majority of your membership due to a lack of interest. Be careful how you plan and coordinate all projects.

Keep people involved at all levels and give people specific jobs (with specific time-frames) to do. Everyone is willing to contribute a little bit of time. Do not give too much responsibility to one person when it can easily be delegated to several.

The following list provides examples of possible short- and long-term projects:

- Neighborhood clean-up
- Community garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive

- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video
- Crime watch program
- Scholarship program for neighborhood youths
- Skills exchange (Example: Ex-boxer in the neighborhood sets up an afternoon boxing program for kids. In return, the kids mow and care for his yard.)
- Block party or festival
- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting
- Tool lending libraries
- Tutoring program for youth
- Home tour
- Neighborhood cook-out, picnic, or potluck
- National Night Out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood T-shirts
- Yard of the month
- Neighborhood newsletter, Web site, directory, or telephone tree
- Paint-up/fix-up projects
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representatives to attend City Council and School Board meetings

## Maintaining Interest in the Organization

Once you have tackled a few projects, how do you keep people interested? This is, by far, the biggest challenge for any neighborhood organization. In general, members will participate if there are:

- Business and social events in which to participate
- Issues of importance to discuss
- Clear and visible accomplishments
- Organized, competent leaders
- Events to recognize participants

One key is to get a strong core group that is made up of individuals who are consistently willing to devote time each month. Always make sure that your goals match your resources. Pick goals that are realistic and stand a good chance of success, especially in the beginning. The only way to maintain interest is through energetic participation and constant communication. It also takes positive reinforcement, acknowledgment and a constant sense of accomplishment.

# Bylaws

Bylaws provide an overall framework for your organization and outline general rules that govern the day-to-day operation of the group. They should state the organization's purpose, mission, and structure. In writing bylaws, use language that everyone can understand. Remember, that bylaws are just an instruction manual for your group. The following is a general outline for writing bylaws:

## ***Article 1 - Name of organization***

- Clearly state name of organization. (When selecting a name for the association, one that describes the area represented by the organization helps define it geographically.)

## ***Article 2 - Purpose of organization***

- State the specific, primary focus of group.
- List those who will be served by the organization.
- What is your function? (Preservation, educational, advocacy, safety, etc?)

## ***Article 3 - Membership***

- Define classes of membership. (Voting members versus non-voting members, etc.)
- Define membership dues.
- Define voting members. (Who can vote and who cannot.)

## ***Article 4 - Regular Membership Meetings***

- When will regular meetings be held?
- When will officers be elected?
- When will the treasurer report on financial condition?
- When can special meetings be called?
- How will meetings be publicized?
- Define quorum (How many people will it take for an action to pass – a percentage of voting members.)

## ***Article 5 - Board of Directors***

- Define powers of board.
- Define number of directors.
- Define how the board will be elected.
- Define terms of office.
- Resignation.
- Vacancy.
- Suspension or removal.
- Compensation.

### ***Article 6 - Board Meetings***

- Who will run the board meetings?
- When will the board meet?
- What constitutes a quorum of the board?
- How many votes does a director have; what is a majority?
- Can the board take action without meeting?

### ***Article 7 - Officers***

- List the offices to be filled.
- How will officers be selected and how long will they serve?
- Define responsibilities of chairperson.
- Define responsibilities of vice chairperson.
- Define responsibilities of treasurer.
- Define responsibilities of secretary.
- List what officers serve on the executive committee.

### ***Article 8 - Committees***

- List standing (permanent) committees.
- Who can serve on committees?
- How are committees appointed1 formed?
- What are the powers of committees?
- When will committees meet?

### ***Article 9 - Records and Reports***

- What records will be kept permanently and who will keep them?
- How will members be tracked?

### ***Article 10 - Fiscal Year***

- When does the fiscal year begin and end?

### ***Article 11 - Contracts, Checks, Deposits, Funds***

- Execution of contracts. (Who can sign them?)
- Checks (Who can write them; How are they approved?)
- Deposits (When and where will funds be deposited; Who will deposit them?)

### ***Article 12 - Changes to Bylaws***

- When will they be reviewed?
- Who can change them?
- How will changes be communicated?

# Officers & Board Members

Some neighborhood associations have a more formal organizational structure than others depending on the size and scope of each. While there is no required standard, some level of organization structure is necessary to maintain order and define the roles and responsibilities of the officers or board members as well as the members. This guide provides a general organizational structure with a description of the roles and responsibilities of each.

## *Chairperson/President*

- Serves as chairperson of the board of directors or the president of the association.
- Oversees the schedule of meetings and activities.
- Coordinates the activities of officers, leaders, and committees.
- Appoints committees as needed. The chairperson is an ex-officio member of all committees except the nominating committee.
- Arranges for a regular meeting time and place each month.
- Develops a meeting agenda.
- Contacts each person who has a part during the meeting and encourages him/her to be prepared.
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room.
- Exhibits good leadership qualities and is a role model to the members of the association.

## *Vice Chairperson/Vice President*

- Assists the chairperson.
- Presides at meetings and performs other duties in the absence of the chairperson.
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room.
- Responsible for introducing new members and guests at meetings.

## *Secretary*

- Keeps complete and accurate minutes of all meetings. It is a good practice to keep minutes of meetings that describe what happened and the decisions made. It provides a written record and helps people stay informed and on track. Minutes need not be in any particular form but should be clear about any decision made, list who was present and, if requested, state the name of anyone opposed to the decision made. Minutes should be signed by the secretary of the meeting and accepted by the board at the next meeting.
- Reads letters of information or any other correspondence to the group.
- Writes letters for the association.
- Contacts members who have missed several meetings and extends an invitation for them to attend the next meeting.

### *Treasurer*

- Keeps accurate records of all receipts and expenditures of association funds.
- Plans a budget and presents to the association for approval.
- Pays bills as approved by the association.
- Gives a financial report at each meeting or as requested by the chairperson.
- Prepares a financial report for the year and presents it to the association.
- Provides written financial reports for the Secretary to include with the minutes.
- Opening a Bank Account: Most neighborhood associations eventually accumulate money and will need to open a bank account for the organization. The problem with using a member's personal social security number to open an account is that the person becomes liable for paying taxes on the additional money reported. Therefore, your group should get a tax identification number. To get this number, complete form SS-4 (Application for Employer Identification Number). Forms can be picked up at the Internal Revenue Service Office. The secretary of your neighborhood association, along with anyone else who will be signing on the account, must sign bank signature cards. Along with your tax ID number, you will need other papers such as bylaws and minutes proving the legitimacy of your organization. Identification, such as a driver's license, credit cards, or passport, is required to open any type of account.