

5. Organizing a Neighborhood Association

Introduction

Neighborhood organizing is an effective tool for mobilizing residents and developing leaders. Sustained organizing connects residents with information, networks of like-minded stakeholders, practical experience, and opportunities to express their opinions.

In areas with active neighborhood associations, residents become neighbors and friends, and develop a sense of community and neighborhood pride. Once they feel part of their community, residents are more likely to take pride in the appearance of their yard and home. Positive peer pressure also contributes to the residents taking better care of their property. In addition, neighborhood associations often have their own programs for encouraging property upkeep and appearance.

While residents often desire for local government to encourage or enforce compliance with city ordinances, this approach can be improved upon through neighborhood association involvement. The following information is provided to assist residents with some of the basic steps in organizing a neighborhood association.

Step	Explanation
Getting Started	<p><i>Begin with a simple hello.</i> Greet and talk to neighbors to determine if there is an interest in forming a group to advocate for your neighborhood. For many people this is a difficult first step. Do not be afraid or embarrassed. You will find that there are many people who share your concern of building and maintaining a safe and healthy neighborhood. Most people would love an opportunity to talk about their concerns and ideas regarding their neighborhood.</p> <p>On the rare occasions that you find someone not interested in the organizing effort, simply thank them for their time and knock on the next door.</p>
Develop A Core Group	<p>You cannot organize or reactivate a neighborhood association alone. You will need help. Assemble a core group of people who will be the organizing committee. With this group, decide on issues that are most pressing, most extensive and the most easily solved. To identify concerns objectively. Discuss the role of an organized group in managing the future of the neighborhood. Also, talk about how to get other people involved.</p>

Step	Explanation
<p>Develop A Core Group <i>(continued)</i></p>	<p>Once you have a small group, create a contact list, set a date to get together. This is the beginning and core of your neighborhood association.</p>
<p>Determine Boundaries</p>	<p>You have the option of starting with a small area and enlarging your boundaries as interest in the association increases. In establishing boundaries, consider natural barriers, housing type, and history. Contact the Office of Neighborhood Vitality to inquire about existing groups in the area and to view a map of your area or subdivision.</p>
<p>Planning for the General Neighborhood Meeting</p>	<p>When you hold the first neighborhood meeting, it is important that it be well organized. Well-run meetings will contribute to the success of the association. Meet with your core group to determine the time, date, location, and agenda for your first general neighborhood meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan a strategy for getting people to come to the first meeting. - Plan how to present the issues as the core group sees them. - Explain why you see the need to organize a neighborhood association. - Explain what you hope the association will accomplish. <p>Remember, this is just a planning group. At the first general meeting there will be people with different ideas. To be a successful neighborhood association, you must be open to involving all neighbors and listening to their concerns.</p> <p>Try to estimate the number of people you expect at your first general meeting and then look for a meeting space to fit that number. Possible sites include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools, both public and private - Churches, synagogues, temples, or mosques - Community college meeting rooms - Homes - Community centers - Restaurant meeting rooms <p>When arranging for a meeting space, ask if there is a cost associated with the use of the facility. Be sure that your meeting space can accommodate people with disabilities. If your neighborhood is racially and ethnically diverse you should make an effort to secure translators for those potential attendees.</p>

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<p>Notify Neighbors of General Meeting</p>	<p>Design a flyer or postcard to notify neighbors that you want to start a voluntary neighborhood based group. The flyer should include benefits of starting an association, meeting information, and a contact for additional information.</p> <p>For neighborhoods just getting started, the Office of Neighborhood Vitality provides assistance with copies. However, this is limited to the first few organizational meetings.</p>
<p>The First Meeting</p>	<p>A well-planned agenda is key to a successful meeting. An agenda is a listing of the topics and the order in which they are to be discussed by the group. Decide at the planning meeting who will draft and reproduce the agenda. Your agenda may include the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introductions of all people present. It may benefit the group for each individual to identify their address and association with your neighborhood. - Clearly state the purpose of the meeting. This will provide a staging area for discussion for those in attendance. Be careful not to appear as "lecturing" to the attendees. This will turn them off from the entire process. - Set aside some time for socializing. Generally, this would be held at the beginning of the meeting. However, it can be held at either the beginning or the end. You might prepare several "ice-breaker" exercises to help the attendees mix more freely. - Refreshments are a good idea for your first meeting. - Remember to create a sign-in sheet to collect the names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and property addresses of those in attendance. - Set a date for your next meeting.