

## A Guide for Maintaining a Successful Neighborhood Association

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Courtesy City of Irving, Texas website

This guide will assist you in getting your neighborhood association off the ground. Each neighborhood is different. What is presented in this guide and what may have worked for one neighborhood may not be right for yours. We hope that your neighborhood organization will be successful for years to come.

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### Tips for Building a Strong Neighborhood Organization

The most common complaint of neighborhood leaders is that they can't get people to participate. Questions you should be asking yourself are: is your group inclusive? Does your group demonstrate effective teamwork, recognizing the needs, interests and skills of all its residents?

Most tasks will continue to fall on the shoulders of a core group of leaders. However, there are many ways for neighborhood leaders to get people involved and keep their interest. Here are some suggestions:

- **Be Inclusive:** Too narrow of a focus and extreme positions can often alienate the very people you'd like to get involved.
- **Welcome New People:** Make sure people attending a meeting for the first time are welcomed, listened to and given opportunities for becoming involved. Get the names and phone numbers of newcomers, give them an opportunity to sign up for a task that interests them, and follow up with newcomers.
- **Recognize Your Assets:** Conduct a survey to identify the particular skills of residents that might be hidden assets.
- **Stay Focused on the Bigger Picture:** Set goals each year and stay focused on those goals. Utilize subcommittees to handle the bulk of the work. Ask subcommittees for a report. Don't spend time at regular meetings on issues that can be considered by a subcommittee.
- **Bring in Young People as Constructive Participants:** Activities that let young people know that there is a neighborhood group that cares about them will build

their respect for the community's values. Such activities might include a recreational function, a youth summit, a school supply drive or a scholarship program. Ask your neighborhood school principal to provide ideas and appropriate activities.

- **Host Productive Meetings with Relevant Topics:** Start meetings on time and keep them brief. Use an agenda with amounts of time established for each item. When time runs over for a topic, ask the group whether the issue deserves more time. Topics for meetings should be varied to attract new people. Limit the number of business meetings per year. Instead of a meeting, host an activity.
- **Listen and Let Everyone Speak:** Asking for introductions at the beginning of a meeting can often break the ice for people who might be afraid to speak up. An open forum for half an hour can make a big difference in whether someone stays involved.
- **Work with Other Community Organizations:** Don't forget to capitalize on the resources and skills of other community organizations. An inventory of the neighborhood might uncover a variety of helpful organizations, such as churches, schools, service clubs, nonprofit organizations and youth organizations.
- **Be Flexible:** More progress will come from a group whose leader is a facilitator rather than a domineering chairperson. If most of the people in a meeting want to carry a discussion in a new direction, effective leaders will swim with the tide rather than fight it.
- **Anticipate Issues:** By staying in touch with issues, you can often identify a potential zoning change, crime trend or other problem before it becomes so large that it is too hard to battle.
- **Act Quickly and Decisively:** "Strike while the iron is hot" is an important reminder in times of crisis. This is when other people are most likely to get involved and give their time.
- **Set Clear Time Lines and Responsibilities:** Many internal conflicts occur because leadership is not clear in summing up discussions, identifying who is responsible for follow-up work and deciding a timeline for action. Ask the secretary to help you summarize discussions and clarify decisions.
- **Develop New Leaders:** Term limits for officers are helpful in forcing leaders to make way for new people. Committee chairs and project leaders are important positions for testing new leaders.
- **Admit and Learn from Mistakes:** Recognize mistakes and move on.
- **Celebrate Accomplishments:** Too often we forget to celebrate accomplishments or to even notify people of the results of our work. Even small victories can encourage people to attend neighborhood functions and give their time more freely.
- **Recognize/Reward Personal Achievements:** Newsletters are great places to recognize people for awards, graduations, new babies and important anniversaries. Good Neighbor awards are a great technique for reinforcing certain actions, whether it is an individual contribution to the group or community-minded activities like a business cleaning up its grounds.

## **Working with Diverse Populations**

"We can't get young people to participate."

"The renters really don't care about our neighborhood."

"Some of our residents only speak Spanish and don't come to meetings."

Have you heard some of these complaints from your neighborhood association board members? Working with diverse populations is one of the biggest challenges for neighborhood groups.

Here are points to consider when meeting the challenge of diversity:

- Listen to ALL of your residents. Find out their interests, talents and needs.
- Offer a diverse set of activities. Don't expect everyone to attend activities all the time. Some residents may not be able to or want to come to monthly business meetings.
- VALUE diversity. By capitalizing on the skills and experiences of all people in your neighborhood, the association will benefit from the rich diversity of the population.
- TRUST is essential. Trust doesn't come until you have the chance to interact with one another. Sponsor activities that bring neighbors together.
- There are as many differences within ethnic and racial groups as there are between racial and ethnic groups.

### **Neighborhood Activities**

A key to cultural diversity in neighborhoods is finding common ground among citizens. Here are a few activities used by neighborhoods to bring their residents together.

- Holiday Celebrations

Create a holiday celebration based on the traditions of the different ethnic and religious groups represented in the neighborhood. Ask neighbors to bring a food item and a decoration item used in their own celebrations. You may end up celebrating Christmas, Chanukah and Kwanza all at once!

- Historical Teas

Many neighborhoods are in transition, and it is important to preserve a sense of neighborhood history for the newcomers. One neighborhood sought to preserve its history by sponsoring small, single-block neighborhood teas. One household on the block volunteers to host the event and invites a long-time resident as the guest of honor. The guest of honor and the host invite other neighbors to participate. The host provides refreshments. To ensure that all the teas are similar, a three-person committee helps to coordinate each of the teas. A television producer in the neighborhood records each of the events.

- Progressive Dinners

Groups of five or six households share a potluck meal with one course at each person's house. The dinner is organized so that guests can walk from one home to another. Serve dessert at a central location so all of the households can gather for the final event.

- May Day Festival

A neighborhood association in Denver, Colo., celebrates spring with a May Day Festival. The association hosts the event in the park and hires musicians from the neighborhood to play folk music. A potluck dinner is served, and one neighbor with a passion for Maypole dancing teaches the traditional dance to children. All participants are invited to make floral wreaths to wear in their hair with materials and instruction provided by the association. Consider celebrating other festivals that have special significance to the people in your neighborhood.

### **Ice-Breaker Ideas**

Ice-breaker exercises encourage people to interact in a fun, comfortable way. A five- to 10-minute ice-breaker before meetings is a great way to develop interaction and build the team.

- Ask people to find something from their wallet or purse about which they can share a memory or fact.
- Everyone shares two true statements about themselves and one false statement. Let the group try to guess which of the three statements is false.
- Have everyone share a favorite memory of living in the neighborhood.
- Ask people to share the best thing that happened to them that week.
- Tape a 3-by-5 index card with the name of a famous person on the back of each participant. Tell the group to walk around the room asking YES or NO questions that will help them determine what their card says.

### **Teamwork**

Teamwork is about building relationships with people. Here are some things to keep in mind when building a strong team:

- Ask open-ended questions. People love to talk about themselves. Ask your neighbors about their families, pets and jobs.
- Be trustworthy. Follow through on your promises. If you announce a meeting, plan to hold the meeting. Following through shows you are about action and that you are trustworthy.
- Recognize the needs of your neighbors. When you plan, consider the needs of your neighborhood.
- Share information. Let people know what resources are available.
- Be honest, respectful and responsible.

## **Recognize Accomplishments**

Remind the neighborhood association of all the great successes as a team. Some of your accomplishments might include:

- Getting to know more neighbors.
- Recruiting five, 10, 15 people to join the team.
- Getting good publicity in the paper about your neighborhood.
- Planning a social event for the neighborhood.
- Conducting a neighborhood-wide survey.
- Checking on a homebound neighbor.
- Producing a neighborhood newsletter.
- Creating a welcome wagon for new neighbors.

## **Ideas for Honoring Volunteers**

Volunteers make the neighborhood association a success. Appreciate whatever level of commitment a volunteer can make. Some volunteers may have more time to get involved than others. Recognizing the efforts of all volunteers is important. Here are some suggestions for thanking them. Add your own creative ideas.

- Treat to a soda or coffee.
- Send a card.
- Greet by name.
- Say we missed you.
- Promote a volunteer-of-the-month program.
- Take time to talk.
- Smile.

## **Leadership Quotes and Anecdotes**

"Leadership: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Dwight Eisenhower

"A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit." Anonymous

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." General George S. Patton

"To lead people walk behind them." Anonymous

"People support what they help to create." Anonymous

"The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind in other people the convictions and the will to carry on." Anonymous

"Leaders walk the talk." John Maxwell

"If you see a snake, just kill it. Don't appoint a committee on snakes." H. Ross Perot

"Good leaders must first become good servants." Robert Greenleaf

### **Why Leadership Fails**

- Lack of motivation.
- Lack of impulse control.
- Lack of perseverance.
- Fear of failure.
- Inability to translate thought into action.
- Distractibility and lack of concentration.
- Indecision.
- Procrastination.
- Inability to complete tasks.
- Too little or too much self-confidence.

From Taking Charge by Perry M. Smith

#### The Mouse

A humorous story is told of Jimmy Carter's presidency, which illustrates that even the most powerful individual in the world may face limits to power.

This incident involved a mouse that had died after it had gotten inside a wall of the Oval Office. The dead mouse's odor became intolerable just about the time President Carter was about to greet foreign dignitary. A hurried call was made to the General Service Administration (which oversees federal property), but the agency refused to act; it insisted it already had exterminated all the mice in the White House. GSA officials argued that the dead mouse must have entered from outside the White House, and therefore was actually the responsibility of the Department of the Interior. Officials at the Department of the Interior, however, were unwilling to provide any assistance, arguing that the mouse was now inside the White House. Exasperated that the President of the United States could not get a dead mouse removed from the White House, Carter demanded to see officials from both agencies in his office. Facing them both in a room where world-changing decisions are made, he complained, "I can't even get a damn mouse out of my office!" A special task force including personnel from both agencies was created to solve the problem.

### **To Open a Bank Account**

If your neighborhood association accumulates money, you may want to open a bank account. An account can be opened by either a person or a corporation.

To open an account, you must first obtain a Tax Identification Number. A tax identification number is a federal tax number that is filed with the IRS.

**To receive a tax identification number follow these steps:**

1. Pick up form SS-4 (Application for Employer Identification Number) at the Internal Revenue Service Office. Forms also can be obtained from the City of Irving's Community Affairs Department.
2. Complete the form.
3. Call the IRS office in Austin, Texas at 512.460.7843 to receive the identification number by phone.
4. Place the number provided in the area titled EIN.
5. Mail the completed form to the Internal Revenue Service in Austin Texas.

**Note: You can begin using the number immediately if this process is followed.**

**Other guidelines for opening a bank account, (this may not include all needed steps to open an account):**

- Identification, such as a driver's license, credit card or passport, is required to open any type of account.
- Along with your tax ID number, you will need other papers providing the legitimacy of your organization.
- If you are not a registered corporation, you must apply for an assumed business name.
- You must bring a copy of your bylaws or minutes of your first meeting if you are not a corporation or do not have non-profit status. You must also state the names and titles of people who can conduct business for the organization.
- If you are a non-profit corporation, you must bring the corporate resolution form, sealed by the state, proving non-profit status.
- Not all non-profit organizations will receive a waiver of service charges. The bank waives service charges to organizations that provide a necessary public service. The decision to waive the charge is at the discretion of the individual bank. If you are not a non-profit business, there is no waiver of service charge.
- Signature cards must be signed by the current secretary of the neighborhood association along with anyone else who will be signing on the bank account.

**Fund-raising**

Fund raising may be needed for any of the following:

- Prizes at meetings

- Refreshments for meetings
- Supplies for a neighborhood beautification project
- Printing a newsletter

Consider what types of goods, services and funds your neighborhood association will need to accomplish its goals.

### **Strategies**

- Postage Neighborhood associations are encouraged to charge no fees or only voluntary fees for membership. It is a good idea, however, to "pass the hat" at neighborhood meetings. Just a dollar from some of the participants begins to add up.
- For one-time projects, leaders might ask members for a special donation.
- Garage Sales - Ask neighbors to agree to hold a garage sale on a certain day.
- Bake Sales - Find a public space with lots of hungry people. Some grocery stores may let you set up a bake sale on their parking lot.
- Yard Flamingos - Collect a large number of plastic pink flamingos and sell to your neighbor the chance to play a joke on a friend or neighbor. For \$10, your team will decorate someone's yard with the birds. You can also sell flamingo insurance. For \$10, you can promise not to decorate the yard.
- Colored Sand - Fund raising that appeals to children will often be successful. The colored sand project allows youngsters to make their own bottle of colored sand. Add nontoxic dyes to white refined sand. Collect baby food bottles and let the kids go to work making art. Charge \$2-\$5 for each child.
- Holiday Home Tours - Capitalize on the hospitality of your neighbors. Ask six or seven neighbors to host an open house. Sell tickets to the event. Provide a map and information about each home to partygoers. Encourage people to take a walking tour of the neighborhood visiting homes, sampling goodies and enjoying fellowship. Ask the children to set up lemonade or hot chocolate stands along the path.
- Sell Your Labor - Ask neighbors for a list of chores such as washing the car, raking leaves or weeding the flowerbeds that they are willing to pay to have done. Find volunteers to complete these projects.
- Neighborhood Art Sale - Many of your neighbors create crafts, sew or paint. Ask people to donate their art to be sold, or conduct an art contest for neighborhood youth.
- Sell Advertising - Your neighborhood is a ready-made market for local advertisers. Agree to sell advertising in your neighborhood newsletter.
- Other ideas to consider are Valentine candy-grams, Mother's Day muffin baskets, flower arrangements, car washes, or a raffle.

### **What Can You Do With In-Kind Contributions?**

Instead of money, many stores or companies may be willing to donate something that they sell. For business owners, in-kind donations usually are easier to donate than cash.

Consider asking a business to let their employees volunteer their time and skills to help your team. In-kind contributions can be used in the following ways:

- Prizes
- Auction items
- Refreshments
- Graphic design
- Copies
- Supplies for a project

Don't forget about local churches when considering in-kind donations. They will often provide meeting space. They also have access to computers, paper and copiers.

To make a request from a business, write a letter to the company on association letterhead. Include your employer identification number and a description of how the donation will be used. After the project, be sure to thank the donor in writing.

## **Incorporation and Nonprofit Status**

### Steps for Filing Articles of Incorporation

If your neighborhood association plans to apply for nonprofit status, you must first file Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Here are the steps to consider when incorporating:

- Call the Secretary of State Corporations Division at 512.463.5555 to check on the availability of your corporate name. The state does not allow duplication of corporate names, and your proposed name may already be in use.
- Write your Articles of Incorporation. The City of Irving's neighborhood coordinator has sample articles for you to follow. If possible, have an attorney check your Articles of Incorporation before submitting them to the State.
- The forms must be notarized. All the officers of the corporation must sign two copies of the Articles of Incorporation in front of a Notary Public.
- Send two copies of the Articles of Incorporation, along with a \$25 filing fee to:

Secretary of State

Statutory Filings Division & Corporate Section

P.O. Box 13697

Austin, TX 78711

- Wait for a reply. Processing usually takes seven working days. This may vary. Once approved, the state will keep one copy and return a second copy for your files.

- For more information about the incorporation process, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at <http://www.sos.state.tx.us> .

### **Applying for Nonprofit Status**

Articles of Incorporation do not make an organization a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status is given by the Internal Revenue Service. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping.

The benefits of nonprofit status are:

- To enable your neighborhood association to accept tax-deductible donations.
- To avoid paying sales tax on your purchases.
- To avoid paying income tax on interest earned in the association's bank account and on qualified non-profit income.

A neighborhood association is eligible for nonprofit status if:

- It is incorporated by the state as a non-profit corporation.
- It is organized solely for charitable purposes.

To apply for non-profit status, you must file IRS Form 1023 seeking tax-exempt status and charitable organization status. IRS Publication 557 explains how to complete Form 1023. The IRS requires the submittal of a filing fee along with Form 1023. To determine the appropriate filing fee for your organization, complete Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request.

Many organizations find that professional assistance in filing these forms is necessary.