

# ORGANIZE NOW!

## 10 Reasons Why You Should Form a Civic Association

1. An association helps residents come together to voice their concerns.
2. An association helps residents work toward common goals.
3. Neighborhood associations can do things as a group that individuals would be less able to accomplish. There is power in numbers. A strong association is better able to communicate with elected officials and city government. It has a stronger voice than individuals have.
4. An association helps residents fight crime through preventative measures and Neighborhood Watch. It is very important to know your neighbors.
5. Working together in an association builds friendships with people from other parts of the neighborhood who you might not otherwise have known.
6. When you have a strong association you are in a ready position to tackle any problem that might arise because your structure and communication system is in place. You'll be organized before a crisis occurs.
7. By forming an association you will be forming a stronger and healthier local community.
8. Neighborhood associations are a clearinghouse of information. Associations can be a resource that helps neighbors determine the best way to deal with problems.
9. The physical appearance of your neighborhood can improve with a unified effort. Organized neighborhoods have less of a litter problem. The association can report problems to the city.
10. Statistics have shown that strong civic associations bring up property values.

## Getting Started

1. Identify a core group of neighbors. (3-10 people)
2. Hold an initial meeting with the core group.
3. Discuss your goals and what you want to accomplish for the neighborhood. Start planning a neighborhood meeting. You will be able to get more people to come to a meeting if there is a common goal or concern among the neighbors.
4. Recruit more neighbors. Have each person in the core group ask five more people to join in the effort. If people don't know their neighbors have them introduce themselves.
5. Have another meeting to plan a general meeting. Set the date, location, time and decide how you will advertise the general meeting.
6. Possible ways to get the message to neighbors: flyers, signs, knock on doors, talk to people you see in front of their yards. You usually get a better response if you speak to people about it.
7. Choose a convenient time and safe location with enough parking. Try to have a little food and possibly a door prize. Local businesses will sometimes donate.
8. Hold your first neighborhood meeting. Make the meeting fun.
9. The Meeting: Start on time.
  - Have a sign-up sheet and be sure to ask for e-mail addresses to help you notify them of future meetings and anything newsworthy for the neighborhood.
  - Have someone lead the meeting and someone take notes.
  - Start on time. Make agendas available. Follow the agenda.
  - Make sure attendees feel they have found a purpose and direction.

***The Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods is always ready to help you organize. Contact at [neighbors@brgov.com](mailto:neighbors@brgov.com) or (225) 389-8680 (Neighborhood Revitalization Office).***

## **Recruiting New Members**

- Be prepared to do a lot of talking. Meet the people on your street. Go door-to-door.
- Be inclusive. Include all neighbors, businesses and churches.
- Welcome new people into the neighborhood.
- Try to think of ways to involve the young and the elderly.
- Listen to everyone and let everyone speak. You might want to have a time at each meeting when people may speak freely for a set amount of time.
- People become active for different reasons. It might be the social aspect of working with others and meeting new people or working toward a goal.

## **First Meeting Agenda**

Below are suggestions. Every neighborhood has its own needs and preferences.

1. Welcome and Introductions - Have everyone introduce themselves. Invite them to say something such as how long they have been in the neighborhood what they like about the neighborhood and what they'd like to improve. This helps them feel involved.
2. Set your priorities as a group – Lead the group through a brainstorming session:
  - What are the most important issues in our neighborhood?
  - What do we want to accomplish in five years?
  - What do we want our association to do?
  - How often should we meet and what do we want our committees to do?
  - What speakers or topics would we like for upcoming meetings?
3. The above information will help you to form committees. People are often reluctant to head a committee so reassure them that they will be working as a team. Pass around a clipboard and ask everyone to sign up for something. Possibilities are:
  - Social- plan events and build relationships between neighbors
  - Security - help set up a Neighborhood Watch Program
  - Membership - focus on telling others about the association
  - Beautification – focus on improving the looks of the neighborhood
  - Nomination – presents a slate of candidates to the board at the annual meeting
  - Welcoming
4. Ask if there are any remaining questions or comments.
5. Adjourn - be sure a date has been secured for the next meeting.

## **How to Elect Officers**

In the beginning, if only a few of you are active, you may become officers by default. When there are enough neighbors involved, a “slate” of officer nominees may be presented to the members by the nominating committee. The committee has already asked each nominee if they would accept the nomination. At the meeting, the committee presents the slate of nominees and then opens the floor for any other nominations from association members. The call for additional nominations must be asked for three times. If there are no nominations the entire slate is voted on at one time. If there is only one candidate, you may vote with a show of hands. The proper way to call a vote is, “All in favor/all opposed.” You may keep it private with ballots.

## Officers' Duties

### President/Chairperson:

- Preside over the association
- Facilitate discussions
- Involve all members
- Serve as spokesperson for the group
- Oversee the schedule of meetings and activities
- Coordinate the activities of officers, leaders and committees
- Arrange for time and meeting place of meetings
- Develop the agenda
- Arrive early to arrange the meeting room
- Exhibit good leadership qualities and is a role model for the members of the association

### Vice-President/Vice-Chairperson

- Perform president/chairperson's duties in the absence of the president or chairperson.
- Assist the president, performs various duties, and participates on committees
- Arrive early to arrange the meeting room.

### Secretary

- Keep accurate minutes of board and general meetings
- Read and writes letters for the association
- Keep membership and attendance records up-to-date.

### Treasurer

- Keep up-to-date records of financial transactions.
- Receive and deposit funds in the association's bank account.
- Give finance report at each general meeting.
- Plan a budget and present it to the board for approval.

## Tips on Running an Effective Meeting

- 1) Choose a meeting time, date and place that suits as many people as possible.
- 2) Always develop a well planned agenda.
- 3) Set up the meeting room in advance so it is ready when the attendees arrive.
- 4) Display handouts and the sign-in sheet near the door.
- 5) Check the room temperature.
- 6) Start on time. If you know that some will be late, start with less important agenda items.
- 7) Don't overload the agenda.
- 8) Limit the meeting to one hour or one and a half hours.
- 9) Make sure there is someone taking minutes throughout the meeting. The minutes should be typed within a few days and sent to board members to remind them of what they need to do. Otherwise, it is easy to forget.
- 10) It is the president or chairperson's job to keep the meeting moving.  
Whether you decide issues by majority voting or consensus, you should decide in advance how your group wants to make decisions.
- 11) A copy of Robert's Rules of Order is available at your library. It helps in conducting meetings.

## **Dealing with Problems in a Meeting:**

- Don't penalize those on time by making them wait for latecomers. Go ahead and start the meeting with a less important item on the agenda. Doing so will reinforce the behavior of those who come on time.
- When a point is being discussed too long, summarize it or suggest tabling the question for a later time.
- When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize the points made by each and turn the discussion back to the group, inviting the two to stay after the meeting to talk about it more.
- When coping with a "one man show", interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution and politely ask him to hold his other points until later. You might say, "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?"
- If a member consistently gets out of hand let them know that they may speak for only a certain amount of minutes. When their time is up thank them and continue on with the meeting even if they continue talking. They will quit eventually. If they continue ignore them. At the next meeting do the same thing. At each subsequent meeting they should talk less and less. If they don't get the attention they are aiming for they should stop.
- When a speaker drifts from the subject you may 1) interrupt, give credit for the idea, but explain that this is a departure from the main idea; 2) propose to the group the question of whether it wants to stray from the agenda or follow it or; 3) bring the discussion back to the topic by using related ideas as the transition.
- When a member has difficulty expressing herself, build her confidence by showing appreciation for what she has said and then rephrase her material with a preface such as, "Is this what you mean Gloria?"

## **Keeping Active Members**

- People will stay involved if they feel appreciated and useful. Compliment the positives and at all stages express gratitude. Acknowledge neighbors for their hard work at a meeting.
- Provide a good experience from the beginning. Be creative and make whatever you do fun.
- Be sure to give everyone something to do, no matter how small a job. If they don't volunteer, ask. Be clear as to what you need and ask what they would like to do. Many people are happy to help, but need to be asked.
- The more you keep people updated and informed about your group's news and activities, the more they'll feel like a part of the team.
- Mutual respect, the ability to listen, and exchanging ideas form the foundation of a successful volunteer sign-up.
- Do not over burden anyone. Divide one job into several smaller ones that can be accomplished by more people if necessary.
- Volunteers are not accountable to an organization in the sense that an employee is accountable. Moreover, a volunteer likely sees him or herself as doing a favor for the organization. This means that the event organizers need to respect the volunteer's temperament and preferences in ways that are not always necessary in dealing with employees.
- Be well organized. People want to be part of a successful experience.

## Important Tips

- Building an organization is a process. Identify your priorities and build on them.
- Set realistic goals and let them grow.
- Remember that people join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One is to get to know their neighbors better. So, as you build your organization always incorporate fun into the activities.
- Stay focused on the big picture. Set goals each year.
- The best way to recruit new members is one at a time.
- Topics for the membership at large meetings should be relevant and varied.
- Committee chairs and project heads are important positions for developing new leaders.
- Celebrate accomplishments. Be sure to let the neighborhood learn about even small victories. It helps them understand the value of the organization.
- Recognize the contributions of neighbors. Thank them. Their contributions can include organizing an event or social, recruiting members, improving common landscaping areas, conducting a neighborhood-wide survey, checking on a homebound neighbor, producing a newsletter, running the website or list-serve, heading a committee and working on a committee. Recognize individuals from outside of the neighborhood who have helped in some way. This could include officials, news media, and others. A newsletter is a good way to accomplish this.
- Listen respectfully to all the residents. Find out their interests, talents and needs. This can be done at a well-attended meeting or with a door-to-door-survey.
- Sponsor activities that bring neighbors together. Activities can include pot luck lunches and dinners, sometimes with prizes for the best dessert, hot dog barbeques, roller skating for the kids, a Halloween parade, crawfish boils, music and games in the park, a pizza party where the association buys the pizza and everyone else brings drinks and dessert, Mardi Gras Parades, Easter egg hunts, Christmas caroling, Christmas photos with Santa, ladies tea and recipe swap, and block parties.
- Strong relationships build strong organizations.
- The organization helps you and you help it.
- “People support what they help to create.” – Anonymous

## Storing Records

Use a three-ring binder to store all your records. Your records book should contain:

- the articles of incorporation and the bylaws
- minutes of your organizational meeting and all following meetings
- a list of the names and addresses of your directors
- a membership roster listing the names, addresses and e-mails of your current members
- A record of any activities that you did, how they were organized and who did what to make future activities easier.
- The president should keep your records book so you always know where to find it. Having your documents in order can also help in the event your group is ever involved in an IRS or financial audit, or a dispute among directors, members, creditors, contributors, or anyone else.

## Articles of Incorporation

You may become an official corporation by signing up with the Secretary of State's Office. This may be done at 8585 Archives Ave. This is off Essen Lane. For questions call (225) 922-2880. They will ask you if you have an EIN. You may file your Articles of Incorporation online at <http://www.sos.la.gov/Home/Commercial/Corporations/FileOnline/OriginalFilings/tabid/1009/Default.aspx> It's easy. (\$60 fee)

Taxpayers can obtain an EIN (Employer Identification Number) from the IRS immediately by calling the Business & Specialty Tax Line at (800) 829-4933. The hours of operation are 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. local time, Monday through Friday.

Or online at [http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Apply-for-an-Employer-Identification-Number-\(EIN\)-Online](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Apply-for-an-Employer-Identification-Number-(EIN)-Online)

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