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# Introduction

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Hello and welcome to the City of Gresham’s handbook for neighborhood association volunteers. You may be new to the City or a long-time volunteer with years of experience. You may be interested in tackling issues in your neighborhood, or more interested in working to improve Gresham as a whole. Maybe you’re just interested in how our City government and neighborhood association system works.

Well, you’ve come to the right place.

This handbook provides you with an *overview of how our City works*. It includes *information on how to organize and manage your neighborhood* most effectively. It also includes *advice and information on how to interact with the City*. Think of the handbook as your reference guide for helping your neighborhood and our City be the best that it can be.

*The handbook contains a lot of information, but don’t let that overwhelm you!* You don’t need to read from front to back unless you want to. Topics are broken down into sections describing how our City works and how neighborhood associations fit into the way our City makes decisions and choices about the future. It is designed so that you can refer to specific sections to get the information you need, without having to read through a lot of text or bureaucratic jargon.

So, go ahead, flip through to get a specific piece of information, or read more closely for a full overview of the neighborhood association system.

## **Contact information**

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Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement

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# About Gresham

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## A short history of our City

Between the big-city bustle of Portland to the west and the solitude of the countryside to the east, you will find Gresham, Oregon. Located in the shadow of beautiful Mt. Hood, the City stretches from the Columbia River to the north, to the southern edge of Multnomah County. Gresham covers an area of about 23 square miles, and is called “home” by almost 110,000 people.

The early days of the town began along the banks of Johnson Creek where settlers held Methodist camp meetings in the area that would later become the City of Gresham. The original community, which included a small post office, was known as “Campground.”

A local store-keeper named Benjamin Franklin Rollins wanted to enhance business by moving the post office to his shop. He applied for his store to become the “Gresham Post Office” named after then-United States Postmaster General Walter Quintin Gresham. Even though the federal official had never set foot in the area, Rollins’ flattery paid off! In 1884 the post office was moved to his store, and named after Postmaster Gresham. When the City was formally incorporated in 1905, it kept the name Gresham.

The City began as a small berry farming community. It flourished in the early 1900s when rail lines were extended from Portland. With the advent of the automobile, however, these rail lines were removed. Ironically, the extension of the MAX light rail line from Portland to Gresham in the 1980s again contributed to rapid growth and development.

Gresham’s economy is driven primarily by service and retail trades which serve a large residential community. Interstate 84 and Highway 26, along with the light rail line, and bike trails such as the Springwater corridor, link Gresham with our region

As recently as 1960, the City’s population was under 4,000 people. In the short period between 1978 and 2014, Gresham’s population has increased from 28,850 to nearly 110,000 people, making Gresham one of the top five largest cities in all of Oregon.

Gresham is proud of its reputation as a friendly, clean, and livable city. Together, our residents work hard to keep it that way!

# **Gresham's government and organization**

Gresham has a council-manager form of government. Much like a corporate president who answers to a board of directors, a city manager is hired by, and reports directly to the City Council. The city manager oversees all City departments and their staff.

A non-partisan mayor is elected by the citizens of Gresham every four years. Six at-large, non-partisan city council members serve four-year terms. Gresham's Mayor and Councilors serve on a voluntary basis. The Council is the primary policy and decision-making body for the City. Nine departments, each of which manages a specific area of governmental responsibility report to the City Manager, either directly, or through the Assistant City Manager. Two other Departments report directly to Council.

## ***The departments are:***

### **Governance and Management**

Responsible for supporting elected officials, budget, communications, compliance, and community and neighborhood engagement.

### **Finance and Management Services**

Manages financial operations, fleet services, grants, passports, and business licenses.

### **Information Technology**

Supports IT needs throughout the City organization.

### **Police**

Handles public safety services and crime prevention for the City.

### **Fire and Emergency Services**

Includes fire and emergency response, as well as disaster preparedness.

### **Environmental Services**

Manages watershed health, wastewater, solid waste recycling, transportation and parks.

### **Urban Design and Planning**

Responsible for comprehensive planning and development planning.

### **Community Development**

Responsible for code compliance and enforcement, permitting, and building inspections.

### **Economic Development**

Works to promote jobs and economic growth for our City.

***Departments that report directly to Council:***

**Urban Renewal**

Manages the Rockwood Urban Renewal district.

**City Attorney**

The City Attorney's office provides legal representation and risk management services to the City.

# Gresham's Neighborhood Associations

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The future of Gresham depends on healthy, vibrant neighborhoods. Neighborhood associations help people work together in an organized way to improve the livability of their neighborhoods.

The City has a long and committed relationship with Gresham's citizen organized neighborhood associations. Gresham has had recognized neighborhood associations since 1989. Neighborhood associations are where residents come together to meet, discuss issues, share information and have fun.

The City is committed to providing residents with responsive, coordinated service that promotes collaboration and communication among residents and city government through recognized neighborhood associations. Gresham's neighborhood associations are an important independent partner for the City – serving as a voice for Gresham's residents and as a place the eyes and ears for our community. Neighborhood associations offer people from all walks of life an opportunity to get involved in their community, learn about how their City works, and help to make their neighborhoods safer and more livable for everyone.

Gresham has 16 official neighborhoods recognized by the City. Neighborhood associations are an important voice and source for 2-way communication for Gresham residents, providing advice, guidance, and policy recommendations to the City on a host of important topics, including: public safety, land use issues, and priorities for funding and infrastructure investment.

In addition to recognized neighborhood associations, a coalition of associations meets once per month. This coalition is made up of the elected leaders from each of the active associations. It meets to discuss city-wide issues and other items of importance to the City as a whole. It also provides support and assistance to individual neighborhoods.

## **What is a Neighborhood Association?**

A Neighborhood Association is a group organized within a geographic area for the purpose of acting on issues affecting neighborhood and community livability. Neighborhood associations are separate and distinct entities from each other and the City.

Each neighborhood association is different, reflecting the needs and preferences of its members. They may choose work on a variety of projects that range from block parties and neighborhood clean up to being actively involved in a variety of public review processes. Neighborhood Associations also play an important role in advising and guiding land use decisions in our City.

## **Standards**

Recognized neighborhood associations must satisfy the standards outlined in Gresham Revised Code (Article 2.60), as well as any administrative procedures established by the manager of the Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement (ONCE). The ONCE manager determines when an association has met these standards.

## **Bylaws**

Each neighborhood association and the Coalition must adopt and execute written bylaws that provide:

- (a) annual election of officers;
- (b) meetings shall be conducted in conformance with the City of Gresham's administrative procedures;
- (c) provisions for adopting and amending bylaws;
- (d) establishment of a quorum of no less than 10 members for general association meetings, a majority of active associations for Coalition meetings and 3 Board members for Board meetings;
- (e) a minimum of two general association/Coalition meetings per year;
- (f) attending members/associations have one vote each and decisions shall be made by a vote that is at least a majority vote of those members present.

Associations and the Coalition must provide an executed copy of bylaws to ONCE to be kept on file. Copies of all amendments to the bylaws shall also be provided to the Office of Neighborhoods and Community Engagement (ONCE) by the associations and the Coalition within two weeks executing changes. Amendments or changes must be signed by at least one officer.

In an effort to provide consistency, a bylaws template has been established by the Coalition. This template can be used in its entirety or changed to meet individual association needs. However, it is highly recommended that bylaws be as consistent as possible throughout the City of Gresham neighborhood associations.

## **Administrative Procedures**

As established in City Code, the ONCE manager has established Administrative Procedures for neighborhood associations. These procedures are in addition to the recognition standards outlined in City Code. These procedures have been established to ensure that only recognized associations are accessing the resources and processes available for associations and to guarantee the City is communicating with the appropriate association leaders. You can find these additional Administrative Procedures on the neighborhood webpage at <https://greshamoregon.gov/Neighborhoods/>.

## **Membership**

Any resident, business owner, or owner's representative, non-profit organization, or property owner within the recognized boundaries of one of Gresham's neighborhood associations is eligible to be a member of that association. Membership cannot be limited by race, creed, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, heritage, national origin, or income. The neighborhood associations may not charge membership dues. Contributions may be collected only on a volunteer basis.

## **Leadership**

Each neighborhood association's bylaws include provisions for electing a board – these are the leaders of your association. When voting for board members, keep in mind the strong leadership, responsibilities, and skills necessary for these positions. People who accept a position on their local board agree to help run the association to the best of their ability and to learn about the association so that they can make sound decisions that are needed to run it effectively. Board leadership can make administrative decisions as a board. Non-administrative decisions need to be made during neighborhood meetings and are subject to a vote of the association.

### ***Board Members***

Each neighborhood association should elect a board of directors. The board should consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer (or a combined Secretary/Treasurer). The board should also include a Land Use Director.

### **President**

The President is typically responsible for the overall leadership of the neighborhood association and the board. They speak for the neighborhood association and are typically the principal contact with the community and the City – the Mayor, the Council, City staff, business people, and media. A key component of the President's job is to make sure the board is working cooperatively and communicating effectively. Some specific duties can also be assigned to other board members depending on how the board is structured.

More specific responsibilities of the President may include:

- Understanding, promoting, supporting and interpreting the overall goals of the neighborhood association
- Delegating responsibilities among Board Members and committee members
- Appointing people to serve on committees (some association's may have differing bylaws in this area)
- Setting agendas, scheduling, and leading neighborhood association and board meetings and ensuring that the proceedings are recorded.
- Recognizing members for their work
- Meeting with the successor and transferring records, files, and other items

In its book on community organizations, the Sierra Club lists three helpful traits for a chairperson:

- **Coolness under fire** – It is inevitable that a neighborhood association will be involved in confrontations. The Chair will need to deal with confrontation and anger, and be able to discuss issues calmly and firmly.
- **Ability to delegate** – Neighborhood associations are not meant to be one-person organizations. The Chair needs to encourage other people to do some of the work, and be willing to accept that they may approach this work differently.
- **Efficiency in leading meetings** – One of the most important roles of the Chair is leading meetings. The Chair must keep meetings on track so as to avoid unnecessary meetings or meetings that last too late into the evening. Make sure to end your meetings on time!

Check out the sections, “Managing your meetings” and “Specific meeting tools” for information on how to prepare for and lead meetings more effectively.

### **Vice President**

The Vice President works closely with the President in leading the association. This person will conduct meetings when the Chair is unavailable, and – depending on your individual bylaws – may have other specific responsibilities. Vice Presidents often serve as unofficial “sergeants-at-arms,” ensuring that bylaws are followed properly. VPs also typically serve as leaders for any effort to update association bylaws.

### **Secretary/Treasurer**

You may combine the Secretary position with the Treasurer position, especially if there aren’t enough volunteers to fill the positions individually.

*The Secretary* is responsible for maintaining the records of the association. This usually means taking the minutes at meetings and keeping all important documents, such as bylaws, policies, etc. updated and available. It can also include sending out meeting notices and keeping attendance records.

The minutes are important and must be accurate, because they serve as a valuable record for the decision-making process. The Section called “Specific Meeting Tools” contains information on how to take minutes.

*The Treasurer* typically has responsibility for the Association’s financial affairs. This includes revenue from donations, grants, fundraising events, or other methods the group uses to raise money to carry out its goals:

- Receive all monies and make bank deposits
- Pay all bills (with one other signature, usually the President)
- Keep the board and neighborhood association updated about the financial situation

- Work with an accountant to file local, state, and federal taxes where applicable

The Treasurer doesn't have to be an accountant, but does need to be able to create clear, understandable financial reports. The Board will use these reports to help make good decisions.

*The Land Use Director* receives notifications of development activity in each neighborhood and is responsible (along with the President) for complying with the City's Early Neighborhood Notification (ENN) process. In particular, the Land Use Director is often called upon to help advise developers on potential meeting dates and locations for ENN meetings.

For more information on the ENN process, please refer to the Land Use Guide located on the neighborhood webpage at <https://greshamoregon.gov/Neighborhoods/>.

## Committees

Committees are created to organize the work of the association. Specific committees may be directly named in an association's bylaws. Standing committees can be formed to address ongoing issue. Committees can also form to address a single time limited issue – known as “ad hoc” committees. These committees should have a specific timeframe, and be retired when appropriate. Please remember that committees are effective ways to help share the workload, however decisions need to be made by the neighborhood association, rather than by committees or the association's officers. *It is important to always ensure that major decisions are voted on by the entire association, not just a committee or the association board.*

Here are some examples of the more commonly found standing committees:

- **Land Use:** This committee reviews land use proposals, including specific applications filed with the City, land use policies such as the comprehensive plan, or zoning code revisions.
- **Traffic/Transportation:** This committee reviews proposals for changes in traffic patterns (Stop signs, parking, signals) and transportation proposals such as major street improvements. It seeks solutions for traffic problems, and makes recommendations on transit proposals.
- **Communications/Outreach:** This committee is responsible for establishing the most effective way to communicate and keep members informed of the work and of the association. This committee may also be responsible for informing the media about issues and meetings and may be responsible for writing and submitting articles and meeting dates to the City for its quarterly newsletter.
- **City Affairs:** This committee might review proposals before the City, which would have an effect on the neighborhood and may not come under the responsibility of another committee.
- **Public Safety/Crime Prevention:** This committee is responsible for promoting and organizing crime prevention efforts in the neighborhood. It often works with the City's

NeighborReady program and the City's Code Compliance Department. In addition, the Gresham Police Department's Neighborhood Enforcement Team (NET) is an important partner for public safety committee members.

- **Nominating/Membership:** It is important to have a nominating committee active all year instead of just a few months before elections. This allows time for the real work involved in developing a list of qualified candidates for the next election: getting to know individual members, discovering their interests and skills, and talking with them about the different board and committee positions. The committee must look to match the association's needed skill set with the skills of potential officers and board members. It takes time to cultivate leadership and adequate time must be given to this task to ensure a healthy board.
- **Ad Hoc Committees:** Committees, which are formed for a specific purpose or project and for a limited period, are called "ad hoc committees." Once their job is done, they are disbanded. A good example of an ad hoc committee is the bylaws committee. A review of the bylaws every few years is usually sufficient. The president can appoint a bylaws committee when needed, and ask it to review the bylaws and make its recommendations within a certain period. Once that task is completed, the committee is disbanded until next time a review is needed. Typically, the VP leads a bylaw committee.

### **Committee Chair**

The job of a committee chair is much like the president. A chair sets the agenda of the committee, organizes and facilitates meetings, delegates work among the committee members, recruits members, ensures the work of the group is recorded, reports to the board and the association.

As committee chair, you may also be responsible for finding your own committee members, or the neighborhood association president may appoint them.

### **Committee Members**

Committee members agree to do work for the neighborhood association. This usually means attending meetings and doing committee work between meetings. If you are a committee member, it is important that you carry out the commitments you have made and work with others.

# Neighborhood resources

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Over the years, the City has provided a variety of support mechanisms to recognized neighborhood associations. These supports are provided to help you organize a successful neighborhood association.

## ***Neighborhood association resource area***

Located in the ONCE office inside City Hall, the resource area is a designated space that associations can use to conduct neighborhood business. The area has a computer, phone, photocopier, conference room access, and other informational resources neighborhoods frequently use such as the Development Code, GIS system, and internet access. The area is available on a drop-in basis, or by appointment if you need to reserve an extended stretch of time for your use.

## ***Newsletters***

The City has a print newsletter that is mailed to all households within the city three to four times per year. Neighborhood association meetings are noticed in the newsletter. Once per year the City publishes a special insert in the newsletter called Neighborhood News. Neighborhood News published articles written by the associations and the Coalition of Neighborhoods.

## ***Neighborhood Connections***

The City has launched an e-newsletter that is sent to anyone in Gresham who has signed up to receive it. Neighborhood Connections is sent out once a month. You can sign up at <https://greshamoregon.gov/city-publications/>.

## ***City web site***

The City posts association meetings on the City's calendar. On the neighborhood association pages, the City provides space to publish neighborhood descriptions, meeting information, bylaws, agendas, contact information, meeting minutes, and photos.

## ***Meeting space***

While associations are encouraged to hold meetings in their neighborhood boundaries, the City understands that sometimes meeting space is not always available. The City provides free meeting space in City Hall upon request for association business. The City does not provide space for ENN meetings, unless they are held as part of a regular association meeting.

## ***Postcard mailings***

The City provides two postcard mailings per year for each association. Postcards go out to every household in the neighborhood. One of these mailings *must* be used to notice annual elections. Requests for a postcard must be made by contacting ONCE *at least six weeks in advance of the meeting/event*.

### ***Training***

The City provides periodic trainings on issues that are important to running a successful neighborhood association and on issues that concern the community such as land use, community organizing, and running effective meetings.

### ***Technical assistance***

The City provides staff that is available to answer questions about the processes that affect the neighborhoods, assist in accessing information, and provides technical assistance if requested.

### ***Neighborhood matching grant***

Each year (when the City budget allows) the City offers an opportunity for neighborhoods to apply for grant funding for projects within their neighborhood. Any recognized neighborhood may submit applications for projects that increase the livability of their neighborhood. All grant funding requests must include a match from the neighborhood, either financial or in-kind.

# Finding and keeping active volunteers

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## Why do people become active in neighborhood associations?

There are many reasons people become involved in their neighborhood association. When you understand some of the reasons people get involved and volunteer you can create a recruitment strategy that yields results.

When asked why they do not volunteer nine out of ten people say, “I was not asked.” To begin your recruitment process, look at why people become actively involved in neighborhood associations:

- Someone asked them to become involved.
- They want to get to know their neighbors.
- They want to help others in their own neighborhood.
- They want to be involved in their community.
- They have strong feelings about certain neighborhood issues and want to have a say in how those issues are dealt with.
- They want to be a part of activities that are significant to the neighborhood; they may also be concerned about what will happen (or not happen) if they are not involved.
- They want to feel needed and useful.
- They have knowledge, skills or expertise that they want to use.
- They want to gain new skills.
- People they like, and respect are involved.
- The neighborhood association has a reputation for doing good work and having a good time as well.

You can probably add to this list. The key is to consciously recognize that what motivates one person will not necessarily motivate someone else.

To focus your recruitment efforts, ask what your neighborhood association offers to satisfy some of these motivations. Are meetings focused on significant issues? Are all people equally welcome to give ideas? Does the association make the best use of members’ time – during meetings and in project work? Are current members genuinely friendly to newcomers?

## ***Recruiting active members***

A healthy neighborhood association is constantly recruiting new people involved. New and active volunteer are critical to the longevity of associations. Not only do new members bring new ideas and energy, they also ensure an association is representing the needs and desires of the entire neighborhood.

A neighborhood association may experience an upsurge of volunteers when it's working on projects that many people want to be involved in, or when issues the association is working on are well publicized in the media. After the publicity dies down, however, and the problem is solved, active volunteers may dwindle. It is important that you keep these new volunteers engaged in other community building projects once the excitement dies down.

Do not get discouraged if you find your meeting turnout fluctuates. Many people appreciate what the association is doing for their neighborhood, but because of busy schedules, they may not be able to attend meetings or even come into direct contact with an association. However, it is still important that you try to keep them informed of the association's activities.

Successful neighborhood associations know the dangers of depending on the same volunteers repeatedly - the core volunteers eventually tire of doing all the work and burn out. In some rare instances, the unintended consequence can be that the association can develop a reputation of being a small clique that is not open to others. To avoid these pitfalls, develop a process to encourage participation and new volunteers.

## ***Recruiting tactics***

These tactics have been used successfully in neighborhood associations and community groups.

### **Go to them**

Go to your members; do not make them come to you. To sign people up at meetings you first must get them to come to the meeting. So, do not wait for them, go out and find them.

- Be everywhere neighbors are. Undertake a recruitment drive that directly reaches every household within your boundaries.
- Have volunteers go door to door calling on their neighbors. This can be a weeklong or one-day blitz. Have a recruitment drive, followed that same day by a party for the recruitment volunteers where they can share experiences.
- Arm volunteers with printed materials to encourage residents to get involved. Use a brochure about your association or a simple letter from your president explaining your specific neighborhood association and details of upcoming activities.
- Have recruitment volunteers carry sign-up forms with them so that residents who express interest in specific areas or who offer certain types of expertise can be contacted easily.

- Develop a zone leader network in the neighborhood as a foundation for a recruitment campaign and other activities. Zone leaders pass out flyers and newsletters, welcome new residents, serve as a conduit for specific problems on the block, and place volunteers in activities. One resource for names is organized Block Watches.
- Recruit at community gatherings, school events, and other popular community events. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Be sure to have information and sign-up sheets at all events, to collect contact information.
- Use Early Neighborhood Notification (ENN) meetings as a source for new volunteers. You may be able to work with the developer requesting the ENN meeting to collect additional emails and phone numbers. You may also want to provide your own signup sheet at the ENN meeting to collect contact info on your own.

### **Ask the question – “Who is not here?”**

Identify who should be involved in the association, but is not. An issue may affect everyone in the neighborhood, but some may be affected more than others may. Contact residents who are most affected. If the issue is a crosswalk near a school, talk to parents. If it concerns littering and loitering near a neighborhood store, talk to the immediate neighbors rather than those several blocks away.

Locate people who were previously active in the association, and try to find out why they no longer are. If they mention problems with the neighborhood association that caused them to drop out, discuss resolutions to those problems. If circumstances have eliminated the problems, encourage them to discover the difference for themselves at the next meeting. Be sure you take whatever steps necessary to help people rejoin the association and work on current issues facing the neighborhood.

### **Look for skills not names**

A simple way to identify new people to recruit is to focus on the skills needed for the task, not on the person who last had it. List the actual skills required for a task and then attempt to match those skills with an individual’s experience. In this way, it is possible to identify a completely new group of people who can help with a neighborhood project.

### **Involvement by degrees**

One of the most successful techniques for getting more participation is to offer ways in which individuals can become involved on a limited basis and then “grow” into a larger role. Asking for help with a small and simple task makes it easier for an individual to say “yes.” Any effort, no matter how small, is important and leaves the door open to increased involvement in the future.

## **Define the task**

Recruiting new people by asking for help on a neighborhood project becomes easier when a task is clearly defined. This means describing the skills needed as well as the time commitment required.

Defining the task should also include a description of how the special task fits into the whole scheme of neighborhood improvement. Understanding how a contribution makes the whole effort stronger is a powerful motivational tool.

## **Create a history of efficient use of people's time**

Volunteers are encouraged by a meeting that is well run and does not waste their time. Consequently, the efficient use of time helps build a positive reputation for your organization. Residents and inactive members who see that the association's projects are worthwhile and that the efforts are well managed are more likely to take an active role. *End your meetings on time!*

## **Ask personally**

This may be the most important advice overall. It is much more effective to personally ask someone to volunteer, than it is to rely on emails, mailings, or phone calls. If you make a personal connection, don't hesitate to ask for them to come to a meeting or volunteer to serve. The personal touch makes all the difference.

## **More recruitment ideas**

- Specify one meeting/event a year where every active volunteer brings a neighbor. Promote it well so that everyone makes a real effort to bring someone new.
- Use online tools and resources, such as Facebook, nextdoor.com, craigslist, or online community calendars.
- Post fliers in neighborhood markets, coffee shops, Laundromats or businesses with public bulletin boards.
- Ask a member to go to local school meetings or other community meetings to promote the association.
- Develop a recruitment brochure telling about the neighborhood association. Give it to friends, neighbors and businesses.
- Place recruitment ads in newsletters from other groups.
- Do not overlook "temporary recruitment" of other groups or individuals to help you with special projects. Examples might be 4-H clubs, service clubs such as Lions, Kiwanis and Rotary, and other volunteer groups.
- Contact the media about issues in your neighborhood. Increased awareness about the issues your association is working on may bring out more members.

## Transforming your recruits into active members

Once you have new recruits at the meetings, you should try to involve them, or you will lose them quickly. Bring them into the group; let them know you value their participation and the new energy they bring to the association. They are the secret to preventing burnout among veteran members. It is easy to accomplish the transformation of new recruits to active volunteers, if the group follows these steps:

### ***Just how welcoming are you?***

You may see yourselves as open, friendly people, but newcomers to the neighborhood association may have a different picture. They walk into a meeting and see a room full of strangers – or people they know only by sight – that are standing and talking in small, closed circles. They need to be greeted warmly. Members should interrupt their talk with their small groups and welcome the newcomer. If they do not feel welcome, some people will leave rather than wait alone for the meeting to start. Others may attend a few meetings, but if they are never made to feel part of the group, they are likely to drop it altogether. Neighborhood association leaders must make a determined effort to integrate new members. Here are some ways to do this:

- Everyone, at every meeting, should wear a nametag. Assign someone who is friendly and welcoming to give out nametags at the door. Be sure this person writes names clearly in big block letters with a dark color felt-tip pen. (They **MUST** be easy to read from a distance of 3 to 4 feet, or they are useless.)
- It is critically important to bring newcomers into the conversational circles. Station the most outgoing people near the door as “greeters.” Their job is to go up to new faces, introduce themselves, and help people be acquainted. A simple “I’m Jane Doe and I haven’t met you yet,” starts the conversational ball rolling.
- Greeters should find out a little about the newcomer, and share information about you and the association but remember to ask them questions.
- Visit for a few minutes, and then walk the newcomer over to one of the conversation groups of three or four people. Introduce the newcomer by name and with a little bit of information. “This is Mark. He lives on NE Oregon. It is his first meeting, and he read about our new project in the paper. He has two teenagers, and is really interested in the skateboard park we’re considering.” Also, share two or three sentences about each of the people in the small group. Stay with “Mark” for a few minutes before you leave him with the group.
- Veteran volunteer members also should look out for new faces, and welcome them by inviting them into a conversation group. “I’m John Doe. I am not sure that I have met you yet. Come and join us,” are powerfully welcoming words.
- Serve refreshments. Nothing breaks the ice like a cookie.

- Newcomers especially like to know who else is there, and what they do. The president should always introduce her/himself and the other board members at the beginning of the meeting. When someone gives a report, the chair should open with that person's name and position: "Now let's hear from Sam Smith, who's been looking into the park issue," rather than "Sam, let's hear from you now."
- Make follow-up calls to newcomers to show the association's interest. The call can consist of just thanks for attending and a hope that the person will come again. It can be longer, ask the newcomer for feedback and questions. A second follow-up call before the next meeting serves to invite the newcomer to attend, and emphasizes that they will be welcomed.

### ***Being friendly is not enough***

Leaders must make a conscious effort to keep the neighborhood association from eroding, losing active volunteers and becoming dormant. Here are some ideas and suggestions for building and maintaining your neighborhood association:

- Keep trying to broaden the base of participation. People constantly move in and out of active participation, depending on what is going on in their lives. To keep the neighborhood association up to full strength, volunteers need to be constantly reaching out to people in the neighborhood's boundaries.
- Always take each new opportunity for working on an issue or project as an opportunity to recruit new people with new talents for the neighborhood association. Each issue or project attracts the people who are interested in that kind of issue or project. If there are two or three different projects, they may draw in two or three different groups of people.
- Find out the interests and needs of veteran members who are already involved. Members who feel the neighborhood association is meeting their needs and interests will continue to participate.
- To make new and different contacts in the neighborhood, hold a variety of meetings at different times and places. This could include general membership meetings, board meetings, open houses, and potlucks, visiting in different centers of the neighborhood, outdoor meetings, block meetings, workshops and forums.
- Some associations try to hold their general meetings at a regular time and place to help develop a routine or habit for people. You may want to vary the timing of other meetings to ensure that other people are able to attend if the general meeting times don't work for them.
- Socializing activities are wonderful icebreakers and go far toward building a sense of community and group spirit. Some activities that have been successful include ice cream socials, picnics, potlucks, tours, street dances, holiday parties and social gatherings of all the zone captains. Try some of these activities and create your own innovations.
- Communicate! Send neighborhood updates on a regular basis that people can count on.

## ***Avoiding burnout and spreading the work***

Volunteers are special people who give their time, energy and talent without compensation. Volunteers remain active with organizations they feel are contributing positively to the community, but they also need to be recognized for their efforts within that organization. To prevent volunteer burnout, a positive feeling must remain high despite the many hours devoted to the work involved. This is especially true in neighborhood associations, which often demand great commitment from their volunteers.

Here are some of the top reasons for neighborhood association burnout and ways to prevent your members from succumbing.

### **The neighborhood association is lacking in clear goals and direction.**

Set realistic objectives that meet the association's purpose and goals. It helps to have tasks spelled out in writing, so people know what they are getting themselves into and what is expected of them.

### **There is too much work to do. People are afraid to say "no," thinking that it will not be done otherwise.**

Do not let one person take on everything and then suffer burn out. Different people can handle different amounts and types of work. Recognize different abilities and tolerance levels in handing out work assignments. Help people to be realistic about the time they can devote to a project. Get new members involved.

### **There is a popular belief that if you volunteer in your neighborhood association, you must work until burnout.**

Encourage people to admit, "I've reached my limit," or "I'm not getting the personal satisfaction from this work that I need." Tell them how valuable their work has been, and give them a break. Involve new members. Keep in touch with members on a personal level so you will know when volunteers are feeling unappreciated. Find out what they need to feel gratified in their efforts.

### **There are often few rewards or recognition for a job well done in volunteer organizations.**

Always recognize people for a job well done. Awards are not necessary but a genuine thank you is. Thank people in a heartfelt, meaningful way for their contributions. Creating an environment where people verbally and non-verbally appreciate each other's efforts is a critical part of avoiding burnout among volunteers.

# Managing your meetings

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How your meetings are organized and run directly affect how members become involved and stay involved in the association. If your meetings are well run, are a place where diverse opinions are valued and heard, where the agenda is followed, and where the time of guests and attendees is respected - you will have successful and well attended meetings. Everyone contributes to how well or how poorly the meeting goes. With a little preparation, meetings are effective tools that enable neighborhood associations to achieve their goals.

## Open meeting laws

Neighborhood associations are independent entities that are not required to conduct meetings in conformance with Oregon public meeting law. If your association board needs to meet to discuss administrative issues, you can do so without providing public notice or holding the meeting open to the public. None the less, it is recommended that all associations follow the *spirit* of the law.

The law states “The Oregon form of government requires an informed public, aware of the deliberations and decisions of governing bodies and the information upon which such decisions were made. It is the intent (of this law) that decisions of governing bodies be arrived at openly.”

When it comes to making decisions as a neighborhood association, it is required that you make those decisions as part of a regular neighborhood association meeting, give notice to all members, and allow all members to attend. Basic administrative decisions can be made by the board, but any decisions that are made on behalf of the neighborhood need to be voted on by the association at a regular meeting or a meeting that is properly noticed.

Here are some suggestions help your association meetings meet the spirit of openness and transparency:

1. The meeting site must be held in a location that does not discriminate or disallow members of the public to attend, and it must be accessible to people with disabilities.
2. Meetings should be held in public settings and associations are encouraged to hold meetings within the association’s boundaries. Locations such as City Hall, schools, libraries, churches, coffee houses, restaurants, etc. are all considered public locations.
3. The neighborhood association should provide adequate notification of its meetings. This usually includes notices on the City website.
4. All decisions made by the neighborhood association must be made in a public meeting.
5. Minutes must be taken at all general meetings, but do not have to include everything that was said verbatim at the meeting. They *must* include the following:

- members present (signup sheets do not need to be submitted to the City as part of the minutes.
  - motions, proposals, resolutions discussed, and the key points of the discussion
  - results of all votes, recording both yeas and nays
6. Minutes should be submitted to ONCE no more than two weeks after the meeting to be posted on the City website.

## **The meeting belongs to everyone**

There is a lot to think about when conducting a meeting and at first, it may seem confusing or even overwhelming. This section, however, gives a simplified overview of the very complex process. Remember: the meeting belongs to everyone. Most of the contact between members comes at meetings, so prepare for them carefully, whether you are the chairperson or a member.

The following serves as a checklist for the president, but should also be read by the association board and members. If most people “sit back” and place all the responsibility on the president, the group will be unable to function well.

### ***Three stages of a meeting***

#### **Before**

1. Consult with board members and committee chairs to determine items needing action.
2. Define the major objective of the meeting. Keep it in mind and focus the primary energy on it. Normally, it should be one of the first items to be dealt with. Other topics may also be considered, but should receive secondary energy. Any items that need a vote should be scheduled early in the meeting.
3. Prepare an agenda. Carefully determine the flow of the agenda to ensure that primary energy and time are given to major issues. See the “Specific Meeting Tools” section for information on developing an agenda and for a sample agenda.
4. Assign responsibilities. Communicate clearly with persons responsible for reports, leading a part of the meeting, speakers, etc., regarding their position in the agenda and time constraints.
5. Always, send out the agenda at least one week before the meeting, along with minutes to be approved, reports, background materials, and any other information which will help prepare the members so that they can get right to work at the meeting. It is good form to send the agenda to your speakers/presenters as well.
6. Don’t forget to send the agenda to the ONCE office so that it can be posted to your neighborhood webpage.

## **During the meeting**

1. Start on time. Do not be tempted to wait for more people to arrive. Not starting on time is one of the most frequent complaints about meetings. If your meetings have fallen into this practice, stop. Latecomers should be caught up only on the item under discussion, so that they can participate/vote. They can be filled in on what they missed after the meeting or during a break.
2. Introduce yourself at the beginning of the meeting. Do not assume people know who you or your board is. If there is time and the group is a reasonable size, have the others introduce themselves as well.
3. Review the agenda and clearly summarizing the key agenda items. If you can, have the agenda on a flip chart for all to see. Provide copies of the agenda and minutes to be approved.
4. Be organized. Use a watch and follow the agenda. When time approaches to end a discussion, announce that time is almost up. Identify the final speakers and their order from those who still want to speak. The discussion ends when those people finish speaking.
5. Do not abuse the power of the chair. Do not ignore those who want to speak, and do not monopolize the floor because you are the president. A president facilitates discussion and does not dictate decisions.
6. Facilitate voting and decision-making. Never assume there is agreement until an issue is voted on. You must make sure that you have a quorum (according to your bylaws) if you take a vote. Note, the chair does not make a motion for a vote, but can ask for another board member or association member to make a motion.
7. You can choose to vote publicly, or vote by secret ballot. If you do vote by secret ballot, each ballot must have a signature and any challenger can review the vote ballots afterwards.
8. Mediate arguments when they arise. Remain impartial and fair. Give each side a chance to state their point of view.
9. Direct discussion and keep people on the topic. If a member brings up a topic that is not relevant to the current discussion, advise them that there will be time for new business. If the discussion becomes repetitive, you may want to say, "I believe we already covered those issues, so it sounds like we may be ready to vote." Recap the information that has already been shared. If a decision needs to be made, call for a motion. See the neighborhoods webpage for a primer on parliamentary procedure/Robert's Rules of Order.
10. Stay on target. This is a responsibility not only for the president, but for each member as well. Deviations from the agenda are acceptable and often valuable, but people should not be allowed to direct energy away from the established agenda. Bring them back by asking, "How does this relate to the subject we are discussing?" If it does not relate ask them if they would like to help prepare a discussion on the topic at the next meeting or ask if it can be brought up during new business.

11. Keep information items brief and relevant. Send out reading material ahead of time and have extra copies available at the meeting. Do not have people read committee reports aloud: tell them to summarize key findings and recommend action with clearly stated proposals.
12. Discuss decision items at a time when most group members are present. Do not put less significant items up front on the agenda, thinking you can get through them quickly and spend more time on the important matters. Frequently, the less significant matters take up more time than anticipated, and people may leave before important decisions can be made.
13. Present financial information with written copies for everyone. Financial reports should be understandable to all the members, not just to those with accounting backgrounds.
14. Involve everyone who attends the meeting. When newcomers are not recognized or taken seriously, they often do not return for future meetings. Have them introduce themselves before they speak, or introduce everyone at the beginning of the meeting. If some people dominate the discussion, ask them to wait to speak until others have a turn.
15. Set the tone. Not every meeting can be upbeat, but all meetings can be stimulating and full of accomplishment. The chairperson and every participant should take personal responsibility for the tone of the meeting and for keeping it moving along. Be sure to:
  - State ideas positively and show their relation to the overall issue.
  - Get points of view by questioning or restating throughout the meeting.
  - Stress cooperation, not conflict.
16. Assign tasks and delegate responsibilities as the meeting proceeds. Clarify new task assignments. Specify who is doing what and what is expected of that person. Ask the secretary to record all assignments in the minutes. Be sure to review assignments before the meeting is adjourned.
17. Use visual aids as much as possible. Include flip charts, maps and posters. Visual aids give groups something to focus on during a discussion.
18. Allow time to evaluate meeting.
19. Establish the next meeting time and place. When people leave the meeting, they will know when and where they will meet next.

### **After the meeting**

1. Encourage the secretary to write up the minutes and get them to you and the board for review as quickly as possible. See Specific Meeting Tools for information on minutes and for a sample minutes template.
2. Follow up with group members. Check their progress on responsibilities assigned/accepted at the meeting.
3. Before the next meeting, make sure everyone is ready to provide a report on his or her findings or assignments.

## **Specific meeting tools**

### ***Developing the agenda***

The agenda is an essential tool for running a good meeting. It tells people what will be discussed, who is responsible for leading the discussion, what outcome is expected from each agenda item, and approximately how long discussion of each item will take.

When preparing the agenda, first review the minutes of your last meeting to see if any issues were left unresolved or which issues are you now prepared to make decisions? What has happened since the last meeting that should be on the agenda? What new information and/or issues have emerged? Do you need additional information or a resource person for this next meeting?

Most meetings should not last more than 1.5 to 2 hours. Call those responsible for reports or other agenda items to ask how much time they will need, so you can budget the agenda time. Make sure to assign a specific amount of time to each agenda item and include it on the agenda.

To prevent meetings from straying off target or falling into endless discussion of an agenda item, employ one of the following options. These actions can be taken in receiving reports, proposals and issues:

- Item received as information.
- Item received as information for future action but not at this meeting.
- Item referred to committee for study, recommendation or action.
- Item received for discussion only.
- Item received for discussion and action (approval or disapproval).

### ***Committee reports***

Documenting the activities of committees helps you to track the group's progress and decisions and provides a permanent historical record that future neighborhood leaders can refer to in their own decision-making process. When writing a committee report, hone what transpired down to essentials.

### ***Minutes***

There are several reasons why good minutes for general association, board, and committee meetings are so important:

1. Keeping association minutes on file with the City is a critical piece of City recognition standards.
2. They are the only record of the work done and decisions made by the association board and its committees.

3. They are the written history of the association.
4. They keep people informed who were not able to attend the meeting.
5. They are essential in continuity for the association boards that come after you.

### **Helpful tips for the Secretary**

1. Have the agenda in front of you while you take minutes.
2. It is not necessary to write down everything that is said, but do record the pros and cons presented. Summarize them briefly, but as completely as possible.
3. Record all motions:
  - a. Name the member who made the motion and underline the action- (Jane Doe moved that...)
  - b. You should include that the motion was seconded (you don't need to record who offered the 2<sup>nd</sup>).
  - c. State and underline whether the motion was carried or failed – (Motion carried)
  - d. Record the vote tally that includes, yes, no, or abstained.
  - e. Request that lengthy, involved motions be written out and given to you.
4. If a special lengthy report is given, obtain the notes from the person giving the report and summarize it. It is not necessary to record reams of information from a report if the information is available in the files of another committee. For example: *Refer to Community Research Committee minutes of November 2, 1998, for further information.*
5. To draw attention, use a capitalized, underlined topical heading to introduce a subject. For example: COVERED BUS STOP AT 8TH AND MAIN STREET.
6. Write up the minutes as quickly as possible after the meeting, while your notes still make sense. If possible, record your meetings. It is recommended that your fellow association board members review the minutes as well.
7. Send a draft of the minutes to ONCE no more than two weeks after the meeting.

### ***Parliamentary procedure***

Parliamentary procedure is an effective and recognized format that most people have had some experience with it. Our administrative rules for neighborhood associations state that Robert's Rules of Order should be considered the standard for facilitating discussions and group decision making. The purpose is to ensure fairness, participation, and orderly conduct of business. For this reason, your neighborhood association may want to adapt a set of meeting "rules" based on Robert's Rules, which will be more understandable and workable.

## Effective action

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For a neighborhood association to have influence when it acts on an issue or a project, the association must invest in developing relationships and the association's reputation. Just by being a recognized neighborhood association, you already have a built-in level of status, respect and access. To help you move your neighborhood's priorities and concerns forward an association must take the time to understand how municipal decision-making works and how you neighborhood association is a part of it.

### ***Get to know the City and how it works***

Familiarize yourself with the City's departments and their responsibilities. Cultivate relationships with staff in the departments that will have the most impact on your neighborhood. Learn how staff, committees, and other groups feed information to the City Council. Attending neighborhood coalition meetings is also a great way to learn more about the City and neighborhood associations.

Review the Council's agendas to gain an understanding of the issues the Council will be considering. Attend Council meetings so that you will understand how the Council operates. Take time to introduce yourself to your City officials - through personal visits, phone calls and/or letters.

Don't forget to consult the Land Use Guide on the ONCE website for information regarding how the land use process works. Also, please feel free to contact the ONCE office with any questions you might have.

### ***Become familiar with the decision-making process***

For a neighborhood association to be effective you must have an understanding of the system, how it works, who is involved and how you can use the system to your advantage. There are many aspects of the decision-making process you should be familiar with. What steps does an ordinance take before it is considered by City Council? How is code changed? Does staff make the decision? What does the land use planning process include? What issues are committees or staff groups working on? What are other jurisdictions working on that may affect your neighborhood and what is the City's role. When are there opportunities for public comment?

### ***Know your issues and do your homework***

Who is affected and what will happen if no action is taken? Get data to back up your position. Communicate with other neighborhood associations' activities related to your concern, as well as any other groups such as the Planning Commission or Council Advisory Committees are addressing the issue. Know which laws and ordinances apply to your issue. Decide which issues need to be addressed by the neighborhood association. Keep good records of dates of events and who was involved, correspondence and significant phone conversations.

At any meeting, find out in advance exactly who will be attending. For example, if you are meeting with the Mayor, will the City Manager or a City planner be present? If you are meeting with a developer, will his or her attorney be there, too? Knowing who will be there allows you to decide which neighborhood association members should be at the meeting. The board president should not go alone, because it may imply only one person's agenda. Other members can help present a point or explain it differently. After the meeting, it helps to have more than one perspective on what really happened. *Remember, that if you are advocating for a specific position as a representative of your association, your neighborhood association needs to have voted to support that position.*

### ***Keep your public officials informed***

Communicate with the City Council about issues that are of concern to you and what actions the neighborhood association is considering. Give them time to think over new ideas and evaluate them in relation to other issues they must consider. Bring written copies of your concerns when meeting with them, and follow up with letter (keep copies of all letters and notes on phone calls).

When you want to discuss an issue, start with the person most directly responsible for your area of concern. He or she may be able to resolve it for you. Be sure to keep the Councilor you are working with informed. If necessary, address the Council as a whole to be sure your neighborhood association is heard. Working with the neighborhood coalition can be particularly effective. Council is more likely to address your issue if all neighborhood associations have a united voice.

### ***Market your association***

Making the community aware of the results of local effort is important for attracting volunteers. Be creative in how you present your association -- try some, or all the following methods for letting the community know what is being accomplished for them.

Word of mouth is a major communication path. Local newspapers and radio or TV stations can be used to highlight projects and plans. Newsletters and special notices promote the association's meetings, issues and activities.

Build a reputation for the association as being both effective and important. Offer an "annual report" through the local media or as a presentation to the City Council. This increases the reputation and visibility of the group. High visibility makes an organization or project attractive to emerging leaders and makes recruiting new active volunteers more likely.

### ***Make it clear that you represent your association***

**Individual board members cannot speak for the neighborhood association without approval from the neighborhood association.** Once you have approval to speak on an issue via a vote of your association, be sure to identify the name of your neighborhood association and the fact

you are representing them. If you are an officer in your association and wish to address Council as an individual, you have a responsibility to clarify that you are speaking on behalf of yourself and not the association. Make sure to report back to your NA board after you have spoken in an official capacity.

### ***Stay on good terms with the media***

Once your neighborhood association becomes involved in an issue, reporters may contact you for statements. Good reporters are looking for quotable statements, so keep these tips in mind when talking to a reporter.

- Whether you are the president or a member, you represent your entire association in the public's eyes. Never make offensive statements. State your position in a positive way, rather than attacking your opposition.
- Only speak on behalf of the neighborhood association if the association the decision has been made at a neighborhood meeting.
- Keep your remarks factual, simple and to the point.
- Build relationships with local reporters. Introduce yourself to them at meetings. Recommend other people to call, if there are people in your association who are particularly knowledgeable about an issue.

### ***Developing goals for your association***

All neighborhood associations should develop goals that represent the needs of the neighborhood and the association. Having concise goals gives your association a clear path to follow when planning meetings, recruiting volunteers, asking for resources and building the association.

There are many different techniques to develop goals. You need to be realistic when you set your goals. Once you have established your association's goals you are ready to build a work plan. Some questions to consider when developing your work plan include:

- What resources are available to help the neighborhood association meet its goals?
- What is the purpose of doing this project? Is there a need for it? Will it help us achieve our goals?
- Has any other neighborhood association tried this activity? Can they be contacted for help?
- What are the tasks involved for the project?
- How much time will be needed?
- Will funding be needed? Does the neighborhood association have the funds? How can you raise needed money?
- Are enough volunteers available to do the work?

## ***General email communications etiquette***

Trust within your association board and with the larger association is critical for success. Most people will only have limited contact with you on a day-to-day basis. Instead, they will base their perspectives on the effectiveness of your association board on the communications they receive from you. Typically, these communications will occur via email. Considering this, and the importance of “making every contact count,” the following are some tips for communicating effectively with your board and with the association in general via email.

- ***Start out with a summary of the content.*** This may only be a sentence or two at the top of the email, but you should begin by letting readers know what the content is about right off the bat.
- ***Users online do not read, they scan.*** Be prepared to get right to the point and don't expect readers to dive in to details. Give them “just the basics” right off the bat. Provide more detail later so that people can dive in if they are so inclined.
- ***Long sentences and paragraphs are difficult to follow on the screen.*** Use short sentences and paragraphs that can be quickly scanned and understood.
- You can use **bold** and *italics (and bold italics)* to emphasize key points. Avoid using underline for anything but links. Underlining any text that is not a link can be very frustrating for users as they are preconditioned to think they are links.
- ***Do not use all caps in your materials.*** Using all caps is the equivalent of SHOUTING AT YOUR READERS!
- ***ALWAYS use the “blind carbon copy”*** feature for sending out emails to large groups. Do not send out emails to large groups by simply placing all the emails in to the “to” box. Make sure that you send things out to your lists as “bcc” or “blind carbon copy.” This helps protect the privacy of your list, and avoids the potential problem of having large numbers of “reply all” responses cluttering up inboxes.
- ***Make sure to protect your neighbors' privacy.*** When communicating with or about your association and its members, make sure that you do not inadvertently reveal names, phone numbers, or addresses without checking with the person in question first.
- ***It is best to avoid graphics and background images in your emails.*** Not every recipient has a fast internet connection. Unnecessary graphics can slow down the communications process and make your email unreadable to some association members.

# The problem-solving process

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Neighborhood associations often asked to help identify and solve problems. It is best not to go directly from identifying a problem to finding a solution, with nothing in between. Instead, try this systematic process for solving problems.

1. Identify and define the problem. What is not acceptable? What *is not* happening that should be? What is the impact or the effect? What would happen if nothing was done and nothing changed? Is the problem recognized by the group or only by certain individuals? Is there willingness and energy to deal with the problem?
2. Set your goals. What *should* be happening instead? What will the situation be if the problem is eliminated or reduced?
3. Determine criteria for a good solution. What essential criteria must be met for any solution that would be acceptable?
4. Gather and analyze data. What is causing the problem? How long has it been going on? Is it growing? What other factors might contribute to the problem? Have we really documented the impact?
5. Generate alternative solutions. Identify all possible ways to eliminate or reduce the problem.
6. Evaluate each solution against the criteria. Which solution – or solution hybrids – meet our criteria for a good solution?
7. Select one solution or a combination.
8. Develop a plan, carry it out, and evaluate its success.

## **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is a way to allow ideas to bubble up to the surface. It helps a group generate creative ideas without concern for their practicality or appropriateness. In the process, all ideas have merit and are placed on a list for the group to discuss.

Here are the basic elements that apply to brainstorming:

1. List everything! - The recorder should list items verbatim, not attempt to rephrase or condense.
2. Do not discuss! - Discussion reduces the number of ideas generated. If people's initial ideas are rejected during the discussion, they often will be reluctant to offer others.
3. Do not judge! - Do not criticize or praise any idea at this point. When you are trying to generate ideas, all ideas are welcome, no matter how impractical or strange they may seem.
4. Encourage piggybacking. - Let people build onto someone else's idea. List it as a separate item.

Brainstorming releases an incredible number of ideas, but afterwards you need to review the list and determine which items to discuss. Do not throw out unconventional ideas too quickly as they may contain a possibility for creating real change.

### ***Nominal group process***

The nominal group technique is a process for group problem solving. There are several points during which the group members do not interact at all.

It is used instead of brainstorming when you want to allow time for individual thinking, before people need to state their ideas and opinions. In groups with a wide variety of member participation styles, it provides an opportunity for quieter people to participate just as much as more verbal ones.

1. Participants silently and individually generate ideas.
  - a. The chairperson presents the group with an issue, problem or question.
  - b. Without discussion, each individual writes as many responses as possible.
2. Round-Robin listing on flip chart.
  - a. Each group member, in turn, presents one idea to be listed verbatim by the group recorder on the flip chart pad.
  - b. This process continues, without discussion, until all ideas have been listed.
3. Group discussion of each item.
  - a. The chairperson leads the group in a discussion of the recorded ideas for clarification, elaboration and evaluation.
  - b. Items may first be grouped for discussion purposes.

### ***Group decision making***

Autocratic, Democratic and Consensus are the three ways that group decisions are sometimes usually made in neighborhood associations.

#### **Autocratic**

With this method, the group “delegates” the decision to an individual, perhaps because the person is the elected or appointed leader, or because s/he has expertise that the group respects.

#### **Democratic**

In the Democratic process, the group votes, and the proposal with the greatest number of votes wins. When everyone votes yes, it is a unanimous decision.

This is perhaps the easiest method of group decision-making. A question is proposed, and individuals decide yes or no by a show of hands or by answering “aye” or “nay” to the question. Each vote carries the same weight.

When an issue is controversial, or more information needs to be reviewed, taking a vote too soon can alienate members and make the decision less credible. Some members may feel that the vote is unacceptable and may openly refuse to support it. They may become less inclined to participate in the organization. If the group is greatly divided on an issue, use other methods before a final vote on the issue is taken.

A *Straw Vote*, rather than a binding vote, should be used when initially discussing a controversial subject. Alternatively, a straw vote can be used if a group is divided on an issue. This is a show of hands to see how much agreement already exists. It is not a binding decision. If you are considering many proposals, a straw vote might indicate which should be seriously studied. For instance, if everyone favors two or three proposals, the others could be eliminated from consideration.

## **Consensus**

In consensus, a proposal is discussed and changed until everyone agrees he or she can support it. Because the consensus process is much more time-consuming than a simple vote, it should not be used for all decisions. Consensus is best limited to issues where both quality and group support is required.

Consensus works best in small groups. Experts on group decision making believe that it is impossible to reach a consensus with groups larger than twelve are involved. Through discussion and adjustment, a group reaches a final decision that everyone can support. It may not have been everyone's first choice, but they still feel that they can support it. If one person cannot support it, regardless of what changes are made, the proposal is not accepted. Consensus differs from unanimity because the original proposal was altered during discussion.

Even in situations where consensus is appropriate, there are variations. For example, if one or two resistant group members consistently block the group from making decisions by consensus, an inordinate amount of time can be used in trying to reach consensus. A strategy used by some groups is to limit the amount of time spent on a discussion. If consensus cannot be reached by the set time, the group votes by a set quorum.

Here are the basic steps to the Consensus process:

- The group discusses the situation until all have a basic understanding of the problems and needs that must be addressed.
- The group generates a list of possible solutions to the problem. This list is evaluated one by one.
- After discussing possible options, the list is narrowed down to two or three solutions most favored by all. If people have objections, changes are made that help satisfy the concern. The chairperson continues asking the question and modifying the statement until everyone

accepts the solution, or it becomes clear that this solution will not work. The chairperson then moves to the next solution and repeats the process.

- After much discussion, compromise and more debate, the group agrees that it can accept a solution. At this point, a formal vote is taken for the record.

Give yourselves plenty of time. This process takes patience, especially when there are many divergent opinions. Sometimes, consensus may not be reached. If consensus is not possible because people feel too strongly on one side or another, a vote is taken.

# Assessing how we are doing: What is working and what is getting in our way?

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## ***Why evaluate?***

Self-assessment can be an energizing and effective way to keep your neighborhood association vital and active. Whether you call it an evaluation, an assessment, a critique, a debriefing or a review, the idea is to look at what you have done, learn from your experience and use that learning for future work.

If a project went well, you want to be sure you understand why – so that you build similar steps into future work. If there were problems, you want to avoid repeating them when another project comes up.

When an organization keeps repeating its mistakes, it becomes discouraging for the people involved, and soon they do not want to be part of it. This is especially true for volunteers in neighborhood associations – they want their time to be spent in meaningful ways. Evaluation allows a neighborhood association to build on its strengths and work more effectively.

For this reason, your evaluation results should be written down, presented to the members and used in planning other projects.

## ***What to evaluate?***

At a fundamental level, the work of your neighborhood association involves two elements:

- The programs and projects that it is working on, with their related goals, activities and tasks, and
- The way that people work together, and the degree to which they enjoy their involvement and interaction.

In evaluation, do not think only in terms of the first element – goal accomplishment – it is just as important to assess the second element as well: how well people work together and enjoy their interaction. This type of evaluation is especially critical for neighborhood associations, which are composed of volunteers. If volunteers do not find their work enjoyable as well as meaningful, they will soon quit. Moreover, when they quit, they often tell others – who then will be reluctant to become actively involved.

## ***When to evaluate?***

Final evaluation comes at the end of a piece of work: when you have finished a project or program. When you do a final evaluation, you can learn what to do – and what not to do – in future projects.

Mini-assessments are evaluations that can occur while work is in progress. They will help you to stay on track, and ensure that you are involving everyone in a meaningful and enjoyable way. For example, doing a mini-assessment at the end of each meeting can fine-tune your meeting process.

### ***How to evaluate?***

A simple way to evaluate is to ask some core questions: “What went well? What did we do that we want to do again?” and “What did not go well? What got in our way?” A follow up question is, “What did we learn from this that we can use in the future?”

You can ask people to discuss these questions at a full membership meeting, at a committee meeting, at a board meeting, or individually. Written questionnaires can be useful, but they take time to develop mail and tabulate, and they have low response rates. Online survey tools, such as [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com), can be extremely useful and are free.

Here are some questions to ask for an in-depth evaluation:

- Did we accomplish what we set out to do? Were our goals and objectives appropriate? Did we have a project plan? Did it cover all the necessary areas? What did we learn about setting goals and planning that will help us in our next project?
- Did we involve the right people, and to what extent? What did we learn that would help us in our next project?
- Did we use our time effectively? What did we learn about scheduling and using time that will help us in our next project?
- Did we use our people effectively? What did we learn that would help us in our next project?
- Did we use our money wisely? Was our budget planning effective? What did we learn about budgeting that will help us in our next project?
- Did we do a good job of tracking our project’s progress? What did we learn about tracking progress that will help us in our next project?
- Were we able to take corrective action in a timely manner? What did we learn about taking corrective action that will help us in our next project?
- What did we learn from our dealings with other organizations and the City?
- If we had the opportunity to do the project over, what would we do differently?

Conduct mini-assessments of meetings. Since poorly run meetings turn off many people, you want to be sure that is not why people are dropping out. Do a mini-assessment and ask, “When you think of the meeting we have just held, what worked well?” Write the responses on a flip chart. When the list is complete ask, “What got in our way?” List these responses as well. Now

you can work on how to reduce or eliminate the items that “got in our way” and build on the “worked well” items.

If people are willing to discuss it, two helpful questions are “In what ways does the *way* we work together encourage people to participate? What are we doing that may make people reluctant to join us?”

It is critical that this does not become a “blame-storming” session! If people feel they are being singled out for critical comments, they will not want to participate.

### ***What to do with the results***

First, take them seriously. Do not argue with evaluation results if they are not as positive as you would like. Assume that the results are valid, and begin planning how to reduce or eliminate the problem areas.

Provide the results to the committee and ask volunteers to review them and develop a plan to address them. Ask them to do it within a reasonable period, not too far into the future as circumstances can change and problems may be resolved simply as an outcome of the group evaluation process.

# The life cycle of an Association

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Neighborhood associations go through cycles. Involvement is high when there is a problem or hot issue people want addressed, or when there are well-publicized issues and projects that the association is working on. Other times, however, active volunteers may dwindle, and associations may become dormant if another issue is not on the immediate horizon. Although with an established list of goals, you can keep your members engaged throughout the year.

The following information is specifically for neighborhood associations that are in a dormant period and need a “jump start.” When an issue facing the neighborhood arises and only a few people are still actively involved in your association, it will help you answer the question: “How can we move *quickly* into action when the structure is there, but the people are not?”

## Revitalizing your Neighborhood Association – How it starts

When you are setting out to invigorate your Neighborhood Association, you need to look at both the short term – what can you do quickly to get things going – and the long term – what needs to be done more slowly and thoughtfully to sustain your momentum. One advantage of restarting your association is that you can look at it with new eyes and find ways to strengthen it. When the neighborhood association is in full swing, with actively involved people working on projects and issues, it is often difficult to see how you are doing or to explore new directions.

When you are restarting, think about two aspects of the association: the work it does (dealing with neighborhood issues, sponsoring projects, etc.) and the ways it goes about doing its work. Do not look only at *what* you accomplish – look at *how* you accomplish it as well. Your neighborhood association’s reputation depends on both areas.

Let us assume there is an issue that needs to be dealt with – as quickly as possible. You and the remaining active members will get together for a preliminary meeting.

At this core group meeting, identify the issue clearly. Why is it a problem? How much of a problem is it? What will be its effect? How many will feel the impact? Most important, who will be the most affected?

Look at your goals for getting the neighborhood association involved. What do you want to accomplish? Think about your own commitment to this effort. Are you willing to put in a burst of energy and effort in the next two to three weeks, recruiting active volunteers and helping them get organized to deal with the issue? If so, you are ready to go out and bring others on board – both those who used to be active in the neighborhood association and those who have never participated.

### ***Get people involved again***

When jump starting an association, remember, *people are much more likely to volunteer when they are asked personally*. It may take more energy and effort, but the personal approach is the most practical for rapid, high response.

Look back through your files and find the names of people who were active in the past. They are most likely to show an interest now. Call them and ask if they are willing to take on a time-limited task: contacting others to attend a starting-back-up meeting. Have a list of five names ready to provide each person who says “Yes.” Do not be tempted to ask them to call more. Five phone calls – and the phone tag involved – is plenty for re-activated volunteers.

### ***Involve new people***

“New” people are people who have lived in the neighborhood but have never been involved in the work of the association, and people who are new to the neighborhood itself. Sometimes people new to a neighborhood are more likely to be involved than long-time residents are. A personal contact welcoming them to the neighborhood and inviting them to come to a neighborhood meeting to discuss a specific issue and meet their neighbors can be very effective.

It may be more difficult to recruit people who have lived in the neighborhood a while and who have never volunteered to work with the neighborhood association. Use the analysis you did of who will be most affected by the issue that is facing you.

With a block directory, find the names and phone numbers of people on the streets, which are likely to be most impacted. Make personal contact with people and the businesses that you have identified.

Remember that people have different reasons to be involved in neighborhood associations: maintaining their investment in their homes/property, maintaining the quality of life in the area where they live, or wanting to know their neighbors. What is most important, however, is the personal invitation.

### ***Critical meeting***

The first meeting held after one has not been held for some time is critical, as it sets the tone for future work. You want people to feel energized and stimulated by the opportunity to deal with a current issue. You also want them to decide to work with you.

Have food and comfortable seating. Bring people together in small groups if possible – in someone’s home works well. These “block” start-up meetings give people a chance to get to know each other, which serves as an added incentive for attendance. Remember that association decisions can’t be made unless the meeting is an actual neighborhood association meeting.

## ***Organizing for action***

Good organization is important if you are to act quickly. On the other hand, if you are going in the wrong direction, you do not want to increase your speed! Everyone at the initial meeting should be clear about:

- Who is responsible for getting things organized? It will probably be the board, but it may not be.
- What outcome is expected because of the neighborhood associations' involvement?
- What are the next steps?
- Who is responsible?
- When are the critical deadlines?
- What is their personal involvement, and what tasks will they be doing?

Give one person the job of keeping track of this information, as well as the names and phone numbers of everyone who came to the meeting even if they say they cannot volunteer to do anything at this time.

## ***Setting realistic expectations: Yours and theirs***

People want to know what they are getting into before they will get involved. As you are contacting people, be clear about what you want them to do. Provide a clear explanation of what is expected and how much time it will likely take. Be truthful. Do not try to minimize the time and effort.

"It is only a one-hour meeting," does not acknowledge the preparation time and the work involved between meetings.

People are reluctant to sign on for what appears to be open-ended involvement. Just working for two weeks on a specific task may be more realistic and encourage more people to volunteer.

## ***Follow good organizational principles***

Do not use the excuse of "but we need to do this in a hurry" to overlook the principles of managing meetings, or avoiding volunteer burnout. "Jump starting" an organization does just that – gets it started quickly again. However, to keep it running, you need to be willing to follow sound guidelines. This guidebook presents the principles for creating effective neighborhood associations. Do not short change the process or you may find yourself back where you started.

Keep the meeting brief – no more than 60 to 90 minutes. If different meetings are taking place in different homes, make sure they are all following the same agenda. A start-up agenda could include:

1. Welcome and introductions (be sure to have nametags).
2. A clear, concise statement of the problem/issue that is bringing the group together.
3. The impact of the problem: how it will affect the people sitting in the room as well as the neighborhood and the City.
4. What needs to be done and when.
5. A call for volunteers.
6. Be sure to allow for discussion, but it is helpful to have a proposed plan of action that people can discuss.