

## How to Start a Neighborhood Association

A neighborhood association is a group of neighbors working together to build a stronger neighborhood. This article outlines the basic steps required to start an effective neighborhood association.

### What you need to do to get started

Start here. Please find guidelines and resources like sample bylaws and how to become a 501(3) (c) if you wish in the Resources tab. The Wauwatosa Neighborhood Association Council (NAC) can help. Please find the contact us page to send an email to a Board Member.

### Core Group Determines the Issues, Concerns and Needs

Create a small core group of neighbors and friends and inventory the neighborhood to identify and determine what are the primary issues of concern.

Every neighborhood association is different. Some start in response to one particular issue, such as a growth or crime. Most successful neighborhood associations, however, are more social in nature and are structured around many different interests.

In either case, you will want to represent **all of the people in your neighborhood.**

### Core Group Homework

After the core group defines the major interests of your residents, their primary function is to then act as a steering committee and help plan for the first general meeting of the entire neighborhood. The core group will need to do a number of important things in preparation for the first general neighborhood meeting:

- Define a list of small "kick-off" projects that should be fairly simple such as a block clean-up, meet-up at a local restaurant or a potluck fundraising event. The idea is to make it easy for the people who come to the first meeting to get involved.
- Decide who you want to tell about your new organization, such as community newspapers, local government, churches and other neighborhood groups. Create

a list with contact names, phone numbers and email addresses and designate who in the core group should be in charge of this task.

- Designate someone in the core group to be in charge of recruiting neighbors to be general members of the neighborhood association.

### Plan the First General Meeting

Once the core group has completed their "homework," you should decide on a date, time and location for the general membership meeting. Keep in mind that you want to choose a date and time that is going to be convenient for the largest number of people possible. In terms of time, weekday evenings or a weekend day usually work the best. Schools, public libraries and churches make great locations for the meeting and will often be free of charge.

### Create an Agenda

This first general meeting is very important in that its job is to lay the foundation for the organization. You should come out of this meeting with an agreement on goals and the interests of the organization. Below is a framework for what your agenda might look like at this first meeting.

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the core group and explain the purpose of the meeting. Also, everyone attending should introduce themselves and share where they live and what they would like to see happen in the neighborhood.
2. **Discuss the Issues:** Everyone attending should have a chance to voice their opinion and make suggestions. Be sure to limit each person's time, so as not to bog down at this point.
3. **Set Priorities:** Based on the interests discussed, prioritize one or two areas of interest and create projects.
4. **Create Tasks:** Break your project ideas down into a series of tasks and assign volunteers. If the work involves a lot of people, create a committee and assign a head.
5. **Create the Organization Structure:** You will need to create a name and create a leadership team (ask those in attendance to approve the core group as a steering committee until elections are held). Rules for operation and elections can either be adopted at the first meeting or put off until the organization has more experience.
6. **Set a Date for the Next Meeting:** It is essential to agree on a date and time for the next meeting before adjourning.

### Get the Word Out

Now that you have done all the ground work for the first meeting, you need to

publicize the event in a way to ensure the highest participation possible. Below are some tips to ensure high attendance:

- Create meeting announcement flyers that include time, date and place. Distribute to as many homes as possible, including apartment buildings in your neighborhood.
- Consider setting up a website or Facebook page so that when you distribute flyers in the neighborhood, you can give neighbors a place to go online for more details. Be sure to print the address of your website or Facebook page on each flyer.

### **Tips for the Meeting**

- Be prepared for a big meeting with lots of discussion and more ideas than you might have expected.
- Be prepared for a small meeting—low attendance is common for new organizations and if this happens, stay positive and enlist the energies of everyone who does show up.
- All ideas should be given fair consideration.
- Everyone needs to be treated with respect.
- No one should leave the meeting without a task, even if it is simple.
- Everyone should sign in. Collect as much contact information as possible, including email addresses.