

Part 1

How to Organize a Neighborhood Association

Before you begin asking your neighbors to organize, you have to convince them of the benefit of forming a neighborhood association. Some of the points to be made to your neighbors are that neighborhood associations:

- Facilitate meeting the neighborhood's common goals
- Empower a neighborhood to control what happens in the area
- Provide the neighborhood with an effective communication link with local governments officials and other influential groups
- Help members work for the preservation and improvement of the neighborhood
- Let members take part in the decision-making process that directs the neighborhood's actions
- Can plan social activities for the neighborhood

Step One: Organizing the Neighborhood

Bringing together a diverse group of people to achieve a common goal is a difficult task that requires a variety of social skills and great investments of time and other important resources. Whenever possible, we recommend using processes and materials that have been perfected and used successfully by other neighborhood associations.

Step Two: Developing the Core Group

To get started, you will need a small group of committed neighbors who share your willingness to form a neighborhood association to meet neighborhood interests. This small group of individuals is referred to as the Core Group.

The final number of people in your Core Group will depend on whose input you feel will help best define the interests that neighborhood residents will rally around. It is important for members of this Core Group to be able to work well together and share a common vision regarding the neighborhood association.

Note: Be sure to keep the size of the Core Group at 10 or less people.

After the Core Group has defined key goals and tasks, the size of the organization will naturally expand as committees and task groups are developed to achieve the goals of the neighborhood association.

Some examples of interest groups to be considered for the selection of neighborhood residents to be represented in the Core Group are:

- Homeowners selected to represent each block or street
- Business owners
- Apartment residents, managers owners
- Church leaders
- School teachers or administrators
- People whose views are respected by other members of the community.

When you have a commitment from five to ten people, set up a meeting at a comfortable place, such as someone's home. Do this quickly, before your contacts lose interest.

Tip: If the Core Group gets too large, it will become unmanageable and result in low productivity. Keep the size of the Core Group at ten or less.

Step Three: The First Meeting Of The Core Group

The first meeting of the Core Group is very important. It sets the tone for future meetings. It is important to be organized. Have a tentative agenda prepared. Try not to let the meeting drag on. An hour is usually a good time frame for most meetings. If possible, present all of the members of the Core Group with a copy of the agenda a week before the meeting.

Because you have talked with all of the members of the Core Group in advance, and they all share a common vision, the discussion should be focused and flow well to accommodate all of the interest of the members of the Core Group.

During this initial meeting the group will need to:

1. Choose a temporary chairperson.

A good organizer will always place achieving the goals of the organization above being elected to be the chairperson. So if the group decides to select someone other than the person who convened the group, that should not deter the conveyer from being an active participant in the ongoing process. There will be many other opportunities to utilize one's leadership abilities.

2. Determine the boundaries of the neighborhood.

An important step at the beginning of a neighborhood plan is to determine the

neighborhood's boundaries if they have not already been determined by your surrounding neighborhood associations. Typical boundaries may be determined by roads or natural features along the border of the neighborhood. A review of a city map and a tour around the area may suggest logical boundaries for a manageable sized area.

3. Develop a complete list of neighborhood residents.

Once boundaries have been determined, a complete list of residents and property owners should be obtained. The list should be kept current throughout the process to allow every neighbor to become involved. In order to get a complete list, you may need to go door-to-door or check with the City of Wauwatosa's Property Appraisers Office.

4. Discuss each person's ideas concerning the needs of the neighborhood.

Select an interest or event the neighborhood will rally around. This interest or event should be easily understood and easily communicated in newsletter, on pamphlets and brochures, and passed along by word of mouth.

5. Identify and recruit additional leaders.

Identify other potential leaders in the neighborhood. The importance of a pool of qualified leadership is often overlooked as a neighborhood association develops. Strong leadership gives an organization guidance, stability and continuity from year to year, motivation to take action and unity of purpose. The task of recruiting and developing leaders has to be an ongoing activity through the lifetime of any neighborhood association.

6. Determine special skills, talents and willingness to participate.

Identify any special talents, expertise, skills, helpful resources and/or any special areas of interest any member might possess. Also determine each Core Group member's willingness to participate and help.

Note: Some group members might not be able to attend meetings, but possess a special skill that can be of use to the group without their attending meetings. Be sure to be flexible and afford members a variety of ways to participate.

7. Determine a convenient time and location for members to attend meetings on a regular basis.

8. Determine how frequently members would like to meet.

The Core Group may need to meet a few times and formalize an organizational strategy before it will be ready to hold a meeting with the entire neighborhood. Once the entire neighborhood is involved, the Core Group will want to continue meeting as an advisory board for the newly formed neighborhood association.

9. Establish an organizational framework.

If the majority of the people are in agreement with organizing a neighborhood association, the next step is to develop the organizational framework for the association. There are various forms of organizational structures. The neighborhood association may choose simply to adopt “Bylaws” which are simple rules with the approval of all participating people. As others join, they too would agree to the bylaws. In a more structured approach the association members may agree to form a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation or similar entity. Visit with the neighborhood planner for samples and guidance during this step.

10. Elect officers

Once the by-laws are adopted, the election of officers should take place. Make sure there is a proper announcement of the upcoming elections and that the officers’ election takes place in a democratic way.

Some general points to keep in mind are:

- Your contributions to the neighborhood are your abilities and skills to organize. Therefore, try to delegate other responsibilities.
- You should search continually for many "potential" leaders, not just one or two.
- Leaders can become burned out. Have new leaders ready to step in when necessary.
- Keep your organization open and flexible enough to bring new members and leaders in to your neighborhood association.

The importance of qualified leadership is often overlooked as a neighborhood association develops. Strong leadership gives an organization:

- Guidance
- Stability
- Continuity from year to year
- Motivation to take action
- Unity of purpose

A part of your job as a neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop leaders. The task of recruiting and developing leaders has to be an ongoing activity through the lifetime of your neighborhood association. When identifying new leaders for your organization, look for individuals who have shown that they:

- Want to succeed and want their group to succeed
- Communicate well with people
- Can motivate people to take collective action

- Are knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its people and their interests
- Have an allegiance to the neighborhood and the association
- Know how to share power

Note: Do not try to do everything yourself. Delegate responsibilities to other group members.

The following is a list of possible responsibilities which could be delegated to other members in the Core Group:

Conducting A Neighborhood Inventory

A neighborhood inventory is a collection of facts about the area including the population, type of housing, land use and other elements unique to the neighborhood. Your area may be eligible for historic designation.

Interest Identification

Interests can be identified through surveys sent to the residents or through a series of neighborhood meetings. Interests may focus on social functions or special interest groups such as home renovation, dining out and hobbies.

Review neighborhood goals.

The draft neighborhood plan should be reviewed and changed as you continue to form.

Review and evaluation

The progress of the plan must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure its success. Periodic evaluations should be done to recognize successes, detect problems and suggest improvements in the program.

Part 2

Maintaining Your Neighborhood Association

Committee Work

Organizations accomplish their objectives through the dedicated work of committees. The tasks and the types of committees depend on the overall purpose and structure of your neighborhood association. The types of committees can generally be divided into two major categories:

Internal Affairs

- Fundraising/finance
- Meeting arrangements
- Communications/publicity
- Bylaws
- Social events

Neighborhood Affairs

- Police-Neighborhood Relations, including Block Watch and traffic safety
- Senior Liaisons
- Community Services and Resources

Tip: To maintain active, productive, motivated members on the committees:

- Encourage members to participate in the association and the committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Provide reasons for the actions to be considered by the committee and the neighborhood association.
- Give recognition to members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association.
- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible. No one wants to feel they are wasting time.
- Help members develop communication skills.

You'll be planning a lot of great programs in your neighborhood. Don't keep them a secret. Spread the word. This will help others in the neighborhood join in the effort and take part in making a difference. Here are a few ways to get the word out:

- Neighborhood association newsletter
- Weekly area newspapers
- Schools, churches and club newsletters
- Door-to-door handouts
- Neighborhood survey:
 - Mail
 - Phone
 - Door-to-door
 - Person-to-person by phone to friends and neighbors
- Bulletins, notices, pamphlets, posters, fliers placed with permission in:
 - Laundromats
 - Libraries
 - Supermarkets
 - Local restaurants
 - Stores

- Waiting rooms in dentist/doctor's offices
- Booths at local events
- Speakers at:
 - Business groups
 - Service clubs
 - Youth groups
 - Schools/churches
- Cooperative efforts with adjoining neighborhoods
 - Lawn signs
 - Letters
 - Telephone tree
- Sample projects and activities
 - Neighborhood clean-up
 - Community garden
 - Tree and flower planting
 - Back-to-school party
 - School supply drive
 - Murals or neighborhood art project
 - Neighborhood scrapbook or video
 - Scholarship program for neighborhood youths
 - Skills exchange program
 - Block party or festival
 - Neighborhood street signs
 - Security lighting
 - Tool lending libraries
 - Tutoring program for youth
 - Neighborhood cookout, picnic or potluck
 - National Night Out celebration
 - Holiday celebration
 - Neighborhood t-shirts
 - Yard of the month award
 - Paint up/fix up projects

Obtain a Tax Identification Number

A tax identification number is a federal tax number that is filed with the Internal Revenue Service. The number enables the bank to report the earnings of the association's account to the IRS for tax filing purposes. You can get an ID number from the IRS.

If you don't have a tax ID number or feel that it is not necessary, you can open an account with a member's personal Social Security number. Often the secretary will use his/her number. The person whose number is being used is liable for paying taxes on the interest income reported by the bank to the IRS. This means that the money in the account is considered the personal money of the ID holder and taxes must be paid as if it is additional income. Also, if there is ever a lien against the person's assets, those monies are considered personal property and can be assessed.

Obtain Information on Fees and Charges

Over the course of time, every neighborhood association accumulates money for one reason or another. The association needs a management system in place for dealing with these funds. What kind of bank account should be opened and how do you go about opening an account for your organization? Either a person or a corporation can open a bank account. If your association is incorporated and you also have nonprofit status, you may be eligible to receive free banking privileges at some banks.

Tip: Run your neighborhood association like a business; open a bank account.

Research the fees and charges assessed at different banks and credit unions. Some have better programs than others. Banks may waive service charges to organizations that provide necessary public service. The decision to waive the charge is at the discretion of the individual bank. If you are not a nonprofit organization and are eligible for a nonprofit account, there may be no charge for the service the bank is offering. You, however, must take the type of account offered by the bank.

If you are a nonprofit corporation, you must bring a copy of the Articles of Incorporation stamped, "Filed" by the Division of Corporations. If you are not a corporation, bring a copy of your bylaws or minutes of your first meeting. You must also state the names and titles of people who are authorized to conduct business for the organization. Personal identification, such as a driver's license, credit cards or a passport, is required to open any type of account.

The secretary of your neighborhood association along with anyone else who will be signing on the account must sign signature cards. You will then also need a director's signature (an officer of the corporation or a designated director).

Tip: You may wish to limit the number of signatures that may appear on the checks for the purpose of accountability.

The bank will provide a card with wording for a resolution authorizing the bank account. The resolution must be adopted by the board of the nonprofit organization or the members of an unincorporated association. If you pay for an account, you can choose any account you would like, depending on your needs.

The different types of accounts available for your association to choose from:

- **Checking:**
Any checking accounts open to individual customers are open to neighborhood associations. The least expensive usually have minimum deposit requirements. Your association should obtain pre-numbered checks. The use of non-numbered checks is not an acceptable practice for neighborhood associations.
- **Savings:**
If you make limited withdrawals, you might be better off with a savings account rather than a checking account. The best arrangement is often a saving account with checking privileges. These, however, usually require a minimum balance.

Tip: There are two things to consider when determining the type of bank account for neighborhood association:

- How often you will withdraw money
- The amount of money you have

Consider whether your association will have enough money to keep a minimum balance in your account or will have to pay service fees, if any.

Understanding and Managing Conflict

One of the primary benefits of forming a neighborhood association is the improvement in communications between neighbors. However, there will be times, in spite of our best efforts, when communication will break down, and a conflict will develop.

A simple unresolved conflict can escalate and cause serious damage to relationships and to a neighborhood association, so it is very important that neighbors do their best to handle these situations constructively.

Remember that conflict in and of itself is not bad and can lead to the discovery of valuable new insights.

One of the biggest obstacles to managing conflict well is that most of us find conflict to be very uncomfortable. As a result, we either try to avoid dealing with it, or we approach the conflict as if we were going to battle, determined to "win."

There is, however, another approach to this common dilemma, one that accepts conflict as a normal aspect of any relationship or organization. Seen in this light, one can approach conflict resolution as an opportunity for growth, change and new understandings.

Consider using the following tips the next time you are faced with the challenge of effectively resolving conflict.

- **Talk directly.**
Direct conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on the wall, throwing a rock or complaining to everyone else.
- **Choose a good time.**
Try to talk in a quiet place where you can both be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes. Don't approach the other person as he or she is leaving for work or after you've had a terrible day.
- **Plan ahead.**
Plan out what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.
- **Don't blame or name call.**
Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for her or him to hear you.
- **Give information.**
Don't judge or interpret the other person's behavior. Instead, give information about your own situation and feelings and how the person's behavior affects you.
- **Listen.**
Give the other person a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Relax and listen; try to learn how the other person feels.
- **Show that you are listening.**
Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear her or him and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.
- **Talk it all through.**
Get all the issues and feeling out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems too difficult to discuss.
- **Work on a joint solution.**
Two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. Be specific. "I will turn my music off at midnight: is better than "I won't play loud music any more."

- **Follow through.**

Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working.

In some circumstances, you may also wish to seek the assistance of a trained mediator. A mediator is a neutral third party who will listen to the issues and assist the neighbors in conflict to create their own mutually acceptable solution to the problem.

When problems occur, encourage open, respectful discussion. Let the members try to identify the obstacles in their own way.