

Building A Strong Neighborhood Association



Part of the
NeighborWorks Pocatello

Neighborhood Association Toolbox

A Resource for
Community Building and Engagement

Why a Neighborhood Association

The knowledge, experience, and will of members are the guiding authority for the association. Members determine what actions are pursued, how, and when. Neighborhood associations provide a means for members to organize interests and pursue collective action.

Neighborhood associations are unique organizations that can serve as powerful advocacy groups for a neighborhood when they are effective. Neighborhood associations provide the organizational structure to create a sort of “lobby group” for a neighborhood—based on the will of those who know it best.

Neighborhood associations have the potential to speak—with authority—to local government and elected officials. In some cities, neighborhood associations have an additional—permanent—role in decision making processes that affect their neighborhood. Neighborhood associations work to ensure that their neighborhood has adequate amenities and services to give the desired quality of life, while also providing local government officials with public input—an often desired and elusive attribute of local government.

Neighborhood associations build social networks through the development of relationships between members and non-members through repeated interaction. This strengthens the group’s ability to engage in open dialogue and deliberations which can lead to more informed decisions and effective actions. When neighborhood associations have widespread and sustained participation, reinforce building and maintaining social relationships, and when decision-making authority is widespread among members, they can be a self-sustaining mechanism for the betterment of neighborhoods and communities.

NeighborWorks Pocatello provides support to six neighborhood associations: Alameda, Bonneville, College, Lewis & Clark, the Neighborhoods of Historic Old Town, and Whittier. If you live in one of these neighborhoods contact an association officer to find out when the association meets and how you can become involved. New members with an interest in neighborhood issues are a welcomed asset to established associations. If a specific issue or concern is driving your interest in participation but the neighborhood association isn’t working on that issue, be the one to begin the discussion.

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“Organizing a neighborhood association is a big job...While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address common concerns and learn to work together as a group.”

— A Guide for Starting a Successful Neighborhood Association

Structuring a Neighborhood Association

Boundaries and Membership

The neighborhood boundaries will determine who is invited to be a member of the association. Boundaries might be roads or residences within a certain distance of a neighborhood landmark or community facility. You can take a look at a neighborhood map or take a stroll to identify boundaries for the neighborhood association. Before determining boundaries be sure that you are respecting other recognized neighborhood boundaries. For questions about the boundaries of NeighborWorks Pocatello supported neighborhoods call our office at 232-9468.

Although it will be necessary to establish initial neighborhood boundaries to hold the first neighborhood meeting, these boundaries should be flexible. If members disagree with the boundaries give them the opportunity to define what they see as the neighborhood boundaries and see if the group can reach a consensus.

Membership should be as inclusive as possible, and be open to all who live or have a stake within the neighborhood boundaries

Mission Statement

Mission Statement

Mission statements are used to guide organizational actions. Rather than focusing on specific goals of the organization, the mission statement is a broad overarching statement that describes an organization's purpose. The general statement must be specific enough to guide actions without being so restrictive that it unnecessarily stifles neighborhood goals or activities.

Although the mission statement should be developed in consultation with other members (as the association grows), it is important to think about why you are starting the association during the beginning stages

Most mission statements will focus on the conditions of the neighborhood—however, a commitment to the larger community is also important. A neighborhood is only as good as the community it belongs to, and this will help ensure the interests of the whole are also considered.

Structuring Options

Structure matters!
The structure of an organization has a large impact on the effectiveness of the organization. Structure determines how decisions are made, how power is distributed, and how members interact within the organization.

Unincorporated Non-profit Organization

An unincorporated organization is the least restrictive structure option for a neighborhood association. These organizations are not required to install officers or hold regular meetings unless the organization's members want to. However, liability for organizational actions rests with the members personally, donations to the association are not tax deductible, and the association is not eligible to apply for grants.

Incorporated Non-profit Organization

Incorporating your neighborhood association creates a legal entity separate from the individual members. The organization can sign contracts and own real estate, among other things. An incorporated non-profit organization must have a board of directors and write and observe Bylaws. In Idaho "members" are not required, however, for an effective neighborhood association voting members are a must. To incorporate your organization you must file Articles of Incorporation with the Idaho Secretary of State. There is a \$30 fee and the form can be found on their website: www.sos.idaho.gov. Incorporated organizations are required to fill out an annual report, however there is no fee associated with this report if it is submitted on time.

Tax Exempt 501(c)(3) Non-profit Organization

Articles of incorporation do not make an organization a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status is given by the Internal Revenue Service. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping. The benefits of being a 501(c)(3) include the ability to accept tax-deductible donations, avoid paying income tax in qualifying circumstances, and qualifying for additional grant opportunities. Organizations seeking to become a 501(c)(3) are encouraged to seek professional assistance.

When deciding on an organizational structure be sure that it will provide enough guidance and support to make your association effective.

Officer Positions

The association will need to choose permanent leaders that are elected to official terms. Your bylaws should describe all the positions, election procedures, how often they are elected, and the major responsibilities expected from each position. The positions created typically make up the neighborhood association board members. The following positions are the minimum number needed for the governing board of your association:

As you are working to establish the neighborhood association it will be necessary to appoint a short-term leader. Later, when the association is more formalized and member participation has increased it will be necessary to elect a permanent leader. This way, the leader will be one that represents the whole association, not just the initial group.

President or Chairperson: The president is responsible for the overall leadership of the association and has many responsibilities relating to meetings, committee and chair appointment, organizational maintenance, and public image. These typically include:

- **Meetings:** The president oversees the scheduling, coordination, and facilitation of meetings—including developing the agenda. They keep the meeting focused and on schedule, mediate arguments between members as they arise, and bring issues to a vote when necessary. The president clarifies group decisions, delegates tasks and objectives, and follows up on decisions made at meetings.
- **Committee and Chair appointment:** The president is responsible for appointment of leadership for special committees, carefully selecting them according to their talents and capabilities.
- **Organizational maintenance:** The president is responsible for knowing the association bylaws and procedures and ensuring that they are followed by all members. They ensure that the organization is on track to achieving the organizational mission by working with the board and other committees on planning and implementing neighborhood activities. The president is responsible for timely communication of information intended for the association and must meet with their successor to transfer records, files, etc.
- **Public Image:** The president represents the neighborhood association, both officially when requested at community or local government functions, and unofficially, as a good example of a responsible member of the community and neighborhood.

Vice President or Vice Chairperson: The vice president assists the president. They serve in an advisory capacity to the president, and also conduct meetings and duties of the president in their absence. The vice president should have strong leadership skills and possess the same knowledge of the association as the president.

Officer Positions continued

Some associations have two secretaries—a recording secretary and a corresponding secretary. You will need to assess the size of your association and the capacity of your volunteers as you make the decision to have one or two secretaries.

Corresponding Secretary: Responsibilities include:

- Notification of all meetings to the officers, affiliated organizations, and other interested persons
- Notifying officers and chairs of planning meetings scheduled
- Preparing any official organization correspondence at the chair's request
- Reporting at the meeting on correspondence sent and received by the organization since the last meeting.

Recording Secretary: Responsibilities include:

- Keeping a record of the business proceedings of the organization
 - Keeping an accurate, up-to-date list of the officers, chairpersons, and members
 - Be able to provide copies or reference others to the association's bylaws and other procedural rules
 - Writing the minutes of the meetings, and if requested assisting with meeting agendas
- * Because reports will be used in the future as an account of the organizations activities, it is important that they are as accurate as possible.

Treasurer:

The treasurer is responsible for the association's funds. Someone should be selected that will take the duties of the position very seriously since the fiscal condition of the association is crucial to the future well being of the group. Typical duties of Treasurers are:

- Pay all of the association's expenses in a timely and accurate manner
- Collect and deposit all funds received by the association
- Maintain a financial accounting system that is adequate and thorough for the association
- Collect voluntary dues from members of the association

Other Board members will include Chairs of Committees and anyone else the association determines necessary to an effective association

TIP: Officers and Board members dedicate more time to the association than other members. Show them they are appreciated, and rotate them out to avoid burn out.

Committees

Neighborhood associations serve many purposes and work to achieve many goals. Committees make that work easier. A committee is a group of people, from the larger association, who are appointed to work on a specific task.

Committees can be standing, meaning that they are always working on a task or towards a goal. Membership, Welcoming, Beautification, and Grievance committees are all examples of committees that would be standing.

Other committees may only need to be temporarily formed. If the association is participating in a one-time event, or dealing with a one-time problem, a temporary committee that is dissolved when the task is completed is more appropriate.

Temporary committees may turn into standing committees and standing committees may at some point need to be dissolved.

Whatever the purpose of the committee it is important to find the right person to lead the committee and the right members to be on the committee. Members who are passionate, knowledgeable, or who have connections that would be helpful in addressing the purpose of the committee should be strongly considered.

TIP: Recognize your assets! Conduct a survey to identify the particular skills of residents that might be hidden assets.

Bylaws

Bylaws are the guidelines that neighborhood associations follow to maintain consistency as members and leaders change. Bylaws address issues such as organizational purpose, membership boundaries, board of directors, and standing committees—among other things.

Bylaws should reflect the grassroots and democratic nature of neighborhood associations. They should outline democratic processes for decision making that are open and transparent. Good bylaws can help avoid the perception of arbitrary decision making—which can lessen the legitimacy of the association.

Bylaws should be firm enough to give your neighborhood association guidance as issues arise, but should be flexible so that your hands are not tied. Bylaws will need to be amended over time—a process that should be addressed in your bylaws.

It is important that bylaws outline grievance procedures. Conflict is inevitable when individuals are working together as a group, and having a process for resolving disagreements and differences helps ensure quick and uniform treatment of grievances.

The following outline identifies information that should be included in a neighborhood association's bylaws. While it is important that certain information be included, the bylaws should be tailored to meet your associations situation. Sample bylaws and grievance procedures can be found in most of the guides listed in the appendix.

Bylaws continued

Points to include in Bylaws:

1. Name of Neighborhood Association
2. Boundaries [street names or natural boundaries]
3. Purpose [Mission Statement]
4. Membership
 - a. Who is membership open to
 - b. Is voting per person or per household
 - c. Privileges and responsibilities of membership, if any.
5. Dues
 - a. Will dues be required, if so how much
 - b. When are dues paid
 - c. Are dues paid per household, or per person
6. Meetings
 - a. Annual meeting date
 - b. Dates or frequency of general membership meetings
 - c. Notice of meetings
 - d. Define quorum [how many people will it take for an action to pass; % of voting members]
7. Board of Directors
 - a. Define the powers of the Board
 - b. Number [can be flexible]
 - c. Date and manner of election
 - d. Term of office
 - e. Filling vacancies
 - f. Removal of directors
8. Board meetings
 - a. When will the board meet
 - b. What constitutes a quorum of the board
 - c. Can the board take action without a meeting
9. Officers
 - a. Number of positions
 - b. Duties
 - c. Term of office
 - d. Manner of election
10. Committees
 - a. Manner of creation
 - b. Duties
 - c. Composition
 - d. Standing committees
11. Records and Reports
 - a. What records will be kept permanently and who will keep them
 - b. How will the association keep track of members
12. Contracts, checks, deposits, funds
 - a. Who can sign contracts
 - b. Who can write checks, how are they approved
 - c. Who can deposit funds and where will they be deposited
13. Amending bylaws
 - a. When will they be reviewed
 - b. Who can change them
 - c. How will changes be communicated
 - d. Size of majority needed to amend
14. Grievance processes
 - a. Eligibility to Grieve
 - b. Processing the Grievance
 - c. Final Resolution

Bank Accounts and Financial Information

Any neighborhood association is going to eventually handle money and having a management system in place will help ensure that funds are properly handled and accounted for.

Opening a bank account for the association is often necessary. Check with several banks or credit unions to get the best deal. When choosing a financial institution, be mindful of how often you will withdraw money and minimum balance requirements—as well as fees.

Money coming into or out of the organization should be recorded. Cash receipt and cash disbursement journals are one way to do this. A cash receipt journal records information about money the association receives including the total amount, the date it was received, and the source (e.g. contribution, grants, sale of advertising, etc.). A cash disbursement journal records money that the association pays out along with transaction information such as amount, check number, date, payee, and the purpose.

Reports should be generated and presented at meetings as determined by the association. These reports help ensure transparency and accountability. Cash available at the beginning and the end of the period, total of funds received (broken down by source), and total disbursements (with breakdown by type) should be included in the report.

Getting Started

Identifying a Core Group

Ask several interested neighborhood inhabitants (this includes schools and other organizations) to serve on a steering committee to organize the neighborhood association.

Host a meeting in someone's home or another comfortable setting, and begin by addressing a few basic questions:

- Why do you think we should organize?
- What are the issues that need to be addressed?
- What resources are available in the neighborhood?

Next, consider boundaries and create a working name for your group. Once the committee has addressed these questions, it is time to prepare for the first general membership meeting.

The first general membership meeting is the time to announce the formation of your neighborhood association and identify and discuss neighborhood issues.

TIP: “The key is to get a strong core group that is made up of individuals who are consistently willing to devote time each month. Set realistic goals that stand a good chance of success. The only way to maintain interest is through energetic participation and ongoing communication. It also takes positive reinforcement, acknowledgement and a constant sense of accomplishment.” —2

Neighborhood Meetings

“Regular meetings are important so that members are informed of current and future issues and projects, as well as the accomplishments of the group. It is also an excellent opportunity to give recognition to members and committees who have contributed a lot of their time for the association.” —1

“The way that meetings are run will affect how involved members will become in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and stop attending. When meetings are well run and people’s opinions are respected, members will feel more willing to participate in other association activities.”—2

“One important part of holding a meeting is its location. Choose a place that is centrally located and familiar to the neighbors. The location can set the mood and the friendliness of the meeting.”
—1

“The meeting room should be arranged in a way that will encourage people to participate. The chairs can be arranged in a semi- or full circle so that everyone can be seen. Avoid having all the chairs facing the speaker as in a typical classroom. Do not use tables unless you need them to hold drawings or literature because they can form barriers to communication. However, a large table with everyone sitting around it can be used if people need to write.”—1

“Set realistic expectations about attendance. You may not need a large attendance at every meeting. Set a tone at meetings where everyone’s ideas are welcome and respected.”—2

TIP: Relationships between members are essential to an effective neighborhood association—they are the grease that makes collective action possible. Take time to build and foster these connections at meetings.

Meetings continued

Welcome people as they arrive to the meeting and be sure leaders introduce themselves to new members. Direct attendees to the sign in sheet so that a record may be kept of who attended meetings. Ask for their contact information as well and for them to indicate their desired level of involvement with the association.

“Be sure to have enough copies of the agenda available when members arrive for the meeting. Members can begin familiarizing themselves with what is to be discussed and will be aware of the order of topics while waiting for the meetings to begin. The agenda should be short and concise.” –1

“Start the meeting on time. Begin the meeting with less important agenda items to reinforce the behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late. Consider using your agenda to provide structure and simply guide, encourage and limit discussion where appropriate.” –2

“Make sure someone takes the minutes or records the meeting. If you do not have a secretary, rotate this task.” –2

“Meetings should not be allowed to fizzle out, and should end with a plan of action. Ask committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on the date, time and place for the next meeting before members leave.” –2

TIP: “If a regular meeting is scheduled, but there really isn’t anything important to discuss, then create something. This can be done by inviting a guest speaker, organizing a neighborhood tour, or having a potluck. Don’t cancel the meeting altogether because it is important for groups to have contact on a regular basis.” –1

Building Membership

“Designate block captains to welcome new residents, to serve as a sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block, and that can pass out flyers and newsletters about neighborhood news, events, and issues.”—1

For optimal effectiveness neighborhood associations should place a high value on trying to obtain widespread participation in the association. A membership committee is one way to maintain a constant focus on reaching out for new members. The following are membership building strategies. Use your conditions to determine what strategies you use.

“Conduct a neighborhood walk-through. Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door-to-door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask them to attend the next meeting to discuss neighborhood issues and voice their concerns—and to bring some of their neighbors.”

—2

“Community gatherings or other events are also a great way to recruit new members. Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Have membership sign-up sheets available. You can also have information packets about the association to hand out at events.”—1

“Maintain current membership records. Keep a file with members’ names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest, etc.”—1

TIP: Have Fun! Have a party and invite the whole neighborhood, use the opportunity to discuss with non-members what the association does—and to sign up new members.

Neighborhood Projects

Focus on issues that the majority of the neighborhood can rally around. Members, and potential members, will be more interested in the project if it addresses a concern or interest that they have. Ensuring that neighborhood projects are beneficial for the majority of the neighborhood will help projects gain the participation necessary to be effective.

“One of the best ways to attract attention and form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your association unless you are doing worthwhile projects for their benefit or for the benefit of the neighborhood.” —2

“Identify who else is concerned with the issue. Talk with them, form an alliance, share information, work together.”—3

“In developing your organization’s projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action and results. Get the whole community behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or affecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your organization is an effective group.”—2.

“Once a few projects have been completed, members typically become disinterested. This is the biggest challenge for any neighborhood association.

In general, members will participate if there are:

- Business and social events in which to participate
 - Issues of importance to discuss
 - Clear and visible accomplishments
 - Organized, competent leaders
 - Events to recognize participants”

—2

Work Plans

“Making work plans for each project will help members stay focused and on target. Meeting goals, planning events, recruiting volunteers, and strengthening the organization will be easier when time is taken to prepare an outline of expectations and objectives, and then make a plan for meeting those goals.” —1

“Some helpful questions to ask when preparing a work plan are:

- What is the purpose for doing this project?
- Have other neighborhood associations attempted this activity? Can they be contacted for help?
 - What tasks are involved with this project?
 - Who will do the tasks?
 - How much time is needed?
 - What resources are needed to accomplish this project?
- Will this cost money? Does the association have the funds? If not, how will money be raised?”

—1

“Act quickly and decisively: ‘Strike while the iron is hot’ is an important reminder in times of crisis. This is when other people are most likely to get involved and give their time”—5

“Set clear time lines and responsibilities: Many internal conflicts occur because leadership is not clear in summing up discussions, identifying who is responsible for follow-up work and deciding a timeline for action.”—5

TIP: Celebrate Accomplishments! Too often we forget to celebrate accomplishments or even notify people of the results of our work. Even small victories can encourage people to attend neighborhood functions and give their time more freely.—5

Next Steps

Cultivating Leaders

“Once your neighborhood association has been up and running for a while, the group should think about how to find and encourage new leadership within the organization. If the group stays with the same leadership year after year, there is a very real risk of “burning out” those leaders. This is hard on the tired leaders and it is hard on the organization. Although nurturing new leaders takes time and effort, the results are worth it—a healthy organization with leaders who are fresh and enthusiastic.”—4

Having a system in place for tracking members and their participation can be very helpful when identifying potential leaders. Sign-in sheets, biography cards, and computer spreadsheets are all useful for tracking members who are actively involved.

- Leaders should:
- Reflect the demographics of the neighborhood
 - Articulate issues clearly
 - Use democratic participatory methods to make decisions
 - Communicate regularly with the group and members
 - Be knowledgeable about local government and how to influence decision making

—1

Neighborhood associations need a large pool of leaders to draw from to be effective. Cultivating new leaders through organizational involvement is helpful but there are other ways to develop leaders. Check into leadership development courses with NeighborWorks Pocatello by calling 232-9468

TIP: “Develop New Leaders: Term limits for officers are helpful in forcing leaders to make way for new people. Committee chairs and project leaders are important positions for testing new leaders.” —5

Sustaining Momentum

The following are tips to help sustain momentum as you work to develop an effective and self-sustaining neighborhood association.

Work with members to develop a neighborhood plan. Start with a one year plan, identify goals that the association would like to accomplish over the next year, and develop your plan. The plan should serve as a unifying document that guides the work of the association and provides direction to members. A planning process that is open and inclusive is necessary to produce a plan that is desired and accepted by members.

“No matter what goal-setting process your neighborhood uses, it is important to stay flexible. Issues, resources and membership can and will change. To be a responsible neighborhood association, you will need to reflect those changes in your tasks, objectives, and goals.”—4

“Being part of a neighborhood association is not all work. Have fun as well. Sponsor parties and celebrations to get to know your neighbors better. Your events should appeal to all, including children. This will foster a strong sense of community spirit among your neighbors.”—1

TIP: Create Relationships between members as well as between members and non-members. Relationships are important to accomplishing change efforts. Knowing, and having communication with, others is a great way to gain additional information and perspective—and provides additional opportunities.

Accessing Resources

Pocatello is full of helpful resources for neighborhood associations as they work to improve the community.

If you happen to belong to a NeighborWorks Pocatello neighborhood association you qualify for certain support and assistance for the association. If you do not live in a NeighborWorks Pocatello neighborhood we may still be of assistance. For example, a well stocked tool lending library is available for individual or group projects. Call 232-9468 for more info.

The City of Pocatello is also a great resource for associations. Contact information for different departments, as well as information about City services and regulations, can be found on their website: www.pocatello.us

Other neighborhood associations and community groups can be very valuable resources. They may be concerned with the same issue or interested in the same project—or they may have experienced a situation similar to yours. Either way they may provide valuable information, or become productive allies

If you can't find information or support within the local community try searching the internet. Many valuable community building and change making resources are available for free.

TIP: Keep checking NeighborWorks Pocatello's Neighborhood Association Toolbox for additional resources and guides.

Fundraising

“Neighborhood associations need to raise funds for regular operations and special events and projects. The ways that a group raises funds are limited only by the members’ imaginations. Funds can be raised by the group itself, private donations, or private and government grants.”—1

Rummage or garage sales are one type of fundraiser that associations can use. Members can donate items, or donate a percentage of the sale of the items they bring. Advertising is important and multiple venues and methods should be used. Try to have a good variety of items and have the prices clearly marked. Thank buyers for supporting the neighborhood association.

‘Passing the hat’ at meetings can also be an effective way to raise funds. These typically small contributions add up without placing too much of a burden on members.

If your association produces a newsletter, sell advertising to local businesses.

“Many local merchants will readily help a neighborhood group with either merchandise or a cash contribution. Assess merchants according to the size of their business. Remember these points when soliciting for contributions:

- A good customer is the best person to approach a merchant
- Do not solicit a merchant at the beginning or the end of the business day, or during peak business hours
- Bring a letter from your organization (preferably on letterhead) introducing you as the member who is authorized to solicit contributions”

—1

Appendix

Sources

There are many helpful guides available for people interested in starting neighborhood associations. Several of them informed the creating of this guide and were directly quoted in certain sections. The number following the quote corresponds here to the guide they came from.

1

Taking Action! A Manual for Neighborhood Associations.
Produced by the City of College Station, Texas. The guide can be found at:
<http://www.cstx.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=2926>

2

Starting a Neighborhood Association
Produced by the City of Irving, Texas. This guide can be found at:
<http://cityofirving.org/DocumentCenter/View/506>

3

A Guide for Starting a Successful Neighborhood Association
Produced by the City of Wichita, Kansas. This guide can be found at:
<https://www.wichita.gov/Government/Departments/CMO/NeighborhoodDocuments/AGuideforStartingaSuccessfulNeighborhoodAssociation.pdf>

4

Neighborhood Association How To's
Produced by the City of Lincoln, Nebraska. This guide can be found at:
<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/police/ssn/SSN/Releases/NAHow2.pdf>

5

A Guide for Maintaining a Successful Neighborhood Association
Produced by the City of Irving, Texas. This guide can be found at:
<http://www.fwlina.org/PDF/Neighborhood-resources-Fort-Worth-version-2.pdf>