

Manhattan Community Board 10

How to Organize and Maintain a Block/Neighborhood Association

A guide for concerned citizens

**W. Franc Perry III, Chair
Geneva T. Bain, District Manager**

Dear Concerned Citizen,

It is the responsibility of Community Boards to have an important advisory role in dealing with land use and zoning matters, the City budget, municipal service delivery and many other matters relating to their communities' welfare. The Board deals with any problem that affects part or all of the community, from a traffic problem to deteriorating housing, is a proper concern of a Community Board.

We believe that the “How to Organize and Maintain a Block/Neighborhood Association” Guide will serve as a resource for residents willing to organize their communities.

For incorporating a non-profit block/neighborhood Association go to <http://www.state.ny.us>. This site will provide you with instructions on how to incorporate and other pertinent information.

For more information on Community Board 10, please call the district office at (212) 749-3105.

Yours in Service,

W. Franc Perry III,
Chairman

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II: 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. It is a task that requires a variety of social skills and great investments of time and other important resources.

Whenever possible it is advisable to utilize the services of an expert community organizer to assist in getting your neighborhood organization started.

_____Step Two: Developing the Core Group_____

To get started, you will need a small group, of committed neighbors who share the same point of view regarding the needs of the neighborhood and share your willingness to form a neighborhood association to address neighborhood issues. **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 important the issues 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 important issues affecting the neighborhood. Members of the Core Group

should feel a need to form a neighborhood association to address neighborhood issues.

Note: Be sure to keep the size of the Core Group at ten 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

Schoolteachers 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: How to Begin

Once the members of the Core Group have been identified and a meeting time and place have been established, contact Community Board 10 and ask if a liaison is available to assist your group in getting started.

This is also a good time to begin inquiring about sources of seed money and other types of resources available from the governmental agencies to assist your group with such things as printing flyers, duplicating minutes and to assist with the cost of mailing information to neighbors.

Note: If the group chooses not to enlist the assistance of others in organizing all is not lost; with the assistance of this booklet the Core Group will be able to move forward with its organizing efforts.

Step Four: 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:

Choose a temporary chairperson

Note: 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.

1. Determine the boundaries of the neighborhood

An important step at the beginning of a neighborhood plan is to determine the neighborhood's boundaries. Avenues or natural features along the border of the neighborhood may determine typical boundaries. A review of a city map and a tour around the area may suggest logical boundaries for a manageable sized area.

2. 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 County Clerk.

3. Discuss each person's ideas concerning the problems and needs of the neighborhood.

Select an issue the neighborhood will rally around. This issue should be easily understood, and stated in a manner that can be easily communicated and understood in press releases, in newsletter, on pamphlets and brochures, and passed along by word of mouth.

4. Discuss goals, projects and concerns

Note: It is very important that the initial goals of the group be small and easily achievable. Nothing breeds success like success. If you find that the group has reached a stumbling block and does not seem to want to move forward often the cause will be that the goals are too large and too difficult to achieve.

5. Begin discussions on ways to achieve goals

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Determine a convenient time and location for members to attend meetings

9. Determine how frequently members would like to meet

The Core Group will need to meet several times before it will be ready to hold a meeting with the entire neighborhood. The Core Group should meet together as many times as needed to formalize an organizational strategy **before** the first meeting of 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.

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:
 1. Want to succeed and want their group to succeed
 2. Communicate well with people
 3. Can motivate people to take collective action
 4. Are knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its people and their interests
 5. Have an allegiance to the neighborhood and the association
 6. 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 that 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.

Issue Identification

Issues and concerns can be identified through surveys sent to the residents or through a series of neighborhood meetings. The concerns may deal with crime, physical improvements, transportation corridors, preservation of unique features, rezoning, social functions or other special interest concerns such as neighborhood renovation.

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.

Step Five: the First General Meeting

Nobody likes to attend meetings that are unproductive and a waste of time. As the neighborhood organizer, you have the opportunity and responsibility to make meetings productive and even pleasant. The following is a guide.

- Decide on a convenient time and date to meet by consulting with your core group and neighbors
- Develop a well-planned agenda for the first meeting.
- Determine a method of the follow-up to remind the neighborhood volunteers of the upcoming meeting.

This may be done by use of:

- Phone calls
 - Letters
 - Fliers
- Locate a meeting place that is centrally located, politically neutral and familiar to the neighbors.
 - The meeting location and arrangement of the room is very important and will establish the mood and tone of friendliness for the meeting.
 - Try to estimate the size of the expected attendance. The room should be comfortable but not so large as to make the people feel lost.
 - Set up the room for the meeting in advance. Tables and chairs should be in place. Depending on the size of the group and the size of the room; it at all possible try to arrange seating so participants can conveniently look each other in the eye while speaking.
 - Display any handouts inside the room, near the entrance.
 - The room temperature should be comfortable.
 - Set up and test any special equipment in advance.
 - Serve refreshments only if it will enhance the friendliness of the meeting and not interrupt it.

Tip: Stick to the agenda, meet only when necessary, “too many meetings burn out volunteers.” Try to limit meetings to an hour.

Step Six: Developing a Neighborhood Plan

If a neighborhood is viewed as a permanent home for families and as a continuing investment for their money, then steps need to be taken to address changes that will occur. **A neighborhood plan is a guide that provides a framework for present and future decision-making.** The

health and vitality of a neighborhood depends on the ability of its residents to plan for its future. A Neighborhood Plan is developed by a group of organized neighbors referred to as a neighborhood association. **A neighborhood plan contains** broad statements about what the residents would like to have happen (**goals**) and principles they would like to see followed (**policies**). It also contains suggestions for strategies on how to reach goals.

One-Year Neighborhood Plan Development Guideline:

1. Identify one to three issues that are of major concern to the neighborhood
2. Form a committee for each issue to spearhead the drive to resolve the issue
3. Identify available resources that can be utilized to assist the committee
4. Identify strategies and goals
5. Implement strategies

Tip: Always keep a written record of your plan and ongoing assignments. This will provide guidance for your association.

III: 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

- Fund-raising/finance
- Meeting Arrangements
- Communications/Publicity
- Bylaws
- Social Events

Neighborhood Affairs

- Housing Conditions
- Police-Neighborhood Relations
- Economic Development
- Neighborhood Maintenance
- Community Services and Resources
- Traffic Safety

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 words. 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:
 1. Mail
 2. Phone
 3. Door-to-door
 4. Person-to-person by phone:
 5. To friends
 6. To neighbors
- Bulletins, notices, pamphlets, posters, fliers placed with permission in:
 1. Laundromats
 2. Libraries
 3. Supermarkets
 4. Local restaurants
 5. Stores
 6. Waiting rooms in dentist/doctor's offices
 7. Booths at local events

Unproductive Association or Committee

Look for the following conditions:

- The committee may be stuck in the discussion phase and need to move forward with task assignments
- The goals may be too large
- Fear of the possible results
- Conflicting loyalties of some members
- Interpersonal Conflicts
- Poor leadership
- Rigid decision-making methods
- Not allowing open discussion
- Failure to follow the bylaws and or not applying them in a consistent manner. When such problems occur, encourage open, respectful discussion. Let the members try to identify the obstacles in their own way.

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 alone 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.

1. Talk directly.

Direct conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on the wall, throwing a rock or complaining to everyone else.

2. 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.

3. Plan ahead.

Plan out what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.

4. Don't blame or name call.

Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for her or him to hear you.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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."

10. 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.

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).

Tips: 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 board of the nonprofit organization or the members of an unincorporated association must adopt the resolution. 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 prenumbered 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.

Tips: 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?