

# **Organizing Neighborhood Associations**

A handbook for starting and managing  
successful neighborhood associations.



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# The Critical Role An Association Plays

A healthy functioning neighborhood association can benefit both the residents of the community and local government alike.

## **Builds Relationships**

Forming a neighborhood association is one of the best ways to build relationships with your neighbors. Residents of a neighborhood can go for years without knowing their neighbors two doors away. A spirit of neighborliness and common interests can be generated through the formation of an association. Also, neighbors become familiar with each other's talents and skills, and become more supportive and resourceful in problem solving.

## **Creates An Organized, Unified Voice**

Through an association your neighborhood has a unified voice in local government decision making. The services the City can provide to your neighborhood can be

accessed more efficiently through an organized association. Information on City services and projects, including land planning and infrastructure projects, can also be provided to a greater number of residents resulting in a benefit to the neighborhood as a whole.

## **Aids in Neighborhood Improvement**

If your neighborhood desires enhancements, local residents are the best resources to help make those improvements. Neighborhood associations are valuable resources for City officials when preparing improvement projects and long range planning efforts, including land use, zoning and neighborhood/community based planning.



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## Types of Associations

There can be a variety of associations operating in a given area. Often times, the type of an association is determined by the function they provide to their community. Here are some examples of different types of associations:

### **Neighborhood Association**

This type of association generally includes the residents and businesses within a specifically defined geographic area. Membership can include the property owners, renters, businesses and even institutions within the defined neighborhood boundaries. The issues of a neighborhood association are broad based, addressing residential and business concerns that impact the specific community.

### **Homeowners Association**

This type of association primarily includes property owners who join together for the betterment of their subdivision or neighborhood. There are two types of homeowners associations: 1) voluntary, and; 2) mandatory.

A *voluntary* homeowners association means that owners do not have to be a member of the association. These associations do not have the authority to force property owners to do anything.

A *mandatory* homeowners association means that owners automatically belong to the association by virtue of their property deed and must pay dues. These associations have the authority to enforce rules and regulations (deed restrictions) and may be able to place liens against an owner's property if the owner is not paying dues.

A homeowner association is governed by a board of directors and officers.

### **Condo Association**

This type of association has members who automatically belong to the association by virtue of ownership and typically must pay maintenance fees. Members address any relevant issues to the common property and the complex in general.

### **Civic Association**

A civic association is a voluntary group that has been formed to educate, inform and encourage involvement in preserving and enhancing the community. Members strive to solve problems in the community through their own efforts. They build trust and better their community by interacting, cooperating and working to resolve problems together. They share values and promote the general welfare, safety and civic spirit of the community.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Community Association

A community association is similar to a civic association. However, the primary focus of the group is to build “community” within a geographic area. A community association may be an umbrella group, comprised of other associations or diverse stakeholders such as residents, merchants, or commercial landowners.

It is also worth noting that in some cases more than one of these association types can be used in naming a new association. For example, one may use Homeowner, Neighborhood or Community in addition to Civic Association, etc.

Neighborhood leaders are encouraged to be creative in naming a new association — and work to select a name reflective of the geography and the work/mission of the organization.

## Landowners Association

A landowners association is usually formed to enhance economic development or beautification.

## Business/Merchants Association

A business or merchants association is comprised of business owners and commercial landowners who seek to promote commerce in a specific geographical area to draw attention and support a certain mission.



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# How Associations Grow

Growing and maintaining a healthy neighborhood association is quite similar to caring for a garden of plants and flowers.

In the beginning, the focus is on planting the seeds and keeping the interest alive. As the group develops and grows there may come times when it's necessary to prune back, fertilize and regularly evaluate the direction of new growth.

The following are some tips for neighborhood leaders to keep their associations alive and well:

### Ask For Help

While it is sometimes easier to do things yourself, a healthy organization constantly reaches out to its membership to get them more actively involved. The leadership then becomes a facilitator in the process.

### Be enthusiastic

The art of building community can be fun and exciting. It can also be a “thankless” job. The most effective leaders are those who see the bigger picture and remain enthusiastic. There are many in the community who will attempt to “burst the bubble” with their negativity; Don’t let them detract from your positive mission!

### Be courteous

Responding in the “opposite” way one may feel is a proven method for deescalating a situation. For example, in dealing with an angry resident, group of residents, listening, smiling and taking notes will show them you are truly trying to grasp the root of their concern. Even if the solution to the issue is beyond your control, showing you are willing to work on it will build your credibility and enhance their trust in you as their leader.

### Promote accomplishments

New associations are always encouraged to “begin with a small success” and build momentum. The strongest of buildings all have a firm foundation in common. It is easy to focus on the negative things happening in the community. But, the strongest of associations are built from a series of accomplishments. Don’t be shy about sharing the good work that is being done!

### Create visual impact

In looking for a small success, bear in mind the importance of making a visual impact in the community. Anything positive that can be done to earn the association recognition is beneficial. This may include a neighborhood clean-up or beautification project done in a place where a large number of people travel.

### **Communicate**

The key to all good relationships is communication. Think of your associations as a relationship between the leadership and it's membership. Seek creative ways to keep the lines of communication alive. This can be accomplished from the traditional methods such as email blasts, newsletters, postcard mailings, yard signs and/or the social media approach such as Facebook, NextDoor or a website. Most public libraries now provide internet access for those who do not have access to a computer at home.

### **Serve refreshments**

Refreshments are a great way to build attendance at meetings. In some associations, members take turns in providing the food/drink so it is not a burden on any one individual. This is especially fun in multi-cultural neighborhoods. Food sharing lends to learning about various cultures that exist within the neighborhood. It adds an extra celebratory air to a meeting or function!

### **Invite other organizations in to tell their story**

It can be especially helpful to a new organization (or an organization running adrift) to hear the story of another groups' life cycle. Success stories of other areas may also inspire members to do more within their association.

### **Use residents' skills**

In many cases, the corporate world refers its employees as "human resources." This is based in the belief that each person comes with a skill-set and talents that when properly tapped, will benefit a company. The same holds true for volunteer organizations. The sharing of these skills and talents among the membership (bartering) can also be critical to residents who are no longer able to care for their property due to physical or financial limitations. Identify people who have the time to devote to working with the neighborhood association.

### **Delegate & Mentor**

Delegating helps all members of the association feel they're a part of the bigger picture. Also, one of the greatest resources in the community are the "youth/children." Finding meaningful roles for children of the community will teach them the importance of being active from the beginning. In many cities, the civic/neighborhood associations did not complain about children on the streets after school — they became part of the solution. They began offering programs and evening activities to keep the children active and engaged.

### **Plan short-term projects**

Biting off more than one can chew is a common problem. Focusing on "short-term" feasible projects will show progress/results and help the keep the community's interest. Be results driven!

### **Thank/reward volunteers**

Keeping an "attitude of gratitude" will not only maintain the current membership, but encourage current members to invite others to get involved. Look for ways to say thank you to the people who offer their help and make sure volunteers know they are appreciated.

### **Leadership should reflect diversity**

It is very rare to find any neighborhood that is all one creed or color. Subsequently, the neighborhood leadership should reflect the membership. Not all will respond affirmatively when invited to be involved, but knowing they were asked will mean a great deal to those who are accustomed to standing on the sidelines.

### **Whose Job Is It?**

**This is a story about four people named EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, ANYBODY, and NOBODY.**

**There was an important job to be done and EVERYBODY was asked to do it. EVERYBODY was sure SOMEBODY would do it. ANYBODY could have done it, but NOBODY did it. SOMEBODY got angry about that, because it was EVERYBODY'S job. EVERYBODY thought ANYBODY could do it but NOBODY realized that EVERYBODY would not do it. As it turned out EVERYBODY blamed SOMEBODY when NOBODY did what ANYBODY could have done.**

# Successful Association Components

The following are some basic building blocks in creating and maintaining a solid foundation for a neighborhood association. These steps are not meant to be all-inclusive, but an outline of the basics:

## Clear Goals & Objectives

Goals and objectives provide a road map for associations and give them a reason to exist. Clearly defined goals promote communication and provide members with direction and a sense of accomplishment. Goals and objectives need to be realistic and attainable for the members.

## Written Operating Procedures

To ensure continuity from year to year, especially when officers and leaders change, your association needs to have written operating procedures and policies. These written procedures can take many forms. The most common operating documents are bylaws. There are instructions on what to include on page 19 of this document. Your association does not have to be incorporated to adopt bylaws. The written procedures should address the purpose of the association, the boundaries it serves, titles and duties of your groups leadership, when and how leaders are selected, frequency of meetings, voting procedures, definition of membership, etc.

## Democratic Process of Leadership and/or Officer Elections

Members should have a voice in the leadership of the association. Through the election of officers/leadership, members are able to participate in the development and direction of the association. Election of officers also helps to promote officer/leadership accountability to the members.

## Solid Leadership

Assuming a leadership position with a neighborhood association is not to be taken lightly. A leader is in the position of impacting the association and the neighborhood for years—Good leadership is shared leadership. A neighborhood leader needs to have the vision and the ability to build consensus, to delegate duties and authority to others, to encourage neighbor involvement, and maximize neighborhood talent. A leader needs to help the association cultivate future leaders. A good leader knows how important it is for the association to experience a change in leadership. Look for individuals that have shown they want to succeed, want the group to succeed and communicate

well with people. They should also be knowledgeable about the neighborhood and share interests with others. These individuals should be team players and should be willing to share power.

## Committees

Shared leadership is healthy for a neighborhood association. Committees are the basic operating tools for associations. Committees allow the neighborhood leadership to delegate issues (identify and research problems and solutions) and meet its goals by involving a number of members. Many associations have standing committees, which operate continually, addressing key issues, such as newsletter and communication, beautification, safety, social functions, etc. Special committees and/or task forces may be created to address short-term issues. Special committees and/or task forces are dissolved after the issue has been addressed to the satisfaction of the members.

## Neighbor Input and Involvement

A neighborhood association is only as strong as its weakest member. The key to a vital and active association is members - neighbors involved in their association. A neighborhood association serves as the foundation to bring neighbors together to address neighborhood issues, promote team building, and serve as a vehicle for neighbors to pool their resources and maintain the integrity of their neighborhood.

## Funding

Neighborhood associations have expenses and should operate with a budget capable of supporting association goals. In many cases, membership dues are the main source of funding for neighborhood associations. The association leadership, specifically the treasurer, should provide a monthly report of the revenues, expenses and balance on hand. Associations are encouraged to build their budget out of their goals and objectives.



# Setting Goals & Objectives

Associations need clear direction. In order to chart that direction, it is important to determine the talents and skills of your neighbors as well as the social and physical needs of your neighborhood. Performing an asset inventory of what “gifts” your members/neighbors possess and how those “gifts” might be applied to the good of the association should be a first step. After all, you do not know what you need until you know what you have. Completing this step will not only help the association determine true neighborhood needs, but also forge relationships in order to build a stronger community and increase participation. Schedule a meeting to share the various skill sets of neighbors and ask questions such as what are the concerns, issues, and interests of residents to help your association set realistic long and short-term goals. Connecting assets with needs is the cornerstone of Asset-Based Community Development.

**Goal:** A goal can simply be defined as a statement of what your association wants to accomplish. What do you want to accomplish over the next two to five years?

*Example: To physically improve the neighborhood by implementing a beautification project to enhance the main entrance and medians throughout the neighborhood.*

**Objective:** An objective is a statement that explains how your association will reach its goals. Your objectives should:

- 1) Be Clear & Concise
- 2) Specific/address identified Issues/Goals
- 3) Be Measurable
- 4) Be Achievable
- 5) Be Realistic
- 6) Have Start and Ending Dates

*Example: Create a timeline to enhance the medians. First, prepare a site plan identifying all of the common areas requiring landscaping. Next, decide if volunteers or professional landscaping will be needed. Third, figure out the budget. Lastly, install landscaping.*

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## Advantages of Goal Setting

Goal setting is the key to keeping a neighborhood association alive and well. Here are some other advantages to setting goals for your community:

### 1. Become/Stay Aware of Neighborhood Issues

Through the process of performing an asset inventory and subsequently setting goals for your organization, the capacities and needs of your neighborhood will come into focus. Both neighborhood assets and community issues gives your organization a purpose and meaning.

### 2. Achieve Your Projects

By setting time limits for when you want to finish a project, your organization can anticipate how much work is ahead and set its schedule accordingly.

### 3. Strive Toward a Mark

Goal setting keeps your members enthused and motivated. If your association has set a target date to complete a project, then the energy level of members will increase as that target date draws closer.

### 4. Keep Members Active

If your neighborhood association has set goals, there will be plenty of projects to work on. If members of the organization are not busy, then it is time to get them working to accomplish your existing goals or set new ones.

**Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand.**



# Sample Officer Job Descriptions

What are the duties and responsibilities of the officers of your association? To maintain continuity and to eliminate any role confusion, your association should have written job descriptions of each officer position and committees. In addition, your bylaws should spell out your association's officers' titles and duties.

## **President:**

The president of the neighborhood's association serves as the chief executive officer of the association. The president serves at the will of the board of directors and can be removed with or without cause at any time by a majority of the vote by the board of directors. The president should not allow personal feelings or outside pressures to influence his/her actions. Examples of the duties and responsibilities of the President are:

- Presides at all meetings of the association, including helping the secretary prepare the meeting agenda, and to begin and close the meeting.
- Appoints all committee and task forces chairs. Serves as an ex-officio member of all committees, except nominating committee. Serving as ex-officio does not mean the president has to attend the committee meetings. The president should not serve as a committee chairperson.
- Assumes general charge of the day-to-day administration of the association.
- Has the authority to authorize specific actions in promoting the board's policies.
- Leads orderly discussions by tactfully and politely enforcing rules that offer every member a chance to speak for or against a motion.
- Determines whether or not enough members (a quorum) are present to conduct business.
- Informs people about how the meeting will proceed. Reviews the agenda and explains each motion before it is voted upon.
- Votes to break a tie.
- Serves as spokesperson for the board of directors in most matters relating to general association business.

- Cannot, without specific board approval, borrow funds in the name of the association or otherwise act beyond the scope of the authority established by the association documents and board of directors.

## **Vice President:**

The vice president of the association is responsible for performing the duties of the president in the absence of the president. Examples of the type of duties and responsibilities the vice president may perform are:

- Performs the duties of the president in the absence of the president.
- Coordinates committee chairs and reports status to the board.
- Assumes duties as defined or assigned by the president and/or board of directors.

## **Secretary:**

The secretary is responsible for maintaining the records of the association, including preparing the notices for all meetings of the board and the membership, and authenticating the records of the association. Examples of the type of duties and responsibilities the secretary may perform are:

- Takes the minutes of meetings and keeps a permanent, accurate record of what has taken place in meetings.
- Prepares written minutes for the board of directors and reads the minutes at every meeting.
- Is familiar with previous minutes in order to provide needed information to the president.
- Receives and handles all correspondence.
- Prepares meeting notices of all association meetings.
- Keeps an accurate list of members' names, addresses and telephone numbers.



## Treasurer:

The treasurer is the custodian of the association's funds and financial records. Examples of the type of duties and responsibilities the treasurer performs are:

- Coordinates the development of the proposed annual budget for the association.
- Keeps track of all revenues and expenditures, usually signs all checks or vouchers.
- Pays all the expenses, upon authorization by the board and the association.
- Presents a written report each month to the board of directors and/or association of the month's disbursements and the balance on hand.
- Prepares all financial reports in accordance with applicable state law and IRS codes.

Examples of standing committees many associations utilize include: Nominating, Social, Welcome, Beautification, Grievance, Safety, etc. A special committee or task force may be formed to coordinate a neighborhood picnic or special event or to address an issue affecting the neighborhood, such as lighting, traffic, etc.

The role of the committee chair is to head a small group that reports, makes recommendations and/or acts on a specific issues. The committee chair:

- Is usually the first person appointed to the committee
- May be appointed by other committee members or by the president
- Meets regularly with his/her committee and reports its activities to the group.

## Committees:

Committees play an important and vital role in associations. They help distribute the workload and provide an opportunity for members to get involved. Train and prepare future officers and board members. The president and/or the board of directors have the authority to establish committees and task forces needed to carry out the functions of the association. Standing committees continue from year to year. Special committees are appointed or elected for specific assignments.



# Six Signs of A Strong Association

- Regular Meetings
- Recognized leadership
- Communication\* with members
- Communication\* with Government
- Formal action taken to officially represent
- Published articles of association/incorporation and bylaws



\* *Communication = listening and speaking.*

# Tips On Being a Good President

Every neighborhood association should have someone who takes the lead in making sure that the meeting runs smoothly. The president should never monopolize the floor or dominate the discussion.

His or her job is to make sure that people stay on the agenda, both in content and timing.

Here are some pointers on being a positive and effective neighborhood president or leader when running a meeting:

1. Introduce yourself at the beginning of the meeting—don't assume people know who you are.
2. Inform people as to how the meeting will proceed. Review the agenda.
3. Direct the discussion and keep people on the topic. When issues are brought up that are not relevant to the current discussion, remind members that there will be a time for new business. If people are repetitive, ask if there is any new information to be

shared. If a decision needs to be made, inform members.

4. Limit your own opinions.
5. Mediate arguments if they arise. Remain impartial and fair. Give each side a chance to state their point of view. Try to find common ground that can lead to compromise.
6. Review what has to be done. Make sure that people leave the meeting with a clear understanding of what decisions have been made and what tasks are to be done by whom.
7. Lead by example. Promote teamwork, inclusion, consensus building, and fairness at meetings and in all activities of the association. Good communication and solid cooperation is important to the success of an association.

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## Demands of Effective Leadership

**Confidence:** Confidence in yourself, confidence in others, confidence in your cause, confidence in your neighborhood.

**Optimism:** A belief that the goal is not only good, but that it will be reached. Show a "can do" attitude!

**Knowledge:** An understanding of the underlying problems, what needs to be done and how to go about getting it done.

**Decisiveness:** The ability to weigh options, make decisions and gain the acceptance of your neighbors.

**Openness:** A respect for the opinions of all and a desire to work with people of divergent views and personalities.

**Sharing:** A willingness to help with even menial tasks, to be out in front and to support the members of the group in their endeavors.

**Patience:** The willingness to let ideas ripen, to plan adequately, and to await the right time for action.

**Courage:** The ability to withstand criticism, to make sacrifices, to resist pressure and to continue in the face of adversity.

**Communication:** The ability to understand what others are trying to say and to convey decisions and action plans clearly.



# What to do when a member . . .

## **Creates a conflict:**

Don't get caught up in his/her anger, or get defensive. Remain objective. Explore his/her ideas and let the neighbors decide their value.

## **Would like to help:**

Encourage him/her to frequently share ideas, particularly when discussion is bogging down. Get the person involved.

## **Begins to split hairs:**

Acknowledge his/her point but remind him/her of the objective and the time limit.

## **Just keeps talking:**

Interrupt tactfully. Ask him/her a question to bring the conversation back to the point being discussed.

## **Seems afraid to speak:**

Ask easy questions. Give the member credit when possible and make him/her feel important.

## **Grinds his/her own ax:**

Recognize the self-interest and ask him/her if he/she can see an answer to his/her own objections.

## **Is just not interested:**

Ask him/her about his/her work and how the discussion could help him/her.

## **Acts superior:**

Recognize his/her ability and direct the most challenging questions at that person.

## **Wants to show how clever he/she is:**

Watch out for trick questions. Pass them back to the group to answer.

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## Meeting Essentials

### **Meeting Location**

Find a good meeting place that can accommodate the neighborhood association members. If you are expecting a small group, you may want to have your first meeting in someone's home. One thing you do not want is the meeting room to be too large or too small.

For a group larger than ten people, check the availability of your local community center, library, church, or other public facility.

### **Speakers**

For a change of pace, you may want to invite someone to speak to issues, concerns, and interests expressed by your neighbors. You can invite elected officials, or speakers from various local government agencies. Other community organizations are good sources for speakers.

### **Agendas**

Develop a well-planned agenda. Follow-up with emails, yard signs, newsletters, flyers, etc. Stick to the Agenda – meet only when necessary. Too many meetings can burn-out volunteers. Try to limit meetings to one hour.



# Meeting Types

The bylaws of a neighborhood association usually specify the types of meetings that are held within the association's annual year. Robert's Rules of Order is a good reference for additional information about meetings. An overview of the different types of meetings an association can conduct is listed below.

## Annual Meeting

The annual meeting is held in the same month every year. At the annual meeting, the members of the association elect the officers and/or directors for the next year. The annual budget is also accepted at this time unless the by-laws state another time for acceptance. The members also discuss projects, concerns, and other issues that they would like the board to implement during the next year. If an issue is raised that cannot be adequately addressed at the annual meeting, then another general or special meeting should be called for that specific issue. At that meeting, any additional information can be presented and the members can approve or disapprove action on the issue.

## Board Meetings

The officers and/or directors act as the executive committee and are often referred to as the board. The board as often as needed to oversee the concerns and projects that the neighbors agreed upon in an annual or special meeting. The board is also authorized within the limits of the approved budget to administer the month to month business of the association. Neighbors usually do not attend the meetings, although they can if they choose.

## Regular Monthly or Quarterly Meetings

Some associations choose to have monthly meetings that combine both a board meeting and a general member meeting. The president/chairman oversees the meeting, allowing full participation from the members and other board members. It is wise to publish the meeting topics in your neighborhood newsletter prior to the meeting so that everyone is aware of the business to be discussed. Meetings do not always have to relate only to business concerns; some associations meet monthly for social gatherings. Ask your neighbors how often they would like to meet and what type of meetings or social function they would like to have during the year.

## Special Meetings

These meetings can be called as many times as needed throughout the year. The general members, officers, or board can call these meetings for discussion and decisions that require participation of all members. The neighborhood should receive at least 10 days notice. If a vote will be taken, you should check with the association's by-laws or Robert's Rules of Order to determine how to handle proxy and absentee votes.

## Committee Meetings

All committees should meet separately to discuss and delegate action on their specific responsibilities for presentations at regular meetings. Committees are formed for the ongoing task related to newsletters, membership drives, land use issues, beautification projects and addressing concerns raised by neighbors. Some committees are formed for a specific project and are then dissolved.

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## Characteristics of a Bad Meeting

1. The purpose of the meeting is not defined or is unclear.
2. Officers and neighbors are not prepared for the meeting.
3. Progress made during a meeting is seldom reviewed.
4. Allocating equal amounts of time to trivial and important issues
5. Diverting from the issue at hand.
6. Lack of interest and "mini-meetings" being conducted in the audience.
7. Not reviewing what has been agreed upon and how those decisions will be carried out.

# Meeting Tools

**Good promotion** and advance notification of the meeting. Give neighbors at least two weeks notice of the meeting.

**Sign-in sheet** for all neighbors and guests.

**Name tags** to identify the officers/directors and neighbors. Too often neighbors may recognize faces, but may not know names. The name tags help promote friendliness.

**Agenda** to keep the meeting flowing and in order. Keep it simple and follow the agenda.

**Light refreshments** may make the meeting more enjoyable and promote socializing. If merchants or neighbors donate refreshments, publicly thank them and place a card on the platter acknowledging their contributions.



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## Meeting Tips

- Always start on time. Have your meeting place open at least 30 minutes early for neighbors to arrive, socialize, and prepare for the meeting.
- Introduce any public officials and speakers, etc., at the beginning of each meeting.
- Recognize newcomers at the beginning of each meeting. You may ask them to state what street they live on.
- State the purpose of the meeting clearly on the agenda. Restate the purpose at the beginning of the meeting. Be careful about getting caught up in the meeting trap of having a "monthly" meeting just for the sake of meeting. Nothing dampens enthusiasm more than unproductive meetings.
- Be brief and keep comments relevant to each concern that is discussed. Watch the pacing so the meeting does not last too long.
- Do research ahead of time for additional information that may be needed. If necessary, invite resource people to a meeting to give a presentation.
- Use visual aids as much as possible. Residents can relate to something that they can see.
- Allow everyone to contribute. After a concern or project is presented, open the discussion. However, set a time limit for discussion, especially if the agenda is long.
- Make frequent summaries during the discussion so that everyone clearly understands what is being stated.
- Stress cooperation, not conflict. If conflict occurs, appoint a committee to research the concern and report the findings at the next meeting. Encourage those individuals that are voicing their concern or opposition to be on the committee.
- Assign tasks and delegate responsibility as the meeting proceeds. This gives your neighbors a feeling of belonging instead of just listening.
- Guide the meeting from concerns to solutions. Always ask your neighbors how they would solve or approach a concern. Keep in mind that some solutions may take time.
- Wrap up the meeting. Go over the agenda, giving a very brief summary of each concern discussed or raised and any decisions or assignments that have been made.
- Before adjourning, state the next meeting date, time and place. Thank everyone for attending.

# Improving A Meeting

## Officers can:

- Plan the meeting in advance (have an executive committee meeting within one week of the scheduled meeting for this purpose).
- Start and stop each meeting on time (30 minutes to an hour).
- Keep the session moving. After both sides are given equal time to support or oppose an idea, ask for a motion. Determine the amount of time each person has at the beginning of the meeting and stick to the time restriction.
- Ask neighbors to make decisions instead of the officers making all of them.
- Make sure that meetings are held in comfortable rooms that have enough light and chairs.
- The president/chairman should conduct the meeting and not vote unless to break a tie. Remember, a tie means the motion fails.

## Neighbors/Members can:

- Know the rules they need to follow during meetings.
- Speak out on ideas or motions that they do not favor. Silence means consent. If you keep quiet during a meeting, keep quiet after it.
- Discuss issues - not personalities.
- Ask questions when something is not understood.
- Do not begin talking until the president/chairman recognizes you by name.
- Discuss issues that benefit the general community or common good.

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## Meeting Agendas

**An agenda is a list or outline of things that the group must discuss at a meeting. It is:**

1. A reminder of all business that needs to be covered.
2. A schedule that tells everyone present when each item will be addressed.
3. Helpful in accomplishing more in the allotted time frame.
4. Can be used as an announcement of the next meeting.

**An agenda is important because it:**

1. Serves as a guide which the president/chairman uses to time the action.
2. Makes sure important issues are not crowded out or overlooked.
3. Gives neighbors a chance to prepare for discussions in which they wish to take part.

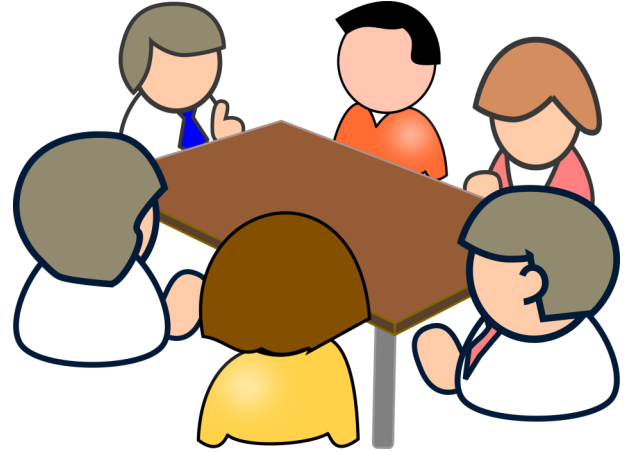
### When and How the Agenda is Prepared

The executive committee should meet at least a week before the regular meeting to decide which items should go on the agenda. To prepare an agenda:

1. Check the minutes of the last meetings. Note any unfinished business.
2. Include committee chairperson and members who are to make reports.
3. The Secretary should go over all correspondence received since the last meeting.
4. The Treasurer should prepare a financial report.
5. Check on all new business which has come up since the last meeting and any guest speakers.

# Sample Agenda

- I. Call Meeting to Order
- II. Recognition of guests and newcomers
- III. Minutes of Last Meeting
- IV. Treasurer's Report
- V. Committee Reports (chairpersons)
- VI. Guest Speaker
- VII. Correspondence
- VIII. Unfinished Business
- IX. New Business
- X. Announcements
- XI. Adjourn Meeting



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## Keeping Good Meeting Minutes

### Reasons for Good Minutes

1. They are the only records of the association business and a reference for the president and board.
2. The committee chairs use them for constant referral.
3. President must be informed of committee activities at all times.
4. They are essential to continuity and information for succeeding committees and executive boards.

### Guide for Recording Good Minutes

1. The following heading should be placed at the top of the first page - Name of Association.
2. Include in the first paragraph:
3. Kind of meeting (regular, special, board meeting, etc.)
4. Name of the committee or board
5. Date, including the year, time and place of meeting
6. Name of the presiding officer
7. Names of members present and those absent. In the case of a general meeting, have a sign-in sheet and attach this to the minutes.
8. Whether minutes of the previous meeting were approved as read, mailed or corrected.

9. Record ideas - listen to comments, put down main points. Summarize. These records are for the committee's or board's use - make them brief, but as complete as possible. Minutes are a record of actions taken or assignments made by the committee or board. It is not necessary to record all the conversations, only the motions made, actions taken or assignments made.
10. Minutes should clearly indicate:
  - a) Major problems stated
  - b) Suggestions proposed
  - c) Conflicting points of view for clarification action
  - d) Motions and votes
  - e) Record all main motions
  - f) Name the member who made the motion and underline the action
  - g) It is not necessary to include the motion was seconded
  - h) State and underline whether motion carried or failed.
  - i) Time of adjournment
  - j) End minutes simply with "John Jones, Secretary."

After minutes have been approved, the secretary should write "approved" with the date at the top.



# Neighborhood Decision Making

- **Individual Decisions**

One person usually, the "boss" makes a decision. Others involved or impacted by the decision are expected to abide by the decision. This approach does not work well in cultivating volunteer involvement. Leaders who utilize this technique will find themselves out of touch with the desires and concerns of the general membership.

- **Minority Decisions**

A few members are involved in the decision making. These few meet to consider the matter and make a decision which is binding for the organization. These could be decisions made by your executive committee or another committee given the "authority" by the board. Only involves a select few in the decision. May be efficient, but does not build a team or promote volunteer involvement or buy-in.

- **Majority Decisions**

More than half of the members/neighbors involved in a situation make a decision which is binding for the organization. This is the most common decision making strategy in a democratic organization. Even though a "majority" participates in this process, "losers" (the minority who voted against the decision) may be lost and alienated. The association is risking a division or struggle for power. If it appears a vote may be close, it is often a good idea (if time permits) to defer the issue to a committee for further exploration.

- **Consensus decisions**

An entire neighborhood association considers the issues on the basis of reason and discussion. Each member expresses a view and a decision is made that all can commit to, instead of a few or a "majority." Normally the president is continually asking the members "What would it take for you to buy into the solution?" This takes longer and requires a level of trust and respect, as well as practice, but it encourages everyone to participate.

- **Unanimous Decisions**

Each neighbor fully agrees on the solution/action, etc. and everyone concerned can fully subscribe to the decision made.



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## Building Consensus

The consensus model creates an openness, which allows for incorporating everyone's work or comments. To begin using the consensus decision model in your association, practice by trying it with a simple decision or issue (such as what date to have the annual picnic), instead of an emotional or heated issue (such as whether or not to support the parking of recreational vehicles in yards).

A healthy neighborhood association has active members/neighbors who are involved in decision making and implementation of the decisions and projects. People have a very strong need to affiliate

with "like-minded" individuals who have the same concerns and issues, such as maintaining a strong quality of life in the neighborhood.

As a leader of an association that is empowered through volunteers, building consensus and a feeling of ownership is critical to the success of the association. Consensus building encourages ownership and a sense of belonging among volunteers. Consensus building takes time and the nurturing of the participants. The results are well worth the effort.

# Consensus Building Model

Before being able to successfully use the consensus building model, it is important for all participants to feel comfortable knowing that their opinions will count and are encouraged. Team building exercises may need to be used.

1. Have the group determine its operating guidelines. For example:
  - a) One person has the floor at a time
  - b) Respect each other's opinion
  - c) Personal attacks will be avoided
  - d) Each person's remarks/comments are limited to two minutes
  - e) Listen to what is being said. It is not necessary to repeat what has already been stated (one group's members use finger-snapping to convey agreement. The British Parliament members say "Here! Here!," which is fine; but you wouldn't want to adopt their "Boo" for dissension.)

***Such guidelines should be posted at all the meetings. This can be done by putting them on a poster or printing them on the back of the meeting agenda.***

2. Consider the meeting location and set up. The meeting location and set up needs to be comfortable and allow everyone to see and participate.
3. State the issue to be discussed clearly and concisely. Ask if everyone understands the issue as stated. You may even want to write it down and ask if anyone has any changes, additions, deletions, etc.
4. Identify common grounds or decisions relating to the issue at hand that members can agree to, such as the members want to maintain strong property values, want safe streets, or want to reduce speeding through the neighborhood.
5. Try to break the issue down in an easy to review segment instead of trying to tackle the whole issue. By breaking it down into smaller pieces, it may prove easier to achieve partial consensus and then continue to build until the whole issue has been addressed and an overall consensus has been reached.

6. Summarize what a person has said and be sure to ask if there is anything else the individual wants to add or share.
7. Continue to summarize and repeat what has been decided to ensure all the participants understand and are in agreement.
8. When you reach an impasse or disagreement, ask those involved what it would take to make them happy and continue to negotiate with the parties until a consensus has been reached.
9. Once a consensus has been found, be sure to repeat the decision and ask for a vote. Summarize the action and the future steps to be taken with the decision or issue.

If there is an individual that refuses to move on or to cooperate and continues to repeat their points, an efficient way to handle this type of person is to take a break for a few minutes and ask the person to take a walk with you. Ask that person for help in moving the meeting or decision process along. Find out what it would take to come to a compromise. Hopefully, you can come to an agreement. If you are unable to and the rest of the group wishes to move forward, you may have to accept the fact that you will not be able to include this person in building a consensus on the issue.

It is difficult to conduct consensus building with large groups. When the group is too large, it can take hours,

if not days, to build a consensus. This model is ideal in groups of less than fifteen. For groups with more than 15, it is recommended that a subcommittee be formed involving people on both sides of the issue to meet. Build a consensus and come back to the larger group for discussion and consensus building.

# Maintaining Member Interest

Keeping the interest and involvement of neighbors in their association is a continual challenge faced by every neighborhood group. Here are some pointers and ideas that hopefully will stimulate other ideas.

- Be realistic in your expectations of the members. Many members have to work and have other responsibilities that may limit their participation.
- Stay focused on a few well defined goals or projects. Too many projects may frustrate or dilute your volunteer resources.
- Be sure to set attainable and realistic goals, which include a time line and identify individual and/or committee responsibilities.
- Celebrate your successes, even if it means doing it one step at a time.
- Be sure to publicly recognize members for their efforts and accomplishments. Recognize efforts in your newsletter.
- Try to incorporate "fun" into your meetings or projects. Humor helps too!
- Ask specific neighbors to help or get involved. Sometimes all it takes is asking. They may not volunteer or speak up when an "all call" for help is issued, but they may be willing if directly asked.
- Find out what is important to your members and try to get them involved in committees or projects involving their interest.
- Identify the talents and skills of members/neighbors to determine assets.
- Delegate important tasks and assignments.
- Ask neighbors what their concerns are and respond quickly to those issues when and if possible.
- Anytime a hot issue comes up, call as many neighbors as possible to ask their opinion.
- Create a buddy system or "neighbor mentor" to make newcomers feel more welcome and important to the association.
- Have the president or another board member personally visit all new members to encourage their involvement.
- Publicize your association meetings well in advance, including what will be on the agenda.

- Start and finish meetings on time. Respect the time and commitment of members attending the meeting.
- Keep meetings on track and to the point. Summarize the results of decisions and actions at the end of the meeting so that members leave with a sense of accomplishment.
- Be creative with your meetings; maybe ask neighbors to share their professional occupation. So often neighbors have no idea what each does for a living. Promote using the businesses and services of neighbors with no perks attached or expected discounts for services, etc.
- Publish a newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed and focused. Include a classified section for neighbors to promote their businesses.
- Meetings are not the only way to bring neighbors together. Organize a social function by delegating the event to a special committee.
- Sponsor clean-up days, possibly taking one street at a time so that the clean up seems manageable and can be accomplished in the morning.
- Involve the youth in the neighborhood in activities and events. Many times children are able to get their parents involved more easily than the association can.
- Provide useful and meaningful information at your meeting.
- Always thank members for their participation and leadership, including showing appreciation to committee chairs and members.
- Listen to what members are saying. Often all a member may want is for someone to listen to them.
- The president and/or board needs to delegate authority and be supportive, let the committees do their job. Respect their decision.
- Create a telephone chain or communication system that makes it possible for the association to keep its members informed
- Incentives and rewards are always appreciated by volunteers. Some examples are: recognizing and thanking a specific person or persons at a general meeting; acknowledging someone's efforts in your newsletter; neighbors cooking dinner or cake/cookies for someone. Incentives and rewards don't have to cost a lot. Use your imagination and creativity. Hold a neighborhood yard sale, holiday celebrations, pot-luck dinners or special interest groups.

# Writing Association By-Laws

By-Laws are the contract between the member and the organization. They are written for a particular organization, making them tailor-made and containing the basic rules governing the organization. The vote to adopt bylaws at the beginning is a majority. Once the bylaws have been adopted they automatically become standing laws of the organization and will usually require a two-thirds vote to amend.

## By-laws Should:

1. Meet particular needs of the organization and have a direct bearing on the rights and duties of its members.
2. Be brief, clear and precise.
3. Arranged in a generally accepted outline format divided into Articles, Sections and Paragraphs.

A suitable format for by-laws includes:

Article I      Name of Organization

Article II      Organization Objective  
The purpose of the organization, briefly stated.

Article III      Members

1. Classes of membership
2. Eligibility for membership
3. Fees and dues, when payable, when delinquent
4. Resignation procedure
5. Honorary membership

Article IV      Officers

1. Titles and duties of all required offices
2. Qualifications and eligibility
3. How officers are nominated
4. Method of election or appointment, how officers are elected, length of term of office, when term begins
5. How vacancies are filled

Article V      Meetings

1. Day of regular meeting and provision for changing it, i.e., meet the third Thursday of each month
2. Annual meeting
3. Special meeting
4. Quorum for all meetings

Article VI      Executive Board (or Board of Directors)

1. Membership of board
2. Powers
3. Special rules for conducting meetings, quorum, etc.

Article VII      Committees

- 1) Establishment of the standing committees (these are committees that your association knows it will need to have in place to operate. For example: social committee, membership committee, budget committee, etc.
- 2) Name, composition and duties of each standing committee
- 3) Establishment of additional committees
- 4) Special committees
- 5) Ex-officio membership

Article VIII      Parliamentary Authority  
Name the text, which will be the authority to follow when the bylaws do not provide it. For example: "The rules contained in the current edition of *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, shall govern the organization in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these bylaws and any special rules that the association may adopt.

Article IX      Amendment of Bylaws  
Prescribes the procedure for how the association may amend its bylaws, and should include language requiring at least that advance notice be given in a specified manner, and that the amendment be approved by two-thirds vote.

For more information about by-laws and for sample bylaws, go to the chapter on Bylaws in Robert's Rules of Order, (newly released edition).

# Simple Guidelines

If you decide to organize your own neighborhood association, please consider the following guidelines:

1. Are there existing neighborhoods in and around your neighborhood? It may be beneficial to be included in the boundaries of existing neighborhoods.
2. Determine the boundaries of the neighborhood association — avoid overlapping your boundaries. If you are unclear about other boundaries, contact the City's Neighborhood Planner at (941) 263-6378.
3. Widely promote information about an initial meeting to organize a neighborhood association.
4. Include everyone that lives or owns property as a potential member of the association.
5. Identify a regular meeting time and place.
6. Elect officers and adopt bylaws. Neighborhood and Development Services has copies of other association's bylaws to assist you in writing your own bylaws.
7. Register with the City of Sarasota, Department of Neighborhood and Development Services (Neighborhood Services Division).
8. Keep everyone informed about association activities.
9. Identify a success story so you can introduce the new group with a positive air.
10. Stay on top of City events and happenings to provide the most information to your members.





**Planning Department**  
**Neighborhood Planner**  
1565 First Street- 3rd Floor Annex  
Sarasota, FL 34236  
Neighborhoods@SarasotaFl.gov  
(941) 263-6378

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