<u>Tips for Building a Strong</u> <u>Neighborhood Organization</u>

Most tasks will continue to fall on the shoulders of a core group of leaders. However, there are many ways for neighborhood leaders to get people involved and keep their interest. Here are some suggestions:

Be Inclusive: The culture of some neighborhood organizations excludes certain residents. A narrow focus and extreme positions can often alienate the very people you would like to get involved.

Welcome New People: Make sure people attending a meeting for the first time are welcomed, listened to, and given opportunities to become involved. Never have a meeting or event without getting the names and phone numbers of newcomers. Consider giving them an opportunity to sign up for a task that interests them. Follow up with newcomers.

Recognize Your Assets: The biggest asset a neighborhood group has is its people. Conducting a survey to identify the particular skills of residents can uncover hidden knowledge, talents and abilities.

Stay Focused on the Bigger Picture: Set goals each year and stay focused on those goals. Utilize subcommittees to handle the bulk of the work. Ask subcommittees for a regular update or report. Do not spend time at regular meetings on issues that can be considered by a subcommittee.

Include Young People as Constructive Participants: Activities that let young people know that there is a neighborhood group that cares about them will build respect for the neighborhood's values. Such activities might include a recreational function, a youth summit, a school supply drive, or a scholarship program. Ask your neighborhood school principal to provide ideas and appropriate activities.

- Host Productive Meetings with Relevant Topics: Start meetings on time and keep them brief. Use an agenda with time limits established for each item. When time runs over for a topic, ask the group whether the issue deserves more time. Topics for meetings should be varied to attract new people. Limit the number of business meetings per year. Instead of a meeting, host a social activity.
- Listen & Let Everyone Speak: Asking for introductions at the beginning of a meeting can often break the ice for people who might be afraid to speak up. An open forum for half an hour can make a big difference in whether someone stays involved.
- Work with Other Community Organizations: Do not forget to capitalize on the resources and skills of other community organizations. An inventory of the neighborhood might uncover a variety of helpful organizations, such as churches, schools, service clubs, nonprofit organizations and youth organizations.



Neighborhood Communications is a series of brochures produced and distributed by the city of Carrollton's Community Services Division to inform citizens about the fundamentals of starting, maintaining and growing a neighborhood organization. If you have any comments about this brochure or if you have an idea or suggestion for another brochure or series of brochures, please contact the Community Services Division.





COMMUNITY SERVICES

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION

MEMBERSHIP



Community Services Division
Department of Environmental Services
City of Carrollton
1945 E. Jackson Road
Carrollton, Texas 75006

Phone: 972-466-4299 Fax: 972-466-3175 www.cityofcarrollton.com



Build and Maintain Membership

Recruiting members is important for the longevity of any organization. Many groups attract members through well-publicized meetings on issues that concern lots of people. Once the project is completed or an issue is resolved, these new members may dwindle away. Many organizations experience this problem, so you need to be creative to avoid this dilemma. Here are some actions your group can undertake to build membership:

- Have association members go door-to-door and talk to their neighbors. This can be a week-long or one-day effort. You could have a membership drive and then have a party for the members that volunteered in the effort. Your members would have fun as well as an opportunity to share experiences with each other.
- Pass out printed materials to encourage residents to get involved. This could be as simple as a letter from the neighborhood association's president or a brochure with details on upcoming events or issues.
 Members should also carry membership forms with them and offer both immediate and mail-in membership opportunities.
- Designate block captains that can pass out flyers and newsletters to prospective new members, welcome new residents, serve as a sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block and organize volunteers to help with activities.
- Host community gatherings or other events 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 hand out information packets about the association at events.

Keeping members involved can be quite challenging. For every member that is active in the association, there are probably two who would be involved if they were properly motivated. Here are some ideas to help retain active members:

- Help new members find a place in the association. Many will offer to help but will not know where to start. Organize a list of volunteer activities. Have those who want to help sign their name next to activities they would be interested in helping with.
- Always welcome new members and attempt to make them feel at ease with the group. Officers and other members should watch for new faces at each meeting and welcome them. New or potential members should be introduced to someone who lives near them. Designate an official "greeter" at every meeting.
- Avoid the appearance of favoritism. New people
 who see the same people running every project
 will feel excluded and may not return. Different
 people should be appointed to positions of
 leadership. This will help create a sense of
 belonging.
- Encourage new ideas and input at all levels of the organization. People who are new to the organization can see things in a different light and provide new solutions to old problems. New perspectives can assist the whole group in problem solving.
- Every meeting should represent the strongest commitment to organization. Busy people will not attend meetings or involve themselves in organizations they consider to be a waste of time. A well-planned meeting will display a sense of accomplishment from the beginning. Have a written agenda for every meeting and stick to it.
- Maintain current membership records. Keep a file with members' names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest, etc.
- 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 everyone, including children. This will foster a strong sense of community spirit among your neighbors.

Working with Diverse Populations

Every neighborhood is diverse. The diversity may be based on race, age, ethnic background, marital status, or size of family. The challenge for neighborhood associations is motivating people from different segments of the community to participate in an organization that reflects the entire neighborhood. Here are points to consider when meeting the challenge of diversity:

- LISTEN to your residents—<u>all</u> of them. Find out their interests, talents, and needs.
- Offer a diverse set of activities. Do not expect everyone to attend activities all the time. Some residents may not be able or want to come to monthly business meetings.
- VALUE diversity. By capitalizing on the skills and experiences of all people in your neighborhood, the association will benefit from the rich diversity of the population.
- TRUST is essential. Trust does not come until you have the chance to interact with one another. Sponsor activities that bring neighbors together.

