Starting a Neighborhood Association

A Guide for Successfully Creating a Neighborhood Association
Congratulations on taking the first steps in starting a neighborhood association. A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners and representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches and schools who organize to improve conditions in their neighborhood. A group that represents the community will have the stability, credibility and clout to be an effective force for a better neighborhood.

Successful neighborhood associations do not happen overnight, but the hard work that goes into creating such an organization has many advantages. Research suggests that when neighbors interact, kids stay in school, crime declines and residents report improved health.

This guide will assist in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules that must be followed, but a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize the group. As the association grows, use other ideas and be sure to have fun.
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Getting Started
Ask several interested people to serve on a steering committee to organize the neighborhood association. In addition to your neighbors, remember to invite church leaders, business owners and school officials to be part of the group. Just three or four enthusiastic people can successfully start a 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?
- How do you want to improve the neighborhood?
- What are the available resources in the neighborhood?

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

**First General Membership Meeting**
The first General Membership meeting is the time to announce the formation of your neighborhood association, solicit new ideas, and discuss some ideas already developed. The City of Irving will assist you in the coordination of notifying residents and conducting the first neighborhood meeting.
HAVE AN AGENDA MEETING
Following are some tips for setting up a productive meeting:

**Create Meeting Arrangements**

- Arrange for the use of a meeting room at a church, school or recreation center in the area.
- Avoid large areas such as auditoriums and sanctuaries where people can feel lost.
- Arrange chairs in a way that people can get better acquainted, such as a circle.
- Schedule the meeting for the early evening or Saturday morning.
- Consider providing baby-sitting services or child activities.
- Offer transportation for those unable to drive.

**Quick Tips**

- Plan to have greeters at the door to welcome people as they arrive.
- Ask people to sign in and wear a name tag.
- Give attendees a small sticker and ask them to locate their home on a neighborhood map.
- Have refreshments available and allow time for mingling.
- Hand out and follow a prepared agenda including:
  → An introduction of the core group
  → An introduction of City of Irving representatives
  → Discussion of issues, concerns and group projects
  → Discussion of committee structure
  → Announcement of the next meeting
Effective Meetings
The way that meetings are run will affect how involved the 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.

Running a Meeting
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 the agenda to provide structure and simply guide, encourage and limit discussion where appropriate. Make sure someone takes the minutes or records the meeting. If there is not a secretary, rotate this task.

Dealing with Difficult People
• When a point is being discussed too long, summarize or suggest tabling the question for a later time.
• When two members get into a heated discussion, summarize points made by each, and turn the discussion back to the group or invite the two to stay after the meeting to talk.
• When coping with the “one-man” show, interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit but politely ask him/her to hold points until later.
• When a speaker drifts from his/her subject, give the speaker credit for his/her idea but explain that he/she is departing from the main point, or bring the discussion
PARTICIPATION
back to the topic by using the related idea as the transition.

- When a member has difficulty expressing his/her thoughts, build his/her confidence by expressing appreciation for what he/she said.

**Ending the Meeting**

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.

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**Quick Tips**

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. Consider establishing a Membership Committee to focus on increasing membership. Be realistic about what people can do given the other responsibilities in their lives. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.
Board of Directors
A successful neighborhood association starts with an enthusiastic and willing board of directors. Discuss with core members the duties and titles of the board of directors. Common duties include the following:

**President**
- Oversees the schedule of meetings and activities.
- Coordinates the activities of officers, leaders and committees.
- Appoints committees as needed; the president is an ex-officio member of all committees except the nominating committee.
- Arranges for a regular meeting time and place each month.
- Develops a meeting agenda.
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room.
- Exhibits leadership qualities and is a role model to association members.

**Vice President**
- Assists the president.
- Presides at meetings and performs other duties in the absence of the president.
- Arrives at least 30 minutes before the meeting to set up the room.
- Responsible for introducing new members and guests at meetings.

**Secretary**
- Keeps complete and accurate minutes of all meetings.
- Reads letters or any other correspondence to the group.
- Writes letters for the association.
• Contacts members who have missed several meetings and extends an invitation for them to attend the next meeting.

Treasurer
• Keeps accurate records of all receipts and expenditures of association funds.
• Plans a budget and presents to the association for approval.
• Pays bills as approved by the association.
• Gives a financial report for the year and presents it to the association.
• Provides written financial reports for the secretary to include with the minutes.
Bylaws
Bylaws provide an overall framework for your organization and outline general rules that govern the day-to-day operation of the group. They should state the organization’s purpose, mission and structure. When writing bylaws, use language that everyone can understand. Remember, bylaws serve as an instruction manual for your group.

The following is a general outline for writing bylaws:

**Article 1 – Name of the Organization**
1. State the name of the organization

**Article 2 – Purpose of the Organization**
1. State specific/primary focus of the group  
   a. Who you will serve  
   b. What is your function (preservation, educational, advocacy, safety)

**Article 3 – Membership**
1. Define classes of membership  
   a. Voting members  
   b. Non-voting members  
2. Define membership  
   a. Attendance  
   b. Dues  
3. Define voting members

**Article 4 – Regular Membership Meetings**
1. When will regular meetings be held  
2. When will officers be elected
3. When will the treasurer report on financial condition
4. When can a special meeting be called
5. How will meetings be publicized
6. Define quorum (How many people will it take for an action to pass; percent of voting members)

**Article 5 – Board of Directors**
1. Define powers of the board
2. Define how the board will be elected
3. Define the number of directors
4. Define the terms of office
5. Resignation
6. Vacancy
7. Suspension or removal
8. Compensation

**Article 6 – Board Meetings**
1. Who will run board meetings
2. When will the board meet
3. What constitutes a quorum of the board
4. How many votes does a director have; what is a majority
5. Can the board take action without a meeting

**Article 7 – Officers**
1. List offices to be filled
2. How officers will be selected and how long they will serve
3. Define responsibilities of president, vice president, treasurer and secretary
4. List what officers will serve on the executive committee

**Article 8 – Committees**
1. List standing/permanent committees
2. Who can serve on committees
3. How are committees appointed/formed
4. What are the powers of committees
5. When will committees meet
Article 9 – Records and Reports
1. What records will be kept permanently and who will keep them
2. How will the association keep track of members

Article 10 – Fiscal Year
1. When does the fiscal year begin and end

Article 11 – Contracts, Checks, Deposits, Funds
1. Execution of contracts – who can sign them
2. Checks – who can write them, how are they approved
3. Deposits – when and where will funds be deposited, who can deposit them

Article 12 – Changes to Bylaws
1. When will they be reviewed
2. Who can change them
3. How will changes be communicated
Communications
The establishment of a good communications and publicity network is essential to any group. One of the most effective ways to establish a manageable and affordable network is by using the following forms of communication:

- **Fliers** – Any activity, project or goal of the group can be announced in a flier. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for the use of a copying machine from a school, church or local print shop.

- **Newspaper Announcements** – Most newspapers have announcement sections and allow neighborhood organizations to advertise their monthly meetings at no charge.

- **Neighborhood Walk-Through** – This is one of the most effective ways to begin a relationship with your neighbors and get them interested in your organization. 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 voice their concerns and to bring some of their neighbors. Visit or call them on a regular basis to encourage communication.

- **Surveys** – Surveys are key to bringing new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. Distribute a survey at meetings and make it available at membership drives.
Dear Valley Ranch,

As summer is almost upon us, I want to encourage you to get out in the mornings for Wa, run, bike, swim, cur, can, etc.

Assuming the City of Irving continues with its plan of extending the Sam Houston trail system, Valley Ranch is at a benefit from this major access route will be the Irving Convention Center, Ben Carpenter, over 35 years ago and has been a focus of Las Colinas Blvd., will open a critical new gateway into the heart I truly would not want to go back to open

The heartbeat of any organization is the volunteer base. The very best contribution

Construction of the Spur 348 bridge, allowing for the completion of Las Colinas Blvd., will open a critical new gateway into the heart of the Urban Center and provide direct access to State Highway 114, George Bush Turnpike, Interstate Highway 635, and DFW International Airport.

Irving’s Convention Center at Las Colinas will require ease of access for both vendors and conventioneers. Completion of the Spur 348 interchange, anticipated to coincide with opening of the Convention Center in December of this year, will provide direct access that is vitally important to both. Patrons of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Orange Line, with stations at the intersection of Lake Carolyn Parkway and O’Connor Blvd., and just to the east of the Convention Center, will have easy access as a result of this project.

Traffic congestion in the Urban Center created by full occupancy of existing office buildings and apartment complexes, along with new development such as the Irving Convention Center, has long been a concern for planners and developers. The Spur 348 interchange and the fourth point of entry into the Urban Center will eliminate that concern. The planned Entertainment Venue, Water Street, future restaurants, and hotel will add to the attraction of the Urban Center. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will approve the Spur 348 Bridge later this month with construction to follow immediately thereafter. The seamless connection of Las Colinas Blvd. from the Urban Center to primary transportation arteries was envisioned by the founder of Las Colinas and the Urban Center, Ben Carpenter, over 30 years ago and has been a focus of City of Irving planners for the past 15 years. Hard work by countless personnel, cooperation between governmental agencies, and TxDOT’s making this a priority, has brought this project to fruition.

The first of many new projects in the Urban Center to directly benefit from this major access route will be the Irving Convention Center. The Convention Center is already proving its effectiveness as an attraction for the City of Irving; staff has begun booking corporate meetings, regional events, sporting events, and even trade shows. Such events will require superior access and proper circulation for the expected traffic. An 800-car parking garage which will be available to those visiting the Convention Center further illustrates the need for enhanced traffic flow in the Urban Center.

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• **Telephone Tree** – Individuals who want to contribute but have little time may volunteer to be on a telephone tree. Give each person at least six people to contact with a short message. This is an easy way to establish a fast, effective communication network.

• **Block Representatives** – Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison with your organization. They can inform neighbors about what the organization is doing and they can recruit new members by word-of-mouth.

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**QUICK TIPS**

A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communication with members. Newsletters can be paid for by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively. Newsletters can be sent via email, home with students or through the mail. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the U.S. Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.
Volunteers
Volunteers are very helpful in successful neighborhood associations. When recruiting volunteers, credibility is very important. Show confidence by knowing what you would like the volunteer to do and be enthusiastic about the task at hand. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, serving on a committee, delivering newsletters, stuffing envelopes, or contacting people to come to the next event. When recruiting to an activity, consider the volunteer’s needs by providing child care or even transportation.

Here are some steps for successful volunteer recruitment:

1. **Be Prepared** – Have in mind a mini-strategy consisting of how you will explain your goal and what you want the person to do. Look and listen for clues to what interests this person.

2. **Legitimize Yourself** – You need to gain quick credibility. Find a common background or a mutual friend. Explain why the person’s participation will make a difference.

3. **Listen, Listen, Listen** – Show that you are listening by asking good questions, providing encouraging remarks, and using body language that says you are interested.

4. **Challenge** – Encourage people to produce change. Challenge people to care about the organization’s goals.
Volunteers
5. **Get a Commitment** – Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment with a firm deadline. Write it down, make a note for follow-up and clarify exactly what should happen next.

6. **Follow-Up** – There is nothing worse than working hard to recruit members only to ignore them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to experienced volunteers, and keep the lines of communication between you and your volunteers open.
Projects
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 organization unless you are doing worthwhile projects for their benefit or for the benefit of the neighborhood. It is important that you determine the needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success.

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.

In planning projects, keep the ball rolling with a list of projects and activities that will maintain participation and interest. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Keep people involved at all levels and give people specific jobs to do. Do not give too much responsibility to one person when it can easily be delegated to several.

Following is a list of possible short- and long-term projects:
- Neighborhood cleanup
- Community garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video
KEEPING INTEREST IN THE ORGANIZATION
• Crime watch program
• Skills exchange
• Tutoring program for youth
• Neighborhood cookout, picnic or potluck
• National Night Out celebration
• Holiday celebration
• Neighborhood T-shirts
• Yard of the month
• Neighborhood newsletter, website, directory or telephone tree
• Paint/fix up projects
• Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
• Representatives to attend City Council and school board meetings

QUICK TIPS

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

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.
Neighborhood Resources
**City Boards and Commissions**
Residents who would like to serve their city are encouraged to apply for a volunteer position on one of its many boards, commissions and committees. Board and commission members advise the City Council on a variety of issues and play a significant role in maintaining interaction between residents and city government. Contact the City Secretary’s Office at (972) 721-2493 for more information.

**City Spectrum**
The “City Spectrum” resident newsletter is mailed to every household in the city each month. The newsletter also includes a listing of city recreation classes.

**City Website**
Residents can access information by visiting the city website at CityofIrving.org. Information about city services, meeting dates and times, and online documents and forms is available on the website. Visit CityofIrving.org for more information, ideas and tools for beginning your neighborhood association.

**Community Development**
The City of Irving administers funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for rehabilitating and revitalizing neighborhoods. Federal monies received include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Shelter Grant and HOME Investment Partnership. For more information, call (972) 721-4800.
Neighborhood Grant Program
The Neighborhood Grant Program provides grants to neighborhood associations in the amount of $250 up to a maximum of $1,750. Grants can be used for physical improvement, neighborhood identity, special events and communications projects. For additional information, call (972) 721-4969.

Neighborhood Watch
Neighborhood Watch helps residents discourage and prevent crime. To start a Neighborhood Watch in your area, contact the Community Services Division of the Irving Police Department at (972) 721-2544.

Keep Irving Beautiful
Keep Irving Beautiful is a dedicated group of volunteers and staff committed to developing solutions to littering. The people involved in this program can assist you with cleanups and help you come up with solutions to littering in your neighborhood. Call (972) 721-2347 for more information.
Citizens Fire Academy
The Irving Fire Department Citizens Fire Academy is an opportunity for Irving residents to learn more about the Fire Department. The class is offered two times a year and meets once a week for 11 weeks, plus one all-day Saturday class. The training consists of classroom discussion, demonstration and hands-on activities. The class is open to anyone 18 years or older who lives or works in Irving. For more information, call (972) 721-3695.

Citizens Police Academy
The Citizens Police Academy is an 14-week educational program designed to provide the public with a working knowledge of the Irving Police Department and its personnel and policies. The training consists of classroom discussion, demonstration and hands-on activities. The classes are held once a week for three hours and are open to anyone 21 and older who lives or works in Irving. For more information, call (972) 721-2544.

Recycling
The city offers curbside recycling to single-family homeowners, and recycling drop-off centers are available to those in single- and multifamily homes. Curbside recycling is provided once a week. Recyclables are collected in blue bags that can be purchased from City Hall or any recreation center. Additional solid waste services include regular household garbage collection, household chemical collection days, and brush/bulky collection. For more information, visit CityofIrving.org or call (972) 721-8059.
Youth ACTION Center
The Irving Youth ACTION Center is a resource center for teens ages 13–19. The center offers a free Internet-accessible computer lab and a newsroom for the production of the “On the Edge” teen news magazine. Free tutoring, life-skills training workshops, game tables and video games are available. The Irving Youth ACTION Center is also the home of the Irving Youth ACTION Council. For more information, contact the center at yacenter@cityofirving.org or call (972) 721-8090.