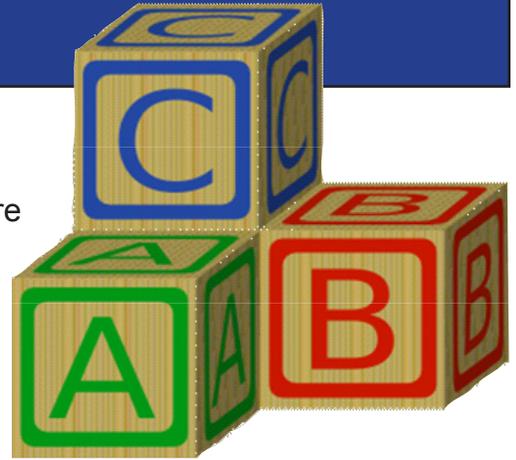


# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECTS

## A “HOW TO” GUIDE

### *Introduction*

Your neighborhood is not only the place you live, but a place where you make connections and establish a sense of community. What would make your neighborhood a better place to live? Are there physical changes that would improve your neighborhood like landscape beautification or a neighborhood cleanup? Are there programs that would make your neighborhood a safer place, like block watch or emergency preparedness programs? Perhaps a neighbor-helping-neighbor program or a senior summit would benefit the elderly or mobility impaired in your neighborhood. A food drive or personal needs collection is an easy way for your neighborhood to build community. The people in your neighborhood can probably think of many projects and programs that would benefit the neighborhood and help connect residents. Often it is just a matter of a few people and some organizing to get a project underway.



The Neighbor Link program was introduced in the Spring/Summer 2009. Neighbor Link gave neighborhoods a structured way to choose a project to benefit their neighborhood and/or the greater community and utilize the assistance of city staff and resources. As neighborhoods consider taking on projects for the upcoming year, we hope you will find the following project guide helpful. No matter what your project entails, we hope this will help you define your goals, create some structure and be headed for success. A neighborhood doesn't have to be organized to take on a project. All it takes is one resident with enthusiasm who can rally some neighbors. You will be amazed what you can do!

### *Establish an organizing group*

- If you have a core neighborhood group or association board, this is a good place to start recruiting
- Request an address list or mailing labels from the City for your neighborhood
- In some cases, the City can help with the cost of printing and/or mailing to your neighbors.
- A flyer or letter taken door-to-door will help identify interested neighbors (Recruit high school students to do the delivery. They receive community service hours and get to know their neighbors)
- Collect e-mail addresses, as this is the most efficient and cost effective communication tool for the long term.



## *Invite neighbors to get involved*

Keep the first communication simple and don't overwhelm people with too much information. It is important that they feel that they have a voice in the direction and details of the project. So only include the following basics:

- A photocopied flyer or postcard is usually sufficient
- Include a brief and enticing description of the project or what you are trying to accomplish
- A meeting time (two week notice is ideal, do a reminder a 2-3 days prior)
- Date
- Location
- Contact information so people can RSVP or call with questions



## *Hold a Meeting*

When you choose a meeting date, consider other conflicting events (curriculum night at the local school, Mariners or Seahawks games, etc). Have a short, focused agenda for your meeting and stick to it. A simple agenda can help set expectations, keep a meeting on track, and create accountability. Keep your first meeting to the “Big Picture” and make it safe and easy for everyone to get involved and express opinions.

- Find a comfortable and convenient location. This could be a local school, church or private home
- Refreshments are always a nice addition
- Have some time for socializing so neighbors can connect and get to know each other
- Stimulate discussion by asking open-ended questions like: “What’s your reaction...?” or “How could we...?”
- Appoint a secretary to take meeting notes and distribute to attendees and to neighbors who couldn't attend but are interested in being involved.

## *Define skills and resources of the group*

Within any group, there are many skill sets. Try to identify skills and who has them. Some common skill sets to look for:

- Writing
- Research
- Marketing
- Graphics
- Phone skills
- Proofreading
- Accounting
- Sales



Depending on your project you will identify other skills you need. Be creative in how you think about skills. A stay-at-home mom may have trouble getting to evening meetings, but could make phone calls or solicit retail merchants for donations. Someone employed full time during the day may be able to do budget and accounting in the evening. Try to match jobs with skills and time available. Someone with limited time may be well connected through their personal or business contacts and can procure resources or provide contacts with others who can be helpful. Not all members of a group will contribute in the same way. A good group leader will figure out how to get all involved in ways that both work for the individuals and contribute to the group.

## ***Decide the scope of the project***

The same project can be done in a big or small way. . For example, a neighborhood block party can be a simple potluck picnic at the park, or could include catered food, live entertainment, carnival games and face painting, city information tables, etc. As involvement grows and more people volunteer, you may be able to expand the scope of a project. Some neighborhoods have an annual project or event and as some pieces are in place and can be easily repeated year-to- year, other pieces can be added and the project made bigger.

- Get agreement on the scope of the project
- Set some basic goals to keep a project from growing too large for your group to handle
- Expand your project if it becomes an annual event or as you get more people involved or have more resources available

## ***Assign tasks***

- Make a list of action items
- Assign tasks
- Create deadlines

If you have a larger working group, you may want to divide into smaller committees that work on different aspects of a project. For example:

- Finance and budget
- Marketing
- Buying supplies
- Soliciting donations



These smaller sub-groups can operate autonomously and decide when the entire group wants to meet again to share information and work on next steps. Make sure it is noted in the minutes who has volunteered for which tasks and when those tasks are expected to be completed.

## Create a budget

Figure out what your project will cost before you go full force ahead. Enthusiastic planners often get too far down the road before they realize their project is not financially viable. This wastes people's time and creates disappointment. When building a budget, add in a contingency for cost overruns of 10-20%. This will give you some leeway should unanticipated expenses arise. Analyze your particular project to come up with all the categories of expenses you may incur. Some common expense categories for neighborhood projects are:



- Permits & Fees
- Graphic design
- Printing
- Postage
- Supplies
- Food & Beverage
- Decorations
- Prizes
- Entertainment

## Establish a timeline

- Work backwards from the event date to determine when things need to be done.
- Plan more time than you think is necessary
- Make a timeline that recognizes which tasks must be completed before others can be done.

(For example, if you are creating a logo, it must be ready before your printed materials can be completed. If you are deciding between locations, much work can be done, but printed materials can't go to the printer until the final location is set.)

- Have someone keep the timeline up to date and share it with the whole group as things change and are updated
- Make sure people who are assigned time-oriented tasks feel they can meet their deadlines
- Create an environment and a process where people are comfortable asking for help when they need it

For projects that are not "date specific" (like a neighborhood directory) set realistic goals for completion, with milestones set along the way. (For example, collect all e-mail addresses by Feb. 1st, have data entered by March 1st, graphics ready for printer by April 1st, distribution of directory on May 1st)



## ***Have a Marketing Plan***

Marketing to ensure attendance and participation are a key to the success of any project. It is useful to map out a plan of everything you can do to attract participation. Prioritize which marketing tools are most important because sometimes you won't have the time or resources to do everything.



Some internal neighborhood marketing tools:

- Brand your communications – make your event or project recognizable with a logo, consistent title, colors and message
- E-mail is the fastest, easiest way to keep people informed or to invite them to participate – start and maintain a neighborhood e-mail list
- For a neighborhood only project, you can't beat personal contact - doorbelling is good!
- Snail mail communications – City of Bellevue can provide a mailing list for your neighborhood
- If your neighborhood has a directory, phone contact is personal and effective.
- Neighborhood newsletter
- Neighborhood website or blog
- Flyers sent home from the local school and/ or posted at local businesses
- A-board signs in key neighborhood locations

For an event that is open to the community, you will want to add to the above. Some external marketing tools:

- If your event is open to the public, ask everyone you e-mail in the neighborhood to distribute to their own contacts list
- Send press releases to local media – this can be newspaper, radio, TV (including Public Service Announcements)
- Make contact with local reporters – they love to cover interesting neighborhood events. Find a unique angle that may interest them. For example, a community garage sale included an antique car which made for a great photo opportunity for the local paper.
- Post flyers or posters at area businesses with bulletin boards (Starbucks, grocery stores, Barnes & Noble, etc.)
- Post on event websites.
- Use social media to spread the word (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

## ***Solicit sponsorships and in-kind support or donations***

Don't be afraid to ask for in-kind support or sponsorships from business or individuals. Many businesses are happy to support neighborhood activities, as it creates goodwill for them in the community. Potential local event sponsors can include grocery stores, health care facilities or local restaurants. Be creative in thinking about who can help you. Most businesses have a much easier time giving away product (food, promotional items) than spending cash. People who can help you may not be obvious. There are neighbors who own a business or may be connected to well known people. Use your networking skills to ask for what you need and be creative. Some neighbors not be interested in participating, but are willing to provide resources for you.

What could be in it for them?

- Promote the local business name or logo on your advertising, posters and flyers
- Give out promotional items like t-shirts or water bottles with a sponsor logo
- Have a Sponsor banner or informational table at the event if appropriate
- Hand out brochures from the business at your event or mail it with your publicity
- Have a sponsor speak at your event
- Provide the sponsor with a list of attendees/participants for their marketing purposes (be sure those who attend or sign up have to option to opt out of a list if they desire)
- Be creative – ask the potential sponsor what benefits they would like to receive!

## *Who should you get involved?*

Try to have diversity in your planning group. Make use of the unique talents or traits of the people contributing their time. If you have jobs you can't fill, ask people to recommend a neighbor that might fit the bill. Often people don't volunteer because they haven't been asked to do something specific. If tasks are well defined and not overwhelming, most people will say yes!

Seek out:

- Youth
- Seniors
- People with varied occupational skills
- People from different cultures
- New families to the neighborhood



## *Evaluate*

Ask everyone involved with a project to evaluate it at its conclusion. You should not only evaluate the actual project, but should evaluate the planning process. Some questions to ask in the evaluation process:



- Lessons learned?
- What would make it easier next year?
- Were good records kept?
- What was best about the project?
- What was most challenging?
- Were there enough volunteers and resources?
- What should be changed?
- Keeping an organized notebook with all records, notes, receipts, etc. makes the process for the following year much easier. A notebook allows you to keep an institutional history, which helps new people get involved in future years.

## *Keep an institutional history*

Be sure to keep good records of your project or event. Each person working on the project should be asked for any notes for the book that might help someone doing their job in the future. Having some history helps if you want to repeat a project in the future or if another neighborhood wants to learn from your experience.

Records might include:

- Minutes of your planning meetings
- Timelines
- Marketing materials
- Budgets and receipts
- Evaluations
- Photographs



## *Celebrate!*

If a project is successful, it is important to celebrate and to recognize those who contributed. If people feel successful and appreciated, they are more likely to be involved again or take on a leadership role in the future. Celebrations should take place soon after an event or project is complete. Neighbor Link can provide support for your celebration. Contact Neighborhood Outreach at 425-452-6836 for more information.







