

Neighborhood Association Toolkit



A Guide to Creating a
Successful
Neighborhood
Association



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What is a Neighborhood Association and What does it do?

A neighborhood association is a group of residents who meet regularly to accomplish specific goals in their neighborhood. The association may include homeowners, renters, business owners, school faculty or staff, church officials and members of non-profit organizations. Depending on the goals of the group, meetings may be held twice a year, once a quarter or every month.

Each neighborhood is as unique as the residents that inhabit them. It's the residents who are best able to create the kind of neighborhood they desire by working together. Coming together with your neighbors only when controversial issues arise limits your effectiveness and the ability of residents to determine the future picture of the neighborhood. Organizing a neighborhood association is an excellent way to improve your neighborhood and develop a spirit of community and pride.

Neighborhood associations help identify challenges and concerns, support change and improvement efforts, help resolve conflicts, provide volunteers for community initiatives, represent the neighborhood as a whole to elected officials and find resources to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

Before forming a neighborhood association, it is important to define or understand the goals of the proposed neighborhood association. Some goals may include:

- Helping neighbors get to know each other by hosting social events
- Making physical improvements such as painting a mural, installing a playground or organizing a neighborhood clean-up
- Assembling a Block Watch to reduce crime
- Organizing to share opinions with public officials

How to form a Neighborhood Association

Form a Steering Committee

Get together an initial group of neighbors who have a genuine interest in neighborhood involvement. This committee will meet to establish the purpose and boundaries of the association, which will change as more residents become involved.

The core group should agree on ground rules for meetings:

- Try to attend every meeting
- Act for the benefit of the group
- Be polite and make constructive comments
- Treat other members with respect
- Discuss issues and concerns, not personalities
- Accept group decisions after a vote has been taken

It's important to determine the boundaries of your neighborhood association. Boundaries might be roads, residences within a certain distance of a neighborhood landmark, or a community facility. You can take a look at the map of existing neighborhood associations (www.cityofpascagoula.com/neighborhoodassociations) for how others are classified or take a community stroll to identify boundaries for the neighborhood association.

Outreach to the Neighborhood

You can spread the word through a variety of means including door to door canvassing, hosting a small event, posting flyers in the neighboring schools and shopping centers, or conducting a neighborhood needs survey. Outreach efforts can help you develop the neighborhood inventory (see below).

Neighborhood Inventory

A neighborhood inventory is very helpful in outreach efforts and future communications. The inventory consists of a collection of facts about the neighborhood including information on residents, types of homes, area businesses, churches, and schools. This list will help you get more neighbors involved in the association and its activities. You may need to go door to door to obtain this list. Information on property owners is also available on the Jackson County GIS website (<http://mapping.co.jackson.ms.us/jacksoncountyflexwebmap/>).

Neighborhood Plan

It is typically helpful to identify problems and develop a neighborhood plan. A neighborhood plan will help your group make decisions and take action. Problems can be identified by hosting a meeting where neighbors can share concerns. Problems and concerns typically addressed by neighborhood associations include crime, physical improvements, traffic, street lights, preserving unique features of the neighborhood, zoning concerns or meet and greet for neighbors.

The Neighborhood Plan should include:

- The reason the association was formed.
- The principals that will guide the association and its work.
- When and how often the members will meet.
- How meetings will be conducted.
- The goals and outcomes of the neighborhood association.
- An action plan for accomplishing the goals set by the neighborhood association.

The Plan will likely be revised shortly after the first few meetings of the neighborhood association.

Other Project Ideas:

- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Community Garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook video
- Crime watch program
- Block party or festival
- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting
- Tool lending libraries
- Touring program for youth
- Home tours
- Neighborhood cook-out, picnic, or potluck
- National night out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood t-shirts, flags, signs, etc.
- Yard of the month award
- Neighborhood newsletter, website, directory email tree
- Paint up/fix up projects
- Paint swap
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representative to attend City Council, school board, and planting commission
- Philanthropic projects, such as “adopting” a family who needs help with Christmas dinner

Registering with the City

Early in the process, you need to register your organization with the City of Pascagoula. By registering, your neighborhood association will be added to the City’s Neighborhood Association website (www.cityofpascagoula.com/neighborhood-associations) and your meetings and any events can be added to the City’s Calendar of Events page. To register, complete the Neighborhood Association Registration Form found on the Department’s website. Submission instructions can be found on the form.

Prepare for the General Meeting

If you need help, the Community and Economic Development Department (630 Delmas Avenue, 938-6639, www.cityofpascagoula.com/community-development) has information on running effective meetings, as well as committee forms, neighborhood surveys, and more.

Prior to the meeting, the Steering Committee needs to agree upon roles for the first meeting (facilitators, note takers, etc.). Plan to provide time for neighbors to get to know one another and create a meeting agenda. The agenda lists the order of business at the meeting, including committee reports.

Example of a typical agenda:

- A. Call to order
 - The President as designated by the neighborhood association will call the meeting to order. This person would also act as the meeting facilitator and offer opening remarks.
- B. Reminder of previous discussions
 - (For meetings after the first meeting) If minutes were kept from previous meeting, those minutes could be distributed for review or read aloud to the association. This could serve as a refresher of the topics at hand.
- C. Reports from committee members
 - A designated person from each committee should be prepared to report on the progress of the committee's goals and objectives. The individual should allow for discussion or feedback from the entire group. Make sure each reporting committee member keeps debate time to a minimum of 5-10minutes.
- D. Unfinished or new business
 - The President will ask for new ideas or topics and opens the floor for discussion limiting discussion to 5-10 minutes.
- E. Announcements
 - In most occasions this is an opportunity for non-profits, city departments, or other agencies involved in the neighborhood association to speak.
 - The next meeting date, time, and location should be announced.
- F. Adjournment
 - The President adjourns the meeting.

Hold the First General Meeting

Items that could be covered during the first general meeting:

- The Steering Committee can introduce the purpose and begin to establish the boundaries of the association.
 - It may take some time to determine where specific boundaries are. Neighborhood Associations can be registered with the City with estimated boundaries.
- As a group, discuss the vision of the Association.
- Establish and prioritize goals for the neighborhood.
- Select an Action Committee to address your first major issue/goal/project.
- Determine on future meeting dates.
- Bring useful information about the neighborhood like upcoming activities or events.
- Don't forget to provide opportunities for input from all attendees throughout each of the discussion topics.
- Invite neighbors to be part of the Steering Committee.
- Establish a means to contact attendees.
 - Sign in sheets with name, address, phone numbers, emails, and rent/own, etc. work well to establish a contact list.

People will be more likely to attend meetings if they are organized, brief, useful, and in a convenient location. Set the time, date, and location by consulting with the core group of members. Plan the meeting to last no longer than an hour. Pick a location that is centrally located and familiar to your neighbors, and then remind them of the time and date, by email, phone call, flier, or letter. Before the meeting begins, arrange the tables and chairs, have all handouts, and resource materials available at the

entrance of the room. Don't forget a sign in sheet. A sign in sheet will allow you to keep all information up to date and keep new members involved.

Writing Bylaws

Sometimes neighborhood associations develop bylaws describing how they will do business. Bylaws simply establish the rules governing a group. They serve as a constitution that established the legal requirements for the association. They also govern the way the association functions as well as the roles and responsibilities of its officers. They should be taken seriously because they are important to the maintenance of order and credibility in the organization.

Writing bylaws can be a tedious procedure for new organizations, but they are very important to the success of the organization. They help members clearly define and understand the purpose, procedures, and role of the neighborhood association. A sample set of bylaws can be found on the City's Neighborhood Associations website (www.cityofpascagoula.com/neighborhood-associations).

Establish Committees

Some neighborhood associations work well when divided into committees. The core group should be responsible for determining what those committees are, how many are needed, and the goals of each.

Examples of Committees:	Possible Duties:
By-laws Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine how the association will conduct meetings and vote Making decisions to resolve disagreements among members about procedures
Crime Reduction Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with Pascagoula PD to educate residents on crime prevention Helps organize block watch programs about procedures
The Green Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes neighborhood clean-ups Works with the MS Department of Environmental Quality to address environmental violations Organizes tree plantings and beautification projects

Example of Committee Action Plan:

Problem:	Rising Burglary Rate:
Committee	Crime Prevention
Goal	Reduce the number of burglaries and overall crime in the neighborhood
Resources and Strategies	Resources: Pascagoula PD Strategies: 1. Form a Block Watch Group for every block. Have them up

and operating as soon as possible.

2. Have at least two residents from each block meet with the Pascagoula PD for proper training on block watch safety.
3. Identify quality of life issues facing the community which may have a direct impact on why crime has increased.

Get Moving

Following the initial meeting, the Steering Committee should begin planning for the next meeting's agenda and continue to work toward expanding the membership base. The Action Committee(s) should meet and begin working toward resolving their issue. Once effectively addressed, celebrate your victory with the neighborhood!

Don't forget to have fun! An effective association encourages neighbor participation by addressing relative issues, getting things done and making community involvement an engaging process.

Publicity

Communication is very important to the success of your association. Sharing information is a great way to build a sense of community in your neighborhood, get to new people to join your association and enlist support for your events.

Here are some ways to get the word out:

- Publish a quarterly or monthly neighborhood association newsletter. Collaborate with other neighborhood associations to share the cost and assist in design. Short, informative articles that are of interest to the entire neighborhood will keep neighbors up-to-date. Newsletters can be paid for through association dues or by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively. A good newsletter might contain the following information:
 - Notices of important meeting dates and group events.
 - Information about city services
 - Recent accomplishments of your group
 - Notification of special events
 - Recognition of volunteers
 - Information about the schools in the neighborhood
 - Profiles of neighbors
 - Crime/safety information
 - Birth/death announcements
 - Graduation announcements
 - Anniversaries
 - A welcome to new neighbors
 - Articles of community interest
 - Advertising
- Announce your meetings and events in weekly area newspapers, in schools, churches, civic groups, and club newsletters.
- Distribute fliers door to door.
- Distribute a neighborhood survey and the results by mail, email, phone, or door to door.
- Ask local businesses to place fliers or posters in their businesses.
- Send letters or emails to all within the neighborhood boundary.
- Call (228) 938-6639 or visit the Community and Economic Development Department (630 Delmas Avenue) to have your meeting publicized on the City's Calendar of Events.

Leadership: Finding and Sustaining It

Most likely, the Steering Committee’s is part of the neighborhood leadership. Part of the Steering Committee’s duty is to identify and develop additional neighborhood leaders. People in leadership positions are responsible for coordinating activities of a group, including activities designed to help the group achieve its goals and those to help members stay involved and feel good about working together.

It is important for leaders to involve all group members in the decision-making process and to be sure everyone is heard before the group votes on an action or makes a decision. The qualities of good leaders include flexibility, the desire to listen and consider the opinions of others, the ability to clearly state goals and expectations and willingness to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of other individuals. Part of being a leader is helping others to grow.

Developing Leaders:	Avoid Leader Burnout:
Search for more than one or two leaders within the community	Delegate responsibility; some leaders have better strengths than others
Encourage people to switch tasks and discover their strengths	Break-up big jobs into small parts and assign different task
Remind members to be open to change: bring in new members with fresh ideas	Encourage younger individuals to participate in leadership roles
Encourage people to communicate in a positive and productive manner	Focus on the goals and achievements, not the conflict in personalities

Keeping Interest in the Association

The biggest challenge for most neighborhood associations is to maintain interest and involvement. In general, members will participate if the following are present:

- Business and social events in which to participate
- Issues of importance to discuss
- Clean and visible accomplishments
- Organized, competent leaders
- Events to recognize participants

When Members Disagree

Neighborhood associations, like any group of people, can run into problems with personality conflicts, burnout, and leadership issues. When problems occur, encourage an open and respectful discussion among the members, make sure the discussion does not become a meeting of personal attacks, and try to guide the group toward the desired outcome.

Some people try to avoid dealing with conflict because it makes them uncomfortable, and some people try to approach conflict as if they were in a battle and are determined to win. It is best to resolve conflict immediately so it won't damage personal relationships or the association. Many disagreements can be resolved through negotiation. Disagreements among association members can be an opportunity for growth, change, and new understanding.

More Tips to Handling Conflict:

- Talk directly to one another – face to face. Direct conversation is more effective than sending a letter or complaining to someone else.
- Choose the right time to talk. Find a neutral place where you can both talk undisturbed for as long as it takes. Approach the other person and ask for their time.
- Think about what you want to say ahead of time. State the problem, how it makes you feel, and offer a solution. Don't blame or interpret others' behaviors. Only speak for yourself and your feelings toward the issue, and do not assume others agree with your position.
- Do not place blame on anyone, do not personally attack anyone, only discuss the problem, and how that affects your feelings. If you offend or make anyone angry, they are less likely to be calm during the discussion.
- Listen to the comments, suggestions, and over all statements of the other person. Give them a chance to tell their side of the story fully, without interruption. Although you may agree with what is being said, show that you are listening by saying that you hear what they are saying and express gratitude for being able to have the conversation. Pay attention to your body language while the other is speaking. Although you may not say anything negative, your body language and facial expression may communicate how your feeling or what you are thinking for you.
- Negotiate a solution. Ask, "What can we do to improve the situation for both of us?", "What is the goal?", or "What steps can we take together to resolve our differences?"
- Check back with each other again in the near future. Ask the other person, "Is this working for you? Do you have additional suggestions?"

People who cannot resolve serious disagreements on their own may want help from a trained mediator. A mediator is a neutral person who will help neighbors in conflict create their own solution to the problem.

How to Influence Decision Making

Action Checklist

- Learn the decision-making process.
- Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- Let your elected officials know about you.
- Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- Inform yourself--research the issue.
- Inform the members and the public of the issues.
- Attend City Council and Committee meetings.
- Assist your elected officials.

- Know and support your allies.
- Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.
- Focus on the preliminary stages of policy making.
- Never threaten elected officials.
- Form coalitions.
- Be discreet.
- Be realistic. You may not win every fight, and at times, compromises will have to be made.
- Thank elected officials for their help.
- Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- Evaluate your efforts.
- Monitor the implementation of decisions.
- Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

Tradition

“We always do it this way.” Examine the traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Or is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from the way “we always do it” will require more explanation to the community before it will be accepted.

Power Clusters

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the state Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. When these groups join efforts, they form a power cluster, sometimes called a coalition.

Established Networks

Networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include other individual neighborhood associations, City Committees primarily made up of citizens, and other volunteer organizations with similar interests.