NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION TOOL KIT
A GUIDE TO CREATING A SUCCESSFUL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

CITY OF PROVIDENCE
Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services
Angel Taveras, Mayor
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.

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

1. START WITH A CORE GROUP
Start your neighborhood association by finding a core group of people who agree to meet regularly. Ask some neighbors you already know and ask those neighbors to speak to other neighbors. Once you have 5 or so people interested, schedule a meeting at a central location, a school, church or community center in the area. Set up the meeting very quickly before people lose interest.

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

2. SET THE NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES
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 a neighborhood map or take a community stroll to identify boundaries for the neighborhood association. Call the Office of Neighborhood Services to see if your boundaries include any existing neighborhood associations, you may want to partner with the existing group on common problems.

Once you have set the boundaries, establish a list of households in the area. 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 available at the Tax Assessor’s Office in City Hall or www.providenceri.com under online services, tax assessor property data.
3. IDENTIFY PROBLEMS AND DEVELOP A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

A neighborhood plan will help your neighborhood association make decision and take action. First, conduct a neighborhood inventory. An inventory is a collection of facts about the neighborhood including information on residents, types of homes, area businesses, churches and schools. You can obtain this information from the City of Providence Planning Department or at www.provplan.org.

After gathering your inventory of the neighborhood, identify a few problems, concerns or desires. (Problems can be identified by hosting a meeting where neighbors can share concerns) Problems and concerns typically addressed by neighborhood associations may include crime, physical improvements, traffic, street lights, preserving unique features of the neighborhood, zoning concerns or meet and greet for neighbors.

The 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
4. 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 the committees.

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<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES OF COMMITTEES</th>
<th>POSSIBLE DUTIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>By-laws Committee</td>
<td>· Determine how the association will conduct meetings and votes</td>
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<td>· Making decisions to resolve disagreements among members about procedures</td>
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<td>Crime Reduction Committee</td>
<td>· Works with the Providence Police to educate residents on crime prevention</td>
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<td>· Helps organize block watch programs about procedures</td>
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<td>The Green Committee</td>
<td>· Organizes neighborhood clean-ups</td>
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<td>· Works with the department of environmental control to address environmental violations</td>
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<td>· Organizes tree plantings and beautification projects</td>
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**PROBLEM**

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<th>Committee</th>
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**Goal**

| Reduce the number of burglaries and overall crime in the neighborhood |

**Resources and strategies**

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<th>Resources: Providence Police Sub-Station and Community Commander, Mayor’s Cicilline’s Office of Neighborhood Services, respective City Departments</th>
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**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 Community Commander for proper training on block watch safety.
3. Call the Office of Neighborhood Services to inquire on any other resources for this problem.
4. Identify quality of life issues facing the community which may have a direct impact on why crime has increased.

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Example of committee action plan:
HOW TO HOLD MEETINGS

PLAN THE MEETING
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, resource materials available at the entrance of the room. Don’t forget a sign in sheet, you will be able to keep all information up to date and keep new members involved.

SET THE AGENDA
All meetings should have an agenda. The agenda lists the order of business at the meeting, including committee reports. Example of a typical agenda:

1. 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.

2. Reading/reminder of previous discussions
If minutes were kept from previous meeting, those minutes should be read aloud to the association. This could serve as a refresher of the topics at hand.

3. 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 discussion or feedback from the entire group. Make sure each reporting committee member keeps debate time to a minimum of 5-10 minutes.

4. Unfinished or new business
The President asks for new ideas or topics and opens the floor for discussion. Limiting discussion to 5-10 minutes

5. Announcements
In most occasions this is an opportunity for non-profits, city departments or other agencies involved in the neighborhood association to speak. Next meeting date, time and location should be announced.

6. Adjournment
The President adjourns the meeting.
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 neighborhood association newsletter 4-12 times per year. Collaborate with other neighborhood associations to share the cost and assist in design.

- Announce your meetings and events in weekly area newspapers, in schools, church 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 or email the Office of Neighborhood Services to make sure your meeting is on City News and the Community Initiative Calendar.
LEADERSHIP: FINDING AND SUSTAINING IT

Part of the neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop 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.

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<th>DEVELOP LEADERS</th>
<th>AVOID LEADER BURNOUT</th>
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<td>Search for more than one or two leaders within the community</td>
<td>Delegate responsibility; some leaders have better strengths than others</td>
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<td>Encourage people to switch tasks and discover their strengths</td>
<td>Break-up big jobs into small parts and assign different tasks</td>
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<td>Remind members to be open to change: bring in new members with fresh ideas</td>
<td>Encourage younger individuals to participate in leadership roles</td>
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<td>Encourage people to communicate in a positive and productive manner</td>
<td>Focus on the goals and achievements, not the conflict in personalities</td>
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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, 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 determined to win. It is best to resolve conflict immediately so it won’t damage personal relationships or the association, and many disagreements can be resolved through negotiation. Disagreements among association members can be an opportunity for growth, change and new understanding.

MORE TIPS FOR 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, 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?” or “What is the goal, 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 TRAINED MEDIATOR. A MEDIATOR IS A NEUTRAL PERSON WHO WILL HELP NEIGHBORS IN CONFLICT CREATE THEIR OWN SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM. FOR HELP FINDING A MEDIATOR CALL MAYOR’S OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AT 401-421-2489.