

Neighborhood Tool Kit

**Office of Neighborhood Vitality
City of Mesquite, Texas**



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NEIGHBORHOOD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are many roles people play within a neighborhood. The primary responsibility is to preserve and improve our neighborhoods.

As a resident of a neighborhood, there are rights as far as self-determination and empowerment; to be advised on public policies and initiatives and private initiatives affecting our neighborhoods; to have our neighborhood values, culture and history recognized and respected; and to have the authority and resources to establish neighborhood organizations that will work to embrace expected change that honors tradition and stability.

As neighborhood people we should be open to doing some, if not all of the following:

- Advising others of neighborhood values, history, and culture to listen to the views of all residents in order to:
 - Help One another care for children
 - Care for the aging and others in need
 - To promote self-sufficiency of neighbors
 - Ensure economic and social development
 - To participate in neighbor to neighbor interactions
 - Preserve safety of our homes
 - Maintain properties
 - Make proper use of public facilities
 - Strive to be good citizens

STARTING A NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP

SIX STEPS TO FORMING A NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP

If your neighborhood does not have an existing neighborhood group, you may want to create one. The following outlines a step-by-step process for forming a new neighborhood group.

Step 1 – The Idea

The idea to start a neighborhood group is to first make sure that another group or association doesn't exist in the existing neighborhood. You can contact your local neighborhood services or police department to inquire. Also, the Texas Secretary of State provides a list of registered HOAs online at www.sos.state.tx.us.

Step 2 – Form a Neighborhood Organizing Team

Once you talk to some of your neighbors to gauge their interest in the need for a neighborhood group, a group of 2-4 residents should be appointed as the Neighborhood Organizing Team. The team will be responsible for getting the group started and working with the City's Office of Neighborhood Vitality.

Step 3 – Meet with Office of Neighborhood Vitality Staff

The team will need to establish a plan or proposed boundaries prior to first meeting. This would include coming up with items you will cover with the appropriate number of housetops. Information about the number of houses within your neighborhood can be located on the Dallas County Central Appraisal District website as well as the City's Neighborhood Map. The Neighborhood Vitality Staff will provide you with information that can assist you with information and assistance necessary to get started.

Step 4 – Hold 1st Neighborhood Meeting

Once the Neighborhood Organizing Team has decided on the structure and boundaries of the neighborhood group and created a list of issues that will be discussed, you are ready for your first neighborhood meeting. The Office of Neighborhood Vitality will help you with information or ideas for the types of information you should include on flyer or notice. Provide an opportunity for discussion on new ideas and concerns and changes to the proposal that is necessary for consensus.

Step 5 – Hold 2nd Neighborhood Meeting

When there is consensus on the boundaries and how the group will be structured (which may take multiple meetings), a meeting is held to create a more structured way of conducting neighborhood meetings.

Step 6 – Register with the Office of Neighborhood Vitality

The City of Mesquite, Office of Neighborhood Vitality encourages you to register the name and contact for your neighborhood group. Registration puts your neighborhood group in the City's database and lists you as the official representatives of your neighborhood. Your group will be kept informed of events in your area and contacted for feedback by various public agencies as well as be provided information to assist with neighborhood issues.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

There are things to remember when creating a Neighborhood Group:

Neighborhood Self-Evaluation Checklist -

The following checklist provides a way for a group to rate their skill or knowledge in different areas. The list is detailed so not all will be applicable to your group. Simply mark points for each using the following scale:

NI – (Needs Improvement)

S – (Satisfactory)

E – (Excellent)

NA – (Not Applicable)

Self-Evaluation Checklist:

I. Organization

- a. Has written mission statement and/or bylaws (or operating procedures)
- b. Develops annual goals and work plan
- c. Annual evaluates organization activities
- d. Meetings are held regularly, widely publicized, and open(accessible) to the public
- e. Meetings are well organized; a written agenda is available and is followed
- f. Meetings begin and end on time
- g. Written minutes are kept and distributed

II. Leadership

- a. Reflects neighborhood population
- b. Articulates issues clearly
- c. Diplomacy participatory methods re used to make decisions
- d. Communicates regularly with group about financial status, key issues, and work plan, etc.
- e. Knowledgeable about local government and how to influence decision making

III. Communication

- a. Newsletters are produced and distributed regularly
- b. An Annual Report or Fact Sheet is produced and distributed
- c. A record of decisions and policies is well-maintained
- d. Meetings have adequate publicity throughout the neighborhood and areas where neighbors frequent
- e. An annual meeting is held for the entire membership\community
- f. A good relationship with local media is maintained
- g. Makes presence know at public hearings and before official bodies

IV. Diversity

- a. Leaders and members reflect the neighborhood's diversity (race, homeowners/tenants, income levels, etc.)

- b. Meeting places are accessible to all persons
- c. Group involves non- or limited-English speaking persons
- d. Issues addressed by the group are representative of active and not-so-active members

V. Volunteers

- e. Group provides orientation for new members
- f. Group provides orientation for new members
- g. Volunteers understand their role clearly in the group
- h. Volunteers are held accountable for their assignment
- i. Volunteers are motivated and stay involved
- j. Volunteers are clear about the group's agenda, goals, and tactics

VI. Resources

- k. Group members have diverse fundraising skills
- l. Annual fundraising goals are set
- m. Annual fundraising plan and calendar is developed
- n. Fundraising events are planned and implemented.
- o. Fundraising plan is evaluated at least once a year
- p. Timely research is done for sources for renewable money
- q. Maintains 501(C) (3) tax exempt status (Optional and depending on the type of goal your group has in mind)

Please see where the central focus should remain for all Neighborhood Groups:



How to Invite Your Neighbors to a Neighborhood Meeting

Hi. My name is _____ (your name) and I'm one of your neighbors on _____ (street). I want to invite you to an important neighborhood meeting on _____ (date) at _____ (time) at _____ (place).

[hand the neighbor a flyer]

Many of the neighbors are concerned about _____ (problems) in our neighborhood. We believe that by working together we can

_____.

(solutions to the problems)

This meeting will be an opportunity for you to state your concerns about the neighborhood and your ideas for improving it. _____ (guests) will be there to share ideas and also answer any questions you may have. I hope you will be able to attend. We need your ideas and support.

Sample Flyer
Important

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Date: _____

Time: _____ a.m.\p.m.

Place:

Directions:

Topics to be discussed:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Note: Keep the estimated time of meeting in mind when planning agenda.

Please attend the IMPORTANT MEETING

Our Neighborhood Needs Your Ideas and Support!

For more information, call _____ at _____ or
_____ at _____.

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

for the problem of:

(Problem\Issue)

1. Explain problem as briefly as possible:
2. List possible causes of the problem:
3. List possible acceptable solutions to the problem:
4. List possible means/people (include phone numbers) to help solve the problem:
5. Things to do:

6. Resolutions/Decisions/Accomplishments:

Date completed:

Problem Solving Procedures

- List below the problems your Neighborhood would like to solve:

	Problem			Problem	

- Prioritize the above problems and place numbers from 1-10 (with 1 being the most important and 10, the least important) in the boxes to the left of the listed problems.

Prioritizing problems can be difficult, and you may want to get several neighbors' input.

What may be top priority to you may not reflect the top priorities of the rest of your neighborhood.

- Grade the expected ease of solving the above problems, and place numbers from 1-10 (with 1 being the easiest and 10, the most difficult) in the circles after the listed problems.
- Fill out a Problem Solving Worksheet for each problem.
- Choose one or two of the top priority items to address at your first Neighborhood Meeting.

Sometimes it helps to pick a more easily achieved goal to accomplish along with a more difficult goal. An early success can help a Neighborhood bond together and renew strength to solve more difficult, long-term problems.

Finally, simply have fun with your neighbors. Although, there are universal rules that neighborhood volunteers should follow in order to be successful, always remember to utilize the creative side of you and your neighbors. Everyone should understand that you are engaging one another for one common purpose and that is to ensure a healthy and safe neighborhood environment.

For more Neighborhood Group tips and information go to the City of Mesquite, Office of Neighborhood Vitality webpage at www.cityofmesquite.com.

SOURCES

- 1) The City of College Station Development Services “Taking Action! A Manual for Neighborhood Associations”
- 2) NeighborWorks - “Position Your Program for Success” and “Positioning your Neighborhood for Economic Success”
- 3) Community Association Institute “The ABC’s of Neighborhood Associations”