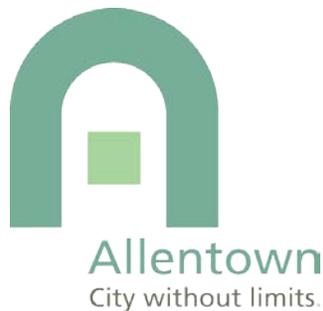


# Opening Doors, Building Bridges:

## The City of Allentown Guide to Organizing Your Neighborhood



Allentown, Pennsylvania



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**On the cover:** Residents participating in a block party held on 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the Allentown Neighborhood Information Exchange's **Guide to Organizing Your Neighborhood**. The Allentown Neighborhood Information Exchange (ANIE) is a cooperative effort between the various neighborhood organizations in the City of Allentown and the City's Department of Community and Economic Development, coordinated through the Bureau of Planning and Zoning. The mission of ANIE is to preserve and improve the City's neighborhoods by fostering better communication among the neighborhoods and the City government and by promoting opportunities for neighborhood residents to meet and discuss issues of mutual concern.

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a general reference tool for neighborhood organizations within the City of Allentown. The guide contains suggestions on how to start, run and sustain a successful neighborhood organization, as well as tips on conducting effective meetings and writing neighborhood newsletters. We would like to give credit to the following agencies, who were the sources for the majority of the information contained in this guide:

**Citizens for New York City:** <http://www.citizensnyc.org/>

**National Crime Prevention Council:** <http://www.ncpc.org/>

**United States Department of Housing and Urban Development:**  
<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>

**University of Kansas Community Toolbox:** <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx>

We hope this guide will serve as a valuable resource for all neighborhood organizations in Allentown, whether they are just starting out or they have been around for years. We commend you all for your dedication and hard work in making your neighborhood, and the whole city, a better place to live. For more information about neighborhood development, please contact the City of Allentown Bureau of Planning and Zoning at 610-437-7679.



## **STARTING A NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION**

When you start a grassroots organization, like a neighborhood association, crime watch or tenants' council, the people in your neighborhood get a chance to decide what needs to be done and work together to make it happen. A group that represents the community and involves its members in making decisions will have the stability, credibility and political clout to be an effective force for a better neighborhood. With the strength and experience gained from dealing with one or two starting issues, you will be in a position to tackle a wider range of local concerns in the future.

If you think your neighborhood needs to be organized, look over the steps explained below, drawn from the experiences of numerous other organizations that are working to improve their neighborhoods.

### **1. PUT TOGETHER AN ORGANIZING GROUP**

You've probably already talked with some neighbors, on the sidewalk or over the back fence, about what is going on in your neighborhood. You know that some people are unhappy about some things and that they'd like to see something done.

The next step is to make that discussion a bit more purposeful and organized. Recruit a handful of these neighbors to help launch the organization. You can also find help by asking leaders of churches, community centers, or similar organizations, whether they know people who may be interested in helping to improve the neighborhood.

### **2. DEFINE THE ISSUES**

Some neighborhood groups are organized as multi-purpose organizations, bringing residents together around a variety of concerns. Others begin in response to a crisis, such as a sudden increase in crime or a proposal for an incompatible land use, for example. In either case, your organization needs to prepare itself to represent the people in your neighborhood.

Talk to other residents to find out what they think the important issues are and what should be done about them. At the same time, collect information about the issues. Try to find out what factors have led to these issues and how other neighborhoods or communities have dealt with them.

### **3. RESEARCH THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

What is the size of the area you want to organize - one block or street, or a larger neighborhood? Often, a neighborhood will already have recognizable boundaries based on land uses or on physical characteristics, such as rivers or highways. You should keep in mind that if the area you choose to organize is too large, the workload might become unmanageable, and if the area is too small, you might not attract enough members to contribute to the group. Either situation could cause your group members to get overwhelmed and discouraged.

What is the demographic character of your neighborhood? Is there a particular group of people in the neighborhood who would be more concerned about neighborhood issues and more likely to join the organization?

What resources does your neighborhood have? Are there churches, schools or parks you could work with? Are there any local businesses that would be supportive of your organization?

What are the sore spots in your neighborhood? Are there vacant lots, abandoned buildings, places with a lot of police activity, dangerous street crossings? These sore spots should be considered resources as well, as they can serve as the building blocks for positive change in your neighborhood.

The City Bureau of Planning and Zoning can provide a variety of neighborhood-level information, including census data and school district enrollment data to help your organization in its research.

#### 4. PLAN A NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Share the work so that people work together from the start. One person can organize refreshments. Another can be in charge of reminder calls. Someone else can set up the room. Someone can take notes and write up your group's decisions. Another neighbor can be the "researcher," gathering information in advance. Another can lead the discussion.

Decide on a time, date and place for your neighborhood meeting that are convenient for people in the neighborhood. Either a weekday evening or a weekend day generally works best. You should try not to conflict with other community events or meetings. Church buildings, community centers and public libraries are places that are easy for neighborhood residents to get to and will often provide a room without charge. Meeting in a public building also helps to get that institution involved with your organization. Just make sure there is enough room at the meeting place for everyone to be comfortably seated.

Spreading the word is crucial for a successful neighborhood meeting and a successful organization. Have flyers printed listing the time, date, place and purpose of the first general meeting. Take the flyers on door-to-door canvasses of your neighborhood. Introduce yourself and the organization, and be sure to ask the people about their concerns and suggestions. Take down names, phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses of interested individuals so they can be re-contacted if they don't make it to the first meeting. Leave everyone you visit with a flyer or something to remind them you were there. These flyers can also be posted in apartment building lobbies, on grocery store bulletin boards and in churches, schools and other public locations.

Contact any neighborhood institutions that you think should know about your organization. Invite schools, businesses, and houses of worship to send representatives. Ask local officials, social service agencies, and others to send someone who can explain how they can help. The Allentown Police Department can often send an officer to provide information about the City's Crime Watch program. (See page 8 for an introduction to Neighborhood Crime Watch.)

## 5. HOLD YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Plan to keep the meeting fairly brief (less than two hours is probably good.) Have an agenda prepared for the group's approval. When preparing an agenda for your first neighborhood meeting, keep in mind that you are laying the foundation for your organization. You will want to come out of the meeting with agreement on issues and goals and the first steps you will take as a group.

Be ready for a big meeting with lots of discussion and more ideas than you had expected, but also be ready for a very small meeting. Sparse attendance is common for organizations that are just starting out. If this happens to your group, be positive: enlist the energies of the people who do show up, and keep your community outreach going. Work with what you have, and move forward. Finally, remember to have fun! Be sure to allow time for socializing, an important benefit of a neighborhood organization. Providing refreshments at the meeting is a great way to make attendees feel welcome.

### **SETTING YOUR AGENDA**

The agenda for your first meeting could include the following:

#### **INTRODUCTIONS**

- Members of the organizing group and reasons for holding the meeting.
- Names of the residents and other people in attendance.

#### **DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS/ISSUES**

- All the people at the meeting should have a chance to voice their opinions and make suggestions. If people feel recognized, they are a lot more likely to return. You will be surprised how much you all have in common. Just don't let the discussion get caught in a gripe session. Remember, you are there as a group to decide what problems you will tackle and what actions you will take, not just to talk. Everyone should have a chance to take part, but be sure the group makes some clear decisions.

#### **PRIORITIZING THE ISSUES**

- Don't plan to tackle every problem at once. If there are a number of issues that arouse strong interest, you need to decide as a group which are most important or should be dealt with right away. The group should identify one or two issues that need immediate action, but keep track of and get back to other problems in the future.
- List next steps and who will take them. Begin by agreeing on projects to address the one or two priority issues, the tasks that need to be done, and who will do them. Try to get everyone to commit to helping with your plan. If the work is complicated or there are a lot of people involved, ask someone to head a committee on each issue. Agree on who will take what roles, how tasks will get done, and how you will coordinate efforts. Build in some checkpoints to be sure all is going well or can be changed as needed.

#### **STRUCTURE**

- Agree on a name for the organization.
- You should ask the group to approve the continuation of the organizing group members, as well as anyone else who joins the organizing group during the meeting, as the steering committee for a temporary period.
- The structure should be kept simple during the early going. By-laws can be drawn up and elections held when the organization has more experience and members know each other better.
- Agree on the next time, date, and place for a meeting and the subjects that should be covered. Be sure to assign someone to arrange for the meeting space, as well as to notify everyone interested in attending.

## 6. REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

As your organization gets under way, it is important to enlist the help of as many people as possible from your community. There is always something that someone can do to help. Anyone can hand out educational brochures. Young children can pick up litter or learn to settle arguments without fighting; older youth can teach younger ones about preventing violence or organize positive activities in a nearby park. Caring adults can help troubled youth; families can help each other. Business people can help manage programs and raise funds; civic activists can round up local agencies to meet needs like recreation, housing, or education. Many kinds of activities can help to address the neighborhood's concerns and enrich the quality of life. Some may be more direct than others, but whatever the contribution of time, energy, talent, and resources, small or large, it will all help.

Decide whose help you will need or want. How will you approach these people for assistance? What do you want them to do? Think about contacting police crime prevention specialists, who have lots of ideas and expertise. Child protection agencies, drug prevention organizations, community development offices, public health offices, the local library, churches, schools and many others can lend a hand. Enlist these groups early. If they help in identifying problems and developing solutions, they'll be more committed to getting the job done.



Neighborhood residents creating a neighborhood garden.

## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION

The following are some of the practices used by neighborhood organizations to make the most effective use of available resources and keep their organizations going strong.

- Spell out the roles and responsibilities of the organization and its members. Adopt by-laws and elect officers.
- Decentralize planning and work. Delegate tasks and establish working committees to focus on specific issues or projects. Be realistic about how many people are needed to do a job, but keep it simple; sometimes the quickest and most obvious route is the best one.
- Involve all elements in the community and invite everyone to get into the act - single parents, renters as well as homeowners, teenagers, senior citizens, and business owners. People will do things if they are asked, and the more people you recruit, the more people they will bring along with them.
- Start with success: A small success or a goal that is quickly attainable can boost enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to tackle tougher tasks that take more time. Success builds group confidence and attracts new members. Everybody wants to work with a winner.
- Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to collectively decide upon program strategies and activities. Try to be flexible by holding meetings when and where more people can attend.
- Keep in touch with members clearly, often, and in different ways. Use personal contacts, in and outside of meetings. Distribute newsletters or flyers to communicate regularly with members. Canvas door-to-door to recruit new members. Send news releases to local media. For those members who have Internet access, establish an e-mail list as a quick and easy way to communicate and/or develop a web page for your organization. If many members do not have access to a computer, a telephone tree can be effective. Prepare a neighborhood map showing names, addresses, and phone numbers of participating households. These can all help keep everyone interested and well-informed.
- Mobilize collective resources and use them. Know members' skills and personal and business contacts. Gain support from the local government, police department, community-based organizations, youth and athletic associations, and family and senior centers, which can be major sources of information and education on issues of neighborhood concern. Working on common concerns with government and other agencies can help establish a positive climate of trust, which can lead to strong partnerships to help your neighborhood.
- Plan for and train new leaders. If people think one leader always controls everything, they may not join. And leaders can get tired and burn out. Divide up the work. Make sure all leaders get praise and recognition. This way, you help train new leaders and make use of everyone's talents. Effective group leaders usually are reliable; get along well with people; have good communication and negotiating skills; are organized; can conduct meetings efficiently; are willing to delegate tasks and listen to others' opinions; do not get discouraged easily; and do not view the position as a power trip or a chance for personal gain.
- Follow through on promises. If you promised to discuss a problem at the next meeting, do so. If you announce an event, hold it. If an official promises action on something, keep asking for it, and go higher up if necessary.
- Strike a balance between business and pleasure. Conduct business meetings on time and efficiently, but have a time for socializing before or after the meeting. Hold potluck dinners or other social events outside of your regular meetings to give neighbors a chance to get together and get to know each other on an informal basis.
- Say thanks and congratulate each other for progress, even if only with a round of applause. Acknowledge officials, agencies, and groups that have pitched in. Celebrate the success of your efforts and recognize volunteers' contributions through such events as awards, annual dinners, and parties.
- Check on where you are. Your real goal may get overlooked in the bustle of "doing something." You may stick with a goal only to find out it is outdated. You can reduce these risks by setting up some checkpoints. Decide in advance how you'll know if you are headed in the right direction. What changes should you expect? If you are not on target, rethink either the goal or the activity. Your group's energy is too important to waste.
- Develop a relationship with local media, such as newspapers, radio and TV stations to publicize positive or successful activities happening in your neighborhood.

## **SUSTAINING A NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION**

Many neighborhood organizations form to respond to an immediate threat, such as an increase in or rising fear of street crime, an unwanted development in the area or other negative issues. Often, when this crisis is resolved, membership and commitment to the organization start to fade away. This short-sighted attitude ignores the key benefits of a neighborhood organization. A neighborhood organization can empower people to prevent neighborhood problems and build a foundation for broader community improvement. Neighborhood organizations are far more than a quick fix for an immediate crisis - they are a moving force for positive action which contributes to the physical, social, cultural, and recreational richness of city life. These are the reasons why we live in the city, but it is the interaction at the neighborhood level that brings these to life.

From time to time, your neighborhood organization should sit back and re-evaluate its purpose, look beyond its original scope and toward other community concerns. Have your organization identify and evaluate the neighborhood's strengths and problems and then brainstorm on what members can do to improve the quality of community life. The following are some examples of projects that neighborhood organizations can get involved in to address broader concerns in their neighborhood.

- Contact the Allentown Police Department to find out how your neighborhood can set up a Crime Watch or a community patrol program. Get to know the police officers who work in your neighborhood and build a partnership focused on solving problems instead of reacting to crises. (For more information, see the Introduction to Neighborhood Crime Watch on page 8.)
- Organize regular meetings that focus on current issues such as drug abuse, bias-motivated violence, crime in schools, child care before and after school, recreational activities for young people, or victim services. Invite guest speakers who can provide special insight into specific issues.
- Publish a newsletter that gives local crime reports and prevention tips, recognizes residents of all ages who have made a difference, and highlights community events.
- Take advantage of safety in numbers by holding rallies, marches, and other group activities to show that your neighborhood is united and determined to drive out negative influences.
- Link your organization's activities to efforts promoted by public agencies, community organizations, schools, churches, youth and athletic associations, or family and seniors' centers. These efforts could include such things as drug prevention, child protection, anti-vandalism, arson prevention, neighborhood cleanups, or recycling. Share resources and promote each other's activities. Don't be shy about letting them know what your neighborhood needs. Develop and share a phone list of local organizations that can provide counseling, job training, guidance, and other services that neighbors might need.
- Organize a neighborhood-wide cleanup and involve everyone, including homeowners, renters, teens, children, and senior citizens. Call the City Bureau of Recycling and Solid Waste and ask for help in organizing a Don't Trash Allentown clean-up. The City currently provides free brooms, dustpans and garbage bags to help keep neighborhoods clean.

- Help to get nuisances out of your building or neighborhood by reporting violations of noise laws, housing codes, health and fire codes, nuisance laws, and disruptive tenant laws in rental units. At the back of this guide is a listing of city departments to contact for a variety of neighborhood-related issues. The Disruptive Conduct Report is one tool residents can use with rental properties when conduct or behavior by an occupant or visitor disturbs the peaceful co-existence of others. If you call the police to report an incident at a rental property, such as a noise complaint, be sure to tell the police the property is a rental and request a DCR. If there are three DCRs in a 12 month period, the renters can be evicted.
- Work with the Allentown School District, other schools and the City to establish drug-free and gun-free zones around schools, playgrounds and parks.
- Turn a vacant or abandoned lot into a park, playground, playing field, or community garden. Or adopt an existing park or school playground and take responsibility for picking up litter, repairing broken equipment, painting over graffiti and planting flowers.
- Work with schools to develop and teach crime and drug prevention programs in the classroom. Help a local theater group to produce a play teaching children how to protect themselves from violence, drug abuse, or other crime. Teach children how to use 9-1-1 or other emergency numbers.
- Make sure the youth in your neighborhood have positive ways to spend their spare time, through organized recreation, tutoring programs, part-time work, and volunteer opportunities. Work with parent associations, youth organizations, and schools to organize and run after-school programs for children and teens.

**The City of Allentown Recreation Bureau publishes a “Recreation Opportunities” booklet with information about the various recreational activities and park facilities in the City. Included in the booklet is information about the Allentown Youth Organization (A-Youth), who coordinates the activities of a number of neighborhood-based youth recreation groups in the City. For a free copy of this booklet, call the Recreation Bureau at 610-437-7757.**

- Start a Block Parent program to help children cope with emergencies while walking to and from school or playing in the area. These programs can be a reliable source of help for children in emergency or frightening situations.
- Help a local youth organization to start an inter-generational program with elderly neighbors. The youth can help the elderly with writing letters, doing yard work or running errands. In turn, senior citizens can help youth with such needs as tutoring or recreational programs, oral history projects, or cooking classes.
- Establish a buddy system for the elderly and people with disabilities, in which someone checks with them daily by phone and summons help if needed. Sponsor a seminar for the elderly and others on how to avoid becoming victims of con games and fraud.
- Don't forget social events that give neighbors a chance to know each other, such as a block party, potluck dinner, picnic, neighborhood yard sale, volleyball or softball game, etc.

## **INTRODUCTION TO NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH**

The Crime Watch program, also called Neighborhood Watch or Block Watch, is a community-based program that has been proven to deter crime. Sponsored by the National Sheriff's Association since 1972, the Crime Watch program unites law enforcement agencies, local organizations and individual citizens in a community-wide effort to reduce neighborhood crime. Thousands of these programs have been developed around the country, breaking down the isolation of neighbors as they work together and with law enforcement officers. It is a remarkably successful anti-crime effort, as participants unite and cooperate as a true community, neighbor looking out for neighbor.

The Crime Watch program establishes a formal network for concerned citizens to communicate with other neighbors and police regarding crime related problems. Simply translated, Crime Watch asks you to be the eyes and ears of the police department, to be more involved with your neighbors and their property by becoming more aware and alert to the activity in your neighborhood.

The Crime Watch program has been proven to work. Throughout the country, decreases in personal and property crimes have been reported by law enforcement agencies in communities that have active Crime Watch programs. Crime Watch fights the isolation that crime both creates and feeds upon. It forges bonds among neighborhood residents, helps reduce burglaries and robberies, and improves relations between police and the communities they serve.

The security of the city and its citizens depends upon the people themselves. No police department can effectively protect life and property without the support and cooperation of the citizens it serves. Every citizen should be a Crime Watch member: a concerned civic-minded person who watches their neighborhood and reports criminal activity to the Police Department.

For example, as we go about our daily routines, we have the opportunity to casually observe the neighborhood. Such observations may be useful in keeping children away from vacant houses, reporting abandoned cars, or alerting neighbors and police to suspicious persons in the area. These examples are few, but it is important to realize that criminals find it difficult to operate in areas where citizens take an active role in preventing crime.

## **HOW TO START A CRIME WATCH**

The Allentown Police Department is available to assist any neighborhood in organizing a Crime Watch program. An officer will come to your group's meeting to discuss the problems and needs of your neighborhood, and will provide a variety of reference materials to assist you in organizing and maintaining a Crime Watch program. For more information, contact the Police Department at 610-437-7719.

One of the most important tools available through the Police Department to groups involved in the Crime Watch program is the CHEC-MATE system, which stands for "Citizens Helping Eliminate Crime." By registering as a participant in the CHEC-MATE system, members will receive an anonymous identification number that will allow them to report crimes and other suspicious activity to the police without having to provide their name, address or other identifying information.

## CRIME WATCH ACTIVITIES

Once your Crime Watch program is beginning to get underway, there are a number of activities your group should undertake to make the program successful:

1. Select a Crime Watch coordinator and block captains who will be responsible for organizing activities and relaying information to members.
2. Recruit new members, keep up-to-date on new residents, and make special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents, and young people. Everyone can contribute to a Crime Watch program, young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner. Even the busiest of people can keep an eye out for neighbors as they come and go.
3. Work with the Allentown Police Department to:
  - Help train your members in how to protect their homes and themselves.
  - Help train your members in how to recognize and report suspicious activity and get registered as CHEC-MATE participants.
  - Obtain information on local crime patterns.
  - Put up highly visible Crime Watch signs and decals. These signs alert criminals that your neighborhood residents will watch and report their activities, which can be an effective deterrent to crime.
  - Organize citizen patrols to monitor certain areas at designated times and shifts, if this is something your group decides they want to. The Police Department has specific procedures that must be followed by all citizen patrols in order to assure their safety.
4. Communicate regularly with members, either through regular meetings or through written means such as newsletters, e-mails or websites, to keep them up-to-date on what is happening in the neighborhood and on the progress of the program.
5. Through either regular meetings or special events, increase awareness of other aspects of community safety, such as hate crimes, school violence, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, or victim assistance. In addition to the Police Department and other City departments, there are a large number of community organizations in Allentown and the Lehigh Valley who have representatives available to talk to neighborhood organizations.

Once you get started in organizing a Crime Watch program, your neighborhood will not only become safer and more secure, but will have the added benefit of neighbors brought closer together, with a greater sense of community.



Residents and police participating in a Police/Resident Community Relations workshop.

## **CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS**

The way your meetings are managed and run is one of the biggest factors influencing member participation and involvement in your organization. It is through meetings that your organization is, or is not, able to get things done, solve problems, manage itself in a way that promotes inclusion and safety, and create a sense of community. Running or chairing a meeting means more than just moving the group through the agenda. When you chair a meeting, you are responsible for the well-being of the group and the members in it. The following are the four important phases in managing and running an effective meeting.

### 1. PLAN THE MEETING

- **Decide the goal of the meeting:** Come up with a clear goal for the meeting and use the agenda as your key to achieving it. Do not hold a meeting just for the sake of having a meeting. You will just end up wasting people's time with a boring meeting that goes nowhere.
- **Do your homework:** If you need information or research for the meeting, have it done before the meeting starts. If you show up at a meeting where important information is missing, it will be a big waste of time for everyone who comes.
- **Decide who needs to be there:** If you are working on a specific issue, determine whether the whole membership needs to attend or just a designated committee. When people come to a meeting where they do not care about the agenda, they usually will not be inclined to come back.
- **Plan with others:** This is a great way to develop new leaders and get other people more invested in the work of your group. Just get three or four interested folks together and work out the agenda together.
- **Create a clear agenda:** List the amount of time you plan to spend on each item. Send the agenda out to members ahead of time so they know what they are coming to do. Let everyone know what is going to be discussed; don't keep it a secret!

### 2. SET UP THE MEETING

- **Start and end on time:** It is disrespectful to abuse members' time and will discourage them from attending future meetings. If you must start late because only three people are in the room when you are supposed to start, at least apologize for starting late. If you get into the habit of starting on time even if there are only three people in the room, word will get around and eventually, people will come on time or they won't come at all. If people keep showing up late, or not showing up at all, this may be a hint to change your meeting time, your meeting pattern, or both.
- **Sign in attendees:** Sign-in sheets do more than tell you who came to a meeting. They also help update your membership list and contact information. Be sure to include name, organization, address, phone number and e-mail address, if applicable.
- **Provide adequate meeting space:** Meeting spaces should be comfortable and convenient. The room should be centrally located, and the right size for the size of your group. If possible, try to find a

meeting space that is wheelchair-accessible. Otherwise, try to arrange transportation or assistance for seniors or others who may have difficulty getting in. Arrive at your meeting space early to set up and try to arrange seating in a way that will facilitate group discussion and interaction.

- **Balance work and play:** Have informal time before and after the meeting for people to talk and socialize. Socialization is a big reason that some people joined your group in the first place, and it can help in recruiting volunteers. Sometimes the “meeting after the meeting” is where people get attached to the group, and also get their best ideas to bring to the next meeting.
- **Establish a regular cycle:** If you have a regular meeting cycle, people will start to save the dates, such as the first Monday of the month. But don't have a meeting just to meet. Always have a clear goal or don't have the meeting at all. If you decide not to have a regularly scheduled meeting be sure to inform all your members.

### 3. RUN THE MEETING

- **Make introductions:** As the chair of a meeting, it is your responsibility to get everyone to introduce themselves, as well as introducing yourself and your role. When there is a special speaker, you are also responsible for introducing them to the group. Don't be afraid to use an icebreaker at the beginning of the meeting to loosen people up and help them get to know each other in a fun or interesting way.
- **Get agreement on agenda and rules:** Since the meeting is for the benefit of everyone in attendance, everyone should be in agreement about the agenda. You can ask for feedback on the agenda before you begin. Ground rules, such as no interrupting, can also be established before the meeting starts if you have some potentially disruptive people in the group.
- **Keep the discussion on track:** If someone is going off the agenda or is speaking too long, pull them back in. Be gentle but firm. People respect a meeting that is run well but they remember all too clearly the meetings where someone was allowed to go on and on. The box on page 13 lists intervention techniques that you can try if you are confronted with disruptions or problems during a meeting.
- **Watch the time:** Remember to start and end on time. Honor the agenda time limits. Look around the room and watch for signs that you should slow things down or speed them up. If the group seems to want to go beyond the agreed upon time on an issue, ask for agreement from all members. Asking the group if they would like to continue on the topic for another ten minutes, or go on to the next item on the agenda can be a good way to get the group's opinion on the matter.
- **Summarize what you hear:** Do not just pretend to listen to what someone is saying. People can tell when you are not paying attention. Listen closely to understand the points the speaker is making, and restate these points aloud if you are unsure. Wrap up each agenda item by summarizing any conclusions out loud. Then move on if everyone agrees with the conclusions.

- **Encourage participation:** If a usually quiet person speaks, show your appreciation. Try to draw everyone in and do not just let the same people speak all the time. Use open-ended questions that require people to say more than yes or no.
- **Use the power of your position wisely:** Watch what you say and how you say it. Do not take sides, and try to be fair to everyone. Have a sense of humor, and do not be defensive. If attacked or criticized, take a step backwards. Think about what was said before you respond. Once you become defensive, you risk losing the group's respect and trust, and may well make the situation worse.
- **Stay in your role:** You cannot be a participant and the chair of the meeting at the same time. When you blur the lines, you risk alienating participants, causing resentment, and losing control of the meeting. Offer strategies, resources, and ideas, but not direct opinions. If you are passionate about an issue on the agenda and want to speak, make an arrangement before the meeting for someone else to chair that section.
- **Develop new leaders by handing over the gavel:** Try rotating the chairing duties among the group. This will help others learn by watching and then doing.

#### 4. FOLLOW UP ON THE MEETING

- **Gather feedback from the group:** You will want to gather information about how the participants felt about the meeting, what could be improved, or what went successfully. You may not want to do this at every meeting, but at least once in a while to make sure that your meetings are satisfying the needs of the group.
- **Summarize the meeting:** It is helpful to have a list of the decisions made, and follow-up actions taken. Formal minutes are valuable for many, but not all, organizations. They may contain announcements or other informational items that are important to report even though they are not decisions. Some alternatives to formal minutes can include:
  - Having the minutes read more like a narrative than a formal report, placing the decisions made and follow-up actions taken in boldface or uppercase, so they stand out.
  - Writing a short summary, either in addition to or instead of minutes, and publishing as part of a newsletter.
- **Follow up on decisions:** The Chair or a designated person should make telephone calls, send out correspondence, and/or take whatever actions are needed to follow up on decisions made at the meeting. These follow-up activities are important in reinforcing to the group members that the decisions they make will lead to action being taken.



Participants at the Housing Workshop, one of the sessions of the 2012 Allentown Neighborhood Summit

## INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES

The following are some intervention techniques that you can try if you are confronted with disruptions or problems during a meeting:

1. *Have the group decide* if someone refuses to stick to the agenda, keeps bringing up the same point again and again, or challenges how you are handling the meeting.
2. *Use the agenda and ground rules* if someone keeps going off the agenda, has side conversations through the whole meeting, or verbally attacks others.
3. *Be honest and say what's going on* if someone is trying to intimidate you, you feel upset and undermined, or you need to enlist the help of the group.
4. *Use humor* if there is a lot of tension in the room, people are resistant to being at the meeting, or people are scared or shy about participating.
5. *Accept, deal, or defer* if someone keeps expressing doubts about accomplishing anything, is bitter and puts down every suggestion, keeps bringing up the same point over and over, or has power issues. You need to either ACCEPT that what they are saying is true and don't ignore it; DEAL with it right there by spending some time on it, or DEFER it to the group for a decision about what to do.
6. *Use body language, if possible*, to quiet side conversations, help quiet people participate, or re-focus attention. You can speak volumes by making eye contact, by smiling, or not smiling, or by a change in your seating position.
7. *Take a break and confront disruptive people outside the meeting room* when less confrontational tactics have not worked, someone keeps verbally attacking other participants, shuffling papers, having side conversations or cutting people off. You can deal with this issue outside the room, at a naturally-occurring break in the action.
8. *Confront in the room* if it is appropriate and will not create backlash, if the group will support you, and if you have already tried less confrontational tactics.



Neighborhood residents attending a community meeting

## **CREATING A NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER**

A newsletter can be the lifeline between the members of your neighborhood organization and the neighborhood, community organizations, elected officials and anyone else important to your group. Through a neighborhood newsletter you can:

- provide summary reports of your meetings and announce upcoming meetings;
- keep members and residents informed about important community issues and events;
- build support for your group's events and projects;
- increase recognition your group's purpose and accomplishments;
- attract new members to your group;
- recognize valued community members; and
- build cohesion, motivation and a sense of community pride among your members.

A neighborhood newsletter should represent the whole neighborhood, not just the individuals producing it. Your organization can produce a newsletter even if there is only one person who is willing to take it on. However, having a committee of people to make decisions and share the work can add vitality, and prevent burnout. You should come to an agreement with the rest of the group on a way to ensure that each issue reflects the needs and views of the neighborhood.

### 1. LAYOUT AND TYPING

Most newsletters do not need a complicated, fancy design that can interfere with your message. Keep it simple! If you have access to a computer, any word processing program will allow you to easily put together an attractive newsletter. You can also create a simple but attractive newsletter using a typewriter and some paper. Type your text neatly, in one or two columns, using one side of the paper only.

For the masthead, or title, of your newsletter, keep the name of the newsletter short and catchy. You can use your organization's logo or a new design that people can identify with your group. Since the masthead is the first thing people will notice on the newsletter, keep it consistent, but make it memorable.

Typically, font size in articles is set at 10 to 12 points. For the text of your articles, the use of serif or hooked fonts makes your text easier to read. (Serifs are small strokes at the ends of the main strokes of a letter.) Common examples of serif fonts that are appropriate for newsletter text include Times New Roman (the font used on this page), Bookman and Century Schoolbook. The sans serif fonts, those that don't have serifs, such as Arial, Trebuchet and Verdana, are more appropriate for headlines. Whatever fonts you decide to use, be consistent. The use of only two or three different fonts will give your newsletter a sleeker, more professional appearance. Using a bunch of different fonts might be really tempting, but it can make a page look cluttered and unprofessional. Use *italics* sparingly, as words in italics are difficult to read. The use of **boldface** to emphasize certain words has more impact, but beware of overusing this technique.

It is usually easiest to have newsletters done on 8½ x 11" paper. Using two or three columns, with the text justified within the columns, makes for easy reading. Consider using a consistent layout that will make your newsletter more familiar to your readers. Try to limit the number of articles per page. Leaving white or blank space on a page gives

the readers a place to rest their eyes. A page with very little white space is less readable than one that has a moderate amount. Keep white space at the edges of the page, not the center. Generally, lighter items should be towards the top of the page and darker ones should be towards the bottom to keep the page looking balanced. Use photos, drawings or other illustrations to help break up the text and give your newsletter a more polished appearance. Most word processing programs come with clip art that can be automatically inserted into your document. Art supply stores and large bookstores carry clip art books containing graphics that can be cut out and pasted onto your originals. The following sample newsletter shows some of these design guidelines in use.



# The Main St. News

The Monthly Newsletter of the Main St. Neighborhood Association



## Our Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held Wednesday, February 29 at the Community Center. Our guest speaker will be our new Chief of Police. **Please attend and bring a friend!**

## School News



Downtown Elementary School has announced that report cards will be mailed out this Thursday, so be sure to watch for them. Congratulations to all our neighborhood scholars!

## Neighborhood Cleanup



We will be having a neighborhood cleanup on Saturday, February 5. We have garbage bags and brooms, but please bring gloves if you have them. Hot dogs and hot chocolate will be served when we are done. Hope to see you there!

## Senior Center

Activities going on at the Senior Center this month include Internet classes, crafts workshops, cooking classes and euchre tournaments. There will also be a bus trip to Philadelphia Art Museum. For a complete schedule, stop by the Senior Center at 524 Main St.

## Crime Report

1/7	Robbery
1/12	Burglary
1/14	Domestic Disturbance
1/17	Fight
1/20	Suspicious Person

**Remember if you see a crime in progress, call 911!**

## Traffic Reminder



Please remember that the speed limit along Main St. is **15 Miles Per Hour** during school hours. Please obey the speed limit and watch for pedestrians trying to cross at the crosswalk.

Masthead

Headlines in Arial font (sans serif)

Text in Times New Roman font (serif)

Paragraph with full justification so that text is aligned on left and right side.

White space to break up text

Graphics to provide visual interest

## 2. WRITING AND EDITING

The content of your newsletter will vary depending upon the needs of your organization. Some newsletters contain a lot of personal information about neighborhood residents. Others are straight reports on the organization's business meetings. Still others emphasize information and strategies on such issues as health, housing, and crime and drug prevention. With careful planning it is possible to cover many or all of these concerns, even in a short newsletter. Ask around and find out what others want to know about. Then decide how often you really need the newsletter to go out. Some organizations have enough to say that they need to have a monthly newsletter; while for others a semi-monthly or a quarterly newsletter can do the job.

The length of your newsletter will depend on what your group considers essential to say. A good newsletter can be as short as one page. After settling on a length, structure your newsletter by organizing it into regular features or columns. These might include:

- Neighborhood news
- Personal announcements
- Committee reports
- Upcoming community events
- Updates on local issues
- Community resources

You should be sure to include information on how to become a member of the organization, such as listing a contact name and phone number or including a tear-off sheet that readers can mail in.

Remember, there is no need for a solo effort when it comes to writing articles or distributing information. Others can, and should, help you, not only to decrease your workload, but also to give others in your group a sense of ownership and pride in the newsletter. Here are some tips for encouraging participation.

- Invite member articles, features, and columns, or even an occasional guest columnist.
- Pass around a sheet for written announcements and story ideas at your group meetings
- Include summaries of your meetings in the newsletter.
- Reprint news coverage of your organization, with permission.
- Borrow from other materials people send to you.

Additionally, the City Bureau of Planning and Zoning distributes, on a monthly basis, information of a general nature that neighborhood organizations are invited to use in their newsletters. This information comes from a variety of sources including City departments, community organizations, neighborhood organizations and other news outlets.

Always be sure to proofread your articles for spelling and grammar errors as well as overall understanding. Whenever possible, have another person look over it before you take the newsletter for printing.

### 3. PRODUCTION

Having your newsletter reproduced for distribution may be as simple as making photocopies or may be more complex for a more professional look. A professional printer has the added advantages, and costs, of the use of a wider variety of colors and papers, as well as the ability to print photographs with clarity. If you must pay, be sure to call different printers and compare prices, as they will vary. A local printer might donate the job or offer a special rate in exchange for a credit line in the newsletter that urges members to use his or her company. Or consider selling advertising to help cover the cost of your newsletter. This can be as easy as including your sponsor's business card in your newsletter. You can also explore having your newsletter printed free or at reduced cost through churches, schools, community

organizations or workplaces of members of your group. Be sure to thank the organization for this valuable contribution!

#### 4. DISTRIBUTION

Before you reproduce your newsletter, make a list of all the people who need to get it. This could include all members of your group, other members of the community, elected officials, local press, and local institutions, such as city agencies, schools, community board members, and local development organizations. This will tell you how many copies to print.

Once printed, newsletters can be distributed in person or through the mail. Many organizations prefer to deliver their newsletters in person because it gives them a chance to meet and talk with their neighbors at the same time. Assign group members to be responsible for each block in your neighborhood and ask them to distribute the newsletters door-to-door, making sure every household gets a copy. Recruiting neighborhood youth to help distribute the newsletters is a great way to make them feel like they are contributing to the neighborhood. If you have large apartment buildings in your neighborhood, try to get deliverers to at least slip the newsletters under each door instead of leaving them in a pile in the lobby. You could also consider placing copies of the newsletter in other places where it might be picked up and read, such as in churches, family or senior centers, or local businesses.

If you mail your newsletters, be sure to figure postage expenses into your budget. If your mailing list is large and fast delivery is not a concern, you may want to save money by sorting your labels into strict zip code order and mailing bulk rate. You can also lower your postage rates if you qualify for non-profit status. Call the U.S. Postal Service for full details.

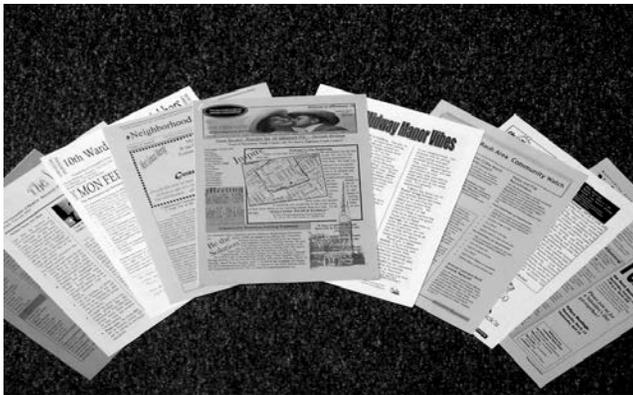
Whatever method of delivery you choose, try to be consistent. If your newsletter comes at the same time each month, people will begin to expect and anticipate it.

## 5. EVALUATION

After several issues of your newsletter have been produced, you may want to solicit feedback from the members of your organization. Some questions you might ask are:

- Do they like the newsletter?
- What columns are most/least helpful or interesting?
- Do they have any suggestions for change or improvement?
- Do they have any suggestions for future organization programs and activities?

The difference a good newsletter can make in strengthening your neighborhood organization is immeasurable. If information is power, your newsletter can be a powerful tool in bringing people together and promoting your organization's goals.



A sample of some of Allentown's neighborhood newsletters.

**SUMMARY**

Allentown is a city of neighborhoods, and no one knows more about those neighborhoods than the people who live there. Allentown's neighborhood organizations have a strong history of working hard to try to make their neighborhoods better places in which to live, work and play. But as the City's neighborhoods continue to face new and ever-changing challenges, the need for neighborhood residents to work together to overcome those challenges continues.

We hope this guide will serve as a starting point for you to organize your neighborhood together to maintain the quality of life you deserve. But we would like to remind you that you are not alone in your quest. People in other neighborhoods may be facing the same challenges you are, or may have already done so. We encourage you to talk to other neighborhood leaders to see what has worked for them or just to share ideas with each other. The City supports the efforts of all its neighborhood organizations and will do whatever it can to help them be as successful as possible. We wish you continued success and thank you for all for your dedication and efforts.

<u>For:</u>	<u>Call:</u>
<b>POLICE - FIRE - MEDICAL EMERGENCY ONLY:</b>	<b>911</b>
<b>Communications Center:</b>	610-437-7751
<b>General Information:</b>	<b>610-439-5999</b>
<b>Abandoned Vehicles:</b>	Communications Center, 610-437-7751
<b>Adopt-A-Block Program:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Alteration Permits</b>	Building Standards & Safety, 610 437-7592
<b>Animal Control:</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610-437-7535 After hours, 610 437-7751
<b>Animal Waste Complaints:</b>	Health, 610-437-7759
<b>Band Trailer Permits</b>	Parks, 610 437-7628
<b>Block Parties</b>	Police, 610 437-7710
<b>Building Permits:</b>	Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7592
<b>Building Setbacks:</b>	Zoning, 610-437-7630
<b>Census Information:</b>	Planning, 610-437-7613
<b>Chec-Mate Program</b>	Police Department, 610 437-7719
<b>Civil Rights</b>	Human Relations, 610 437-7743
<b>Clean and Green/Don't Trash Allentown:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Clean-up Supplies for Volunteers</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Crosswalks</b>	Traffic Planning & Control, 610 437-7734
<b>Dead Animal Pickup</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Disruptive Conduct Appeals:</b>	Housing Coordinator, 610-437-8748
<b>Disruptive Tenant Complaints:</b>	Police, 610-437-7751
<b>Double Parked Vehicles</b>	610 437-7751
<b>Environmental Protection:</b>	Health, 610-437-7759
<b>Fire Code Violations:</b>	Fire Prevention, 610-437-7765
<b>Fire Safety Education:</b>	Fire Prevention, 610-437-7765
<b>Flood Plain Information:</b>	Planning, 610-437-7613

<b><u>For:</u></b>	<b><u>Call:</u></b>
<b>Graffiti in Progress</b>	Police <b>9-1-1</b>
<b>Graffiti Busters:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Health Nuisance Complaints:</b>	Health, 610-437-7759
<b>Historical Architectural Review Board:</b>	Planning, 610-437-7613
<b>Home Safety Surveys:</b>	Health, 610-437-7598
<b>Household Hazardous Waste</b>	Lehigh County, 610 799-4177
<b>Housing Code Violations:</b>	Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7694
<b>Housing Discrimination Complaints:</b>	Human Relations, 610-437-7616
<b>Illegal Dumping in Progress</b>	Police, <b>9-1-1</b>
<b>Illegal Dumping Investigations</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Insect/Rodent Infestation</b>	Building Standards & Safety 610 437-7694
<b>Interior Alteration Permits</b>	Building Standards & Safety, 610 437-7592
<b>Landlord-Tenant Questions</b>	Housing Coordinator, 610 437-8748
<b>Leaf Pick-Up Fall Schedule</b>	Streets, 610 437-7638
<b>Litter Baskets</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Litter Complaints</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Metal Detector Permits</b>	Parks & Recreation, 610 437-7750
<b>Moving Permits:</b>	Police, 610-437-7753
<b>Neighbor Disputes:</b>	Human Relations, 610-437-7616
<b>Noise Complaints:</b>	Police, 610-437-7751
<b>Park Rules:</b>	Parks, 610-437-7750
<b>Parking Complaints:</b>	Communications Center, 610-841-9090
<b>Parking Permits:</b>	Allentown Parking Authority, 610-841-9090
<b>Parking Tickets</b>	Allentown Parking Authority, 610-841-9090
<b>Picnic Reservations:</b>	Recreation, 610-437-7750
<b>Playground Programs:</b>	Recreation, 610-437-7750
<b>Playground Repairs</b>	Recreation, 610-437-7750

<b><u>For:</u></b>	<b><u>Call:</u></b>
<b>Pollution Incidents:</b>	Health, 610-437-7759
<b>Potholes</b>	Streets, 610 437-7638
<b>Public Housing:</b>	Allentown Housing Authority, 610-439-8678
<b>Public Swimming Pools:</b>	Parks & Recreation, 610-437-7750
<b>Recycling Recreation Programs:</b>	Recreation, 610-437-7750
<b>Recycling Complaints:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Recycling Program:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Renovation Permits:</b>	Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7592
<b>Rental Unit Inspections:</b>	Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7695
<b>School Safety:</b>	Police, 610-437-7741
<b>Sewer Backup or Odors:</b>	Water Resources, 610-437-7639 After hours, 610 437-7751
<b>Shopping Carts</b>	Store of origin or, 1-800-244-CART
<b>Sidewalks</b>	Engineering, 610 437-7576
<b>Sign Permits:</b>	Zoning, 610-437-7630
<b>Snow/Ice Not Cleared from Sidewalks</b>	Engineering, 610 437-7596
<b>Snow Control:</b>	Streets, 610-437-7669
<b>Special Events</b>	Community Development, 610 437-7530
<b>Street Cleaning:</b>	Streets, 610-437-7638
<b>Street Cleaning Hotline</b>	Streets, 610 437-7636
<b>Street Lights:</b>	Traffic Planning and Control, 610-437-7735
<b>Street Maintenance &amp; Repair:</b>	Streets, 610-437-7638
<b>Street Trees</b>	Parks & Recreation, 610 437-7750
<b>SWEEP Program</b>	Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729
<b>Taxes, Real Estate:</b>	Tax and Utility, 610-437-7516
<b>Trash Complaints:</b>	Recycling and Solid Waste, 610-437-8729
<b>Traffic Signs:</b>	Traffic Planning and Control, 610-437-7734
<b>Traffic Signals:</b>	Traffic Planning and Control, 610-437-7769
<b>Tree Permits:</b>	Parks, 610-437-7628
<b>Vacant Property Complaints:</b>	Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7694

**For:**

**Call:**

**Water Conditions (Color, Odor):**

Water Resources, 610-437-7645

**Water Service & Maintenance:**

Water Resources, 610-437-7646

**Water/Sewer Billing:**

Water Resources, 610-437-7515

**Weeds/Overgrown Grass Complaints:**

Building Standards and Safety, 610-437-7694

**Yard Waste**

Recycling & Solid Waste, 610 437-8729

**Youth Sports Programs:**

Recreation, 610-437-7750

**Zoning Permits:**

Zoning, 610-437-7630

**Zoning Violations:**

Zoning, 610-437-7630

**Lehigh County**

General Information, 610 782-3000

**Allentown School District**

General Information, 484 765-4000

The computer location is n:\anie\manuals\neighborhoodguide.