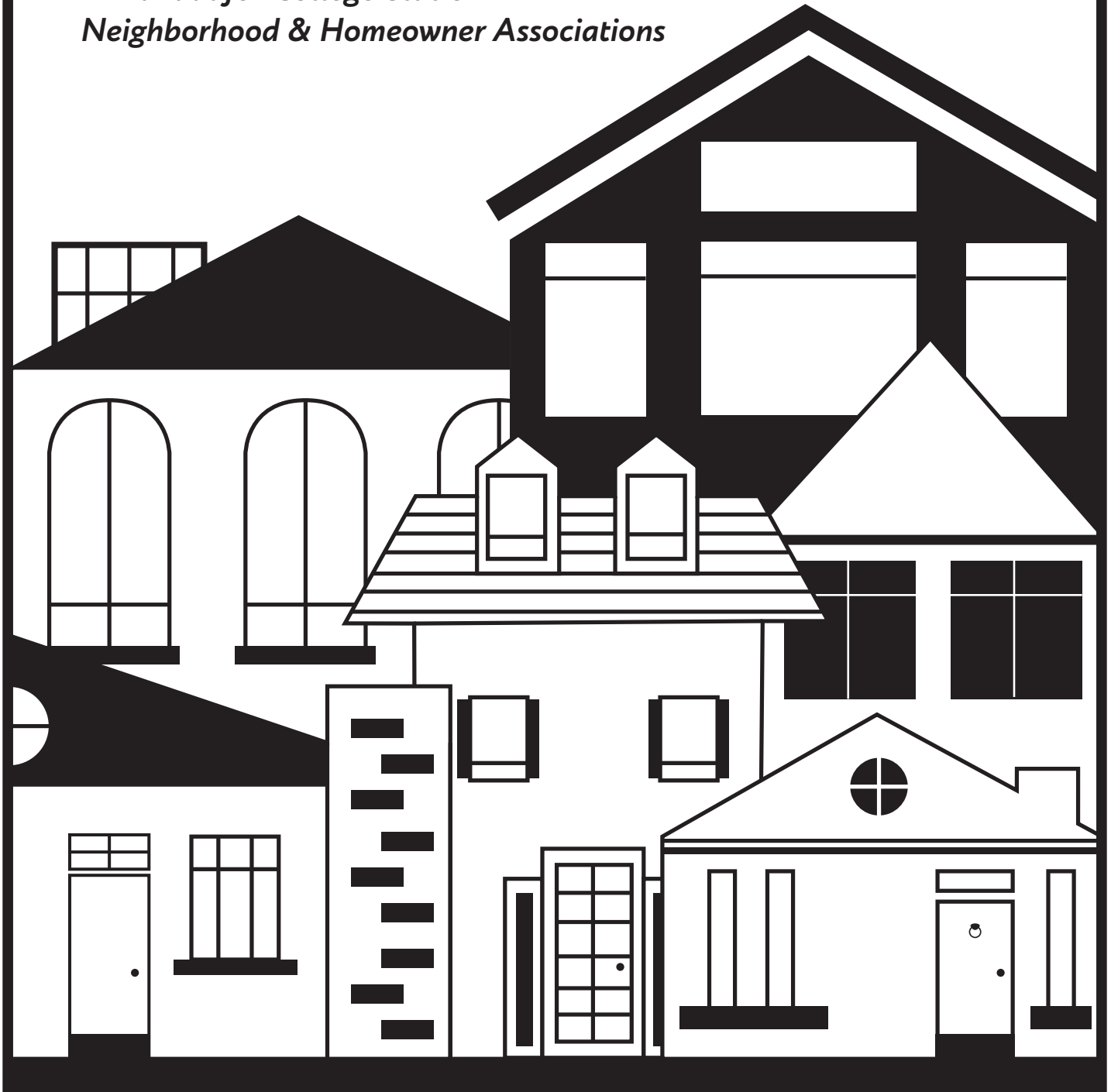


My Neighborhood

A Manual for College Station

Neighborhood & Homeowner Associations



**CITY OF COLLEGE STATION
NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**

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CITY OF COLLEGE STATION
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INTRODUCTION

Neighborhoods are the basic building blocks of the community, and their health and vitality are essential to the future of College Station. Strong neighborhoods are not just a collection of houses within a subdivision boundary; they contribute to a unique sense of place and community identity, with residents contributing to partnerships, leadership and civic involvement. In many ways, a community is only as strong and sustainable as its neighborhoods.

Neighborhood associations play a vital role in representing the interests of residents and enhancing the local community. The residents of College Station have demonstrated a great willingness to dedicate time and energy to make a difference in the community. This manual will help residents focus their efforts and organize their neighborhoods for action. The city believes that increasing citizen participation benefits the whole community by creating a positive environment of shared responsibility and collaboration.



Why do neighborhoods organize?

Neighborhoods organize for a variety of reasons.

Address a specific concern – Many neighborhoods become organized when a specific concern emerges that neighbors can rally around. Residents of the neighborhood will come together to discuss problems and work towards solutions. As an association, members can work together to resolve the issue by using the many resources already available within their neighborhood.

Empower residents – Power is the ability to act and with it comes a responsibility to the community. When neighborhoods organize, they acquire power by joining together to accomplish a common goal.

Build community – Organizing to build a community means improving your neighborhood's ability to act and unite the diverse skills of its residents. Residents become better neighbors by getting to know and helping each other. Whether it is as cooking dinner for a neighbor one night in exchange for having them run errands for you, activities like these enhance the neighborhood's sense of community.



Benefits to Organizing Associations

Through neighborhood organizing, residents get to know each other better while working to improving their community. Other benefits include:

- Facilitating achievement of common neighborhood goals.
- Providing the neighborhood with a common voice and an effective form of communicating with government officials and other instrumental groups.
- Empowering neighborhoods so that they provide feedback on events happening in their area.
- Having members take part in the decision making that affects their neighborhoods.
- Helping members work for neighborhood preservation and improvement.
- Planning and holding social activities for the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Partnership Program

The Neighborhood Partnership Program was created to build helpful, collaborative relationships between neighborhoods, community organizations and the City of College Station. Neighborhood Services is the city's primary liaison with neighborhood organizations and maintains ongoing communications with community groups that can have a positive impact on neighborhoods. Registering your neighborhood through the Neighborhood Partnership Program will improve communication between citizens, government and other useful groups. The following describes the benefits the city offers to participating neighborhood organizations and the city's expectations for the neighborhoods in the partnership.

Advantages of the Neighborhood Partnership Program include:

- **Registered neighborhood and homeowner association database** - Information is available to city departments, community agencies, developers and other neighborhood partners in order to encourage communication regarding projects, events and programs that may affect the livability of the neighborhood.
- **Public hearing notification** - Neighborhood representatives are notified of development and public hearings that pertain to land or projects in the vicinity of their neighborhood
- **Monthly Neighborhood Seminar Suppers** - These meetings provide a forum for education on local and regional topics and networking between neighborhood leaders
- **Start-up support** - Thy city provides support for residents establishing or revitalizing associations.
- **Neighborhood e-newsletter distribution** - Neighborhood representatives receive information on neighborhood, community and city events

As with any successful relationship, all parties share responsibility in creating a relationship that is effective and benefit all involved.



Role of the Citizen

Citizens have a very important role in the health and spirit of a community. Active participation is the best way to ensure that your desired quality of life is fulfilled.

Citizen involvement includes voting regularly, serving in a public capacity or organizing neighborhood projects or activities. Citizen involvement and engagement is crucial to improving the quality of life in neighborhoods and the city. The Declaration on page 7 describes the roles that residents have adopted in many communities.

Neighborhood Commitment

In the spirit of partnership, neighborhood and homeowner associations that are a part of the Neighborhood Partnership Program will:

- Have an active board with officers in place
- Provide Neighborhood Services with a list of all association board officers' contact information and promptly notify Neighborhood Services when there are association leadership changes in personnel or contact information
- Distribute information from Neighborhood Services to the association's board and to association members, as appropriate
- Provide Neighborhood Services with a copy of current association bylaws including any amendments in a timely manner
- Provide Neighborhood Services with association meeting agendas at least 72 hours prior to meetings, copies of association minutes within a week after meeting, and an annual update on the neighborhood organization
- Hold at least one annual meeting where the entire neighborhood is invited to attend
- Attend at least one Neighborhood Services event annually
- Attend at least one Neighborhood Services board member training session annually



Role of Local Government

The preservation and maintenance of an area's quality of life is a shared responsibility. Local government is responsible for ensuring that the common good is protected and public services are carried out in an orderly and efficient manner.

City of College Station Commitment

To promote neighborhood integrity – in partnership with College Station neighborhood and homeowner associations, other city divisions and community organizations.

The City of College Station's Neighborhood Services pledges to:

- Provide start-up support to neighborhoods establishing or revitalizing associations
- Assist with the planning of annual or large neighborhood meetings
- Host meetings and trainings that provide education for association officers and representatives
- Host meetings and trainings that provide a forum for networking and education on local and regional topics
- Help to resolve neighborhood conflicts
- Administer the Strong & Sustainable Grant Program to foster neighborhood identity and community
- Assist Homeowner Associations, Neighborhood Associations, and other city departments in their implementation of adopted neighborhood plans
- Maintain a database of all registered Homeowner Associations (HOAs) and Neighborhood Associations (NAs) to enhance community communication
- Notify associations of public hearings pertaining to development, public works and other municipal projects in the vicinity of their neighborhood
- Distribute a regular neighborhood e-newsletter to association board members offering information regarding neighborhood, community and city events
- Act as a central access point within the city to direct questions, concerns and complaints to various departments
- Serve as the city staff and council liaison



How to Get Involved

Whether you are new to a neighborhood or you are long-time resident, starting or joining a neighborhood association is very simple.

Contact an officer of the neighborhood association where you live. If you do not know how to reach an officer, begin talking with neighbors to find out when regular meetings are or for the contact information of an association officer.

Becoming involved with your neighborhood association will allow you the opportunity to meet your neighbors while also being a part of making your neighborhood a better place to live.

There are several opportunities to get involved, including:

- Attending regular meetings
- Volunteering for activities
- Becoming a registered member of the association
- Attending regular association events and programs
- Becoming a block captain

A DECLARATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD ROLES, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We come together as neighborhood people working to preserve and improve our neighborhoods.

As neighborhood people, we have the right to self-determination and empowerment; to be advised and consulted 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 steward expected change that honors tradition and stability.

As neighborhood people, we have the responsibility to advise government and others of neighborhood values, history and culture; to listen to the views of all residents; to help one another care for children, the aging and others in need; to promote self-sufficiency of our residents and economic and social development of the neighborhood; to participate neighbor to neighbor, business to business and neighbor to business in the spirit of cooperation; to guide our youth, to look out for the safety of our homes and streets, maintain our properties, and make proper use of public facilities; and to strive diligently to achieve liberty and justice for all.

As neighborhood people, we look to a variety of governments, voluntary organizations, businesses and philanthropy to meet neighborhood needs for personal, social and economic development; to be receptive to dialogue with all neighbors concerning issues relevant to the welfare of our community to fund neighborhood organizations and services, to respect neighborhood values, culture and history; and to be held accountable for how their actions affect our neighborhoods.

As neighborhood people, we ask that the actions of all neighborhood residents and organizations, governments, business and philanthropy be guided by the principles of equity, participation and accountability.

Adopted by Neighborhoods USA, May 16, 1993

***Neighborhoods USA is a national non-profit organization
providing support for neighborhoods and citizen groups.***

6 STEPS TO A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

If your neighborhood does not have an existing neighborhood or homeowner association, you create one! The following outlines a 6-step process for forming a new neighborhood association.

Step 1 *The Idea*

The first step is to recognize that a neighborhood association can make your neighborhood a better place to live. A neighborhood association unites residents and gives them the ability to work with the city to identify concerns and address issues. Before making a new association, make sure that a neighborhood association does not already exist in your neighborhood. You can check with the Neighborhood Services office or by asking your neighbors if one exists.

Step 2 *Form a Neighborhood Organizing Team*

Begin talking with your neighbors to find a strong group of individuals who are also interested in developing your community.

Everyone has their own reasons for wanting to join a neighborhood association. Some may have encountered problems in your neighborhood but do not know how to solve them, while others want to form relationships with their neighbors.

A team of 2-4 residents will need to form a Neighborhood Organizing Team. The Team will be responsible for getting the association started and working with the city's Neighborhood Services staff.

Hold an initial meeting and develop a list of topics that need to be addressed. This meeting should be open discussion regarding why attendees want to form a Neighborhood Association, how to get other neighbors involved, when general meetings should be held, possible boundaries (rivers, roads, railroad tracks, parks, land use type and housing styles) and bylaws, as well as provide feedback on things that went well or what needs improved for the next meeting.

Step 3 *Meet with Neighborhood Services Staff*

The Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) is operated by Neighborhood Services and will help residents form new associations. The Neighborhood Organizing Team meets with NPP staff who provide all the information and assistance necessary to get started. This is the beginning of a continuous relationship. Neighborhood associations are expected to maintain open and regular communication with the city's Neighborhood Services Department to take part in the benefits that the Neighborhood Partnership Program provides.

Step 4 *Hold a Neighborhood Meeting*

Once the Neighborhood Organizing Team has decided on the structure and boundaries of the association and created draft by-laws, the first Neighborhood Association meeting can take place. Neighborhood Services staff will help advertise and host the first meeting. The meeting should be held in a large common space such as a community center or school. This meeting will introduce the idea of a neighborhood association to attendees, get residents involved and provide feedback to the Organizing Team on the proposed boundaries and by-laws. An agenda with specific time spent on each topic is recommended. The neighborhood association initiator is responsible for keeping time. In addition to the agendas, a sign-in sheet for names, addresses, and emails of meeting attendants, any relevant handouts, an area map, and contact information for members of the Organizing Team should be provided. The Organizing Team's original proposal should only serve as a starting point for discussion and team members should be open to new ideas or concerns.

Step 5 *Hold a Second Neighborhood Meeting*

When there is consensus on the boundaries and bylaws of the new association (which may take multiple meetings), a meeting is held to adopt bylaws and elect officers. After that, the new neighborhood association exists! A committee should be formed to conduct a neighborhood inventory. A neighborhood inventory involves forming a report of facts about the neighborhood including (but not limited to) information about the types of housing (single family, multi-family, rentals, student housing), schools in the area and information about the residents. Some issues the neighborhood encounters may become apparent during this process, but if they do not, time should be spent determining what problems residents encounter, as well as what the neighborhood association's goals should be according to the broader community, not just the original Organizing Team's ideas.

Step 6 *Register with the Neighborhood Services Office*

Neighborhood associations are encouraged to register with the city through the Neighborhood Partnership Program. Registration puts your association in the city's database and lists the initiator as the official representatives of your neighborhood. Your association will be informed of events in your area and contacted for feedback by various public agencies. The benefits of registering with the Neighborhood Partnership Program can be found on pages 3-4.

CREATING A FORMAL STRUCTURE

Once you have decided to form a new neighborhood association, there are many important decisions that need to be made. First, you must decide how to structure your organization to best meet the needs of your neighborhood effectively.



Neighborhood Associations vs. Homeowner Associations

A neighborhood association is a voluntary group comprised of property owners or residents in a specified geographic location. Homeowner associations are non-voluntary groups in a specified location which may require dues and fees.

Neighborhood Associations

Neighborhood associations generally are a group of residents and other interested stakeholders that devote their time and energy to improve and enhance the well-defined, geographic area where they live. Neighborhood association meetings are a time to exchange ideas, decide on projects and priorities, propose solutions and make plans affecting the neighborhood. Associations usually meet monthly to discuss a variety of issues. Some issues could be sponsoring neighborhood events, economic well-being of residents, improving city services, implementing projects to build neighborhood pride and/or publishing neighborhood newsletters. True neighborhood associations have an elected board of directors and bylaws.

Homeowner Associations

Homeowner associations are groups of homeowners who live in an area developed by the same home builder, usually referred to as a subdivision. Homeowner associations usually have a formally elected body and are governed by deed restrictions - a set of rules that homeowners agree to when they purchase their house. These rules often govern construction regulations, membership/dues requirements, as well as a wide variety of other issues. Some homeowner associations also focus on items that affect their neighborhood such as beautification, clean up, crime, street lighting, building issues or concerns and social events. These issues are similar to those addressed by neighborhood associations.



Bylaws

Neighborhood associations need to have bylaws which describe how they operate. Bylaws simply establish the rules governing a group. They serve as a constitution that establishes the legal requirements for the association.

Bylaws govern the way the association functions as well as the roles and responsibilities of its officers. They are important to the maintenance of order and credibility in the organization and should be taken very seriously.

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 their neighborhood association.

A sample outline from a set of bylaws can be found in the appendix. It contains information that you may consider including when writing your association's bylaws. Staff at the Neighborhood Services Office is also available to help you create your bylaws. When designing your bylaws, use only those areas you are going to need. Do not feel you need to include every piece of information from the sample. Be specific, but still allow flexibility within your association. The bylaws will be part of your neighborhood association for a long time.

Once bylaws are written, they should be reviewed periodically to assure that the association's purpose has not changed. Reviewing bylaws on a regular basis ensures the rules are continuing to meet the needs of the group. Whenever bylaws are updated, they should be re-filed with Neighborhood Services.

Many neighborhood associations also find it helpful to adopt "operating procedures" separate from the bylaws. These rules generally are easier to amend than bylaws. The purpose of such procedures is to record agreements of a particular board or set of members about how to conduct meetings and other activities. Such rules should never conflict with the bylaws. Instead, they should address more detailed procedures than are covered in the bylaws. The key concept of operating procedures is to make sure they reflect the desires of the current board or members and are updated when the desires or needs of the group change.



Membership and Officers

Once the initial group of interested neighbors is established, the group should select a short-term leader. Later, when the association is formalized, the association will need to choose permanent leaders that are elected to official terms.

Your bylaws should describe all the positions, election procedures, how often elections are held and the major responsibilities expected from each position. The positions created typically make up the neighborhood association board members.

Membership

It is important for the neighborhood association to be as inclusive as possible. Any person who is a resident or property owner within the neighborhood association boundaries, or who meets the criteria outlined in your association bylaws, is a prospective member and will be able to participate in your association.

Officers and Board Representatives

Elections should be held annually for your neighborhood association to elect a Board of Directors. These officers will handle the business of the association throughout the upcoming year. Your association's bylaws should specify the positions and the general framework of your electoral process. Descriptions can outline the responsibilities of the board and other individual officer positions.

There are several duties and responsibilities involved in forming an organization. It is important to have enough people on the board to delegate the many tasks that need to be completed. The following positions are the minimum number needed for the governing board of your association:

Chairperson or President

This person is responsible for the overall leadership of the association board and sets the agenda and facilitates all meetings. It is important for this person to be objective and judicial. A chairperson should never dominate discussions. The chair keeps the meeting running smoothly while allowing participation as well as makes sure people keep to the agenda, both in content and timing.

Responsibilities of the chairperson are:

- Making sure members are notified about meeting dates, times and locations.
- Represent the association in a public capacity.
- Keep the meeting focused and within the allotted time frames as outlined in the agenda.
- Mediate membership discussion and clarify decisions made by the group.
- Have an organized agenda and bring issues to a vote, as needed, in an orderly manner.
- Review tasks and make assignments.
- Ensure that all members follow bylaws and procedures.
- Give credit and recognition for accomplishments.
- Follow up on decisions made at meetings.
- Meet with successor and ensure transfer of records, files, etc.

How to Make Your Job as Chairperson More Manageable

1. Introduce yourself at the beginning of a meeting and have other members introduce themselves as well.
2. Review the agenda and establish meeting ground rules.
3. Direct the discussion. Keep people on the topic. If irrelevant issues are being brought up, remind the group that there will be a time for new business at the end of the meeting. If people are repetitive, restate the information that they have shared and move on to the next speaker. If a decision needs to be made, call for a motion and take a vote.
4. Keep your own opinions to a minimum.
5. Facilitate voting and decision making. Never assume there is an agreement until it is put to a vote.
6. Chairperson should be neutral. Do not ignore people who want to speak and do not monopolize the floor.
7. If you want to voice your opinion, temporarily step out of your role as the Chair, and then voice your opinion. When finished, return to your role as the Chair. When your turn is finished, do not continue to speak.
8. Disagreement among members is inevitable. Mediate arguments when they arise. Remain impartial and fair. Give each person an opportunity to state their own point of view.
9. Publicly state in review what must be done. Review all discussions, decisions made and the tasks to be assigned.
10. Be as organized as possible. When it is almost time to end a discussion, announce that time is almost up. Select the final speakers and their order from those still indicating a desire to speak. The discussion should end when those people have had their turn.

11. Do not be afraid to delegate duties and tasks. Be aware that you cannot do everything on your own and that others have chosen to be an active member because they want to be a part of the association.

12. Follow-up on assignments after the meeting. Sometimes members need to be encouraged to get things done. You may need a lot of positive reinforcement to get things accomplished. Stay on top of things to ensure completion and success of the assigned task.

Vice Chairperson or Vice President

This person serves in an advisory capacity to the Chair. In absence of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson conducts the meetings and exercises all the usual duties of the chairperson. The Vice-Chairperson should also be a person with strong leadership qualities.

Some of the responsibilities of the Vice-Chairperson are:

- Effectively managing and facilitating meetings in the absence of the Chair.
- Assume the Chair position if the Chair is unable to complete his/her term.
- Follow-up on tasks assigned to members of the association.

Secretary

The secretary records the minutes of the meetings and makes sure that copies of the minutes, agenda and other records are available for the board and the public.

Some responsibilities of the Secretary are:

- Record minutes during all association meetings and send to members after the meeting.
- Maintain current and comprehensive membership records.
- Record all official correspondence of the association, neighborhood plan and by-laws.
- Pass along important information to be included in association newsletters.

Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for the funds of the neighborhood association. Most boards do not require anything, but an occasional status report from the Treasurer may be needed. The treasurer must take the duties of the position very seriously since the fiscal condition of the association is crucial to the future wellbeing of the group.

Some responsibilities of the Treasurers are:

- Paying all the association's expenses in a timely and accurate manner.
- Collecting and depositing all funds received by the association.
- Maintaining an adequate, thorough financial accounting system for the association.
- Collecting voluntary dues from members of the association.



Tax Identification Number

Neighborhood and homeowner associations should have a federal tax identification number to do business with the city. It can also be used to manage financial accounts, apply for tax-exempt status and limit liability for its members.

Organizations do not need to be incorporated to receive a tax identification number. Contact an Internal Revenue Service agent in Austin, Texas, and ask for Tax ID Form SS-4 or download it from **irs.gov**. Return it to the IRS tax office in Austin at the address noted on the form.

You should receive your tax ID number within six to eight weeks. If you need to use the number before you receive it in the mail (for bank accounts or non-profit status), simply state that you have applied for it, but have not received it yet.

Tax-Exempt Status

To apply for tax exemption, a group must be first be incorporated. The federal government gives tax-exempt status upon application to the Internal Revenue Service. This status permits large contributors to your group to deduct contributions from their income tax. Call the local Appraisal District office at 979-774-4100 for more information and an application. Tax-exempt status is almost mandatory if your group plans to apply for foundation monies or solicit large donations.

*** NOTE: Processing a tax-exempt status application may take up to six months.**

Incorporation

Incorporation is optional to all organizations and may be beneficial to your neighborhood association. When a non-profit organization incorporates, it helps define the group and the organization is deemed trustworthy. Incorporation also protects the personal liability of group members. In Texas, non-profit incorporation costs \$25 to file and there is no renewal fee. If you decide to incorporate, contact the Secretary of State Corporation at 512-463-5555. You will be sent a copy of the law pertaining to nonprofit organizations which includes a sample copy of articles of incorporation that can be used as a model.



Liability

Many board members are fearful of being held liable for board actions. When organizations incorporate, board members can be protected from individual financial liability because of board service.

A provision in the bylaws may be placed to indemnify board members in the event they are sued as a result of board service. Indemnification promises that the corporation will repay the board member for costs of defending themselves in lawsuits and/or for costs of judgements against board members. However, such indemnification is pointless if the organization does not have funds available to cover the board member's legal costs. Therefore, larger organizations usually carry directors' and officers' liability insurance.

Several procedures should be followed to protect board members from potential personal liability:

- Conduct regular board meetings and keep members well informed.
- Utilize a dependable system for keeping detailed minutes of all board meetings, recording which members attended and the nature and seriousness of all board discussions.
- Obtain adequate insurance coverage for all activities that are sponsored by your organization.
- If your association has employees, you should be certain that the association has met all tax and reporting requirements under the law.

For a low additional annual fee, several individual homeowners' policies provide coverage for policy holder's volunteer activities. Check with your insurance company to see what volunteer coverage is available.

RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION

Once you have your neighborhood association up and running, you must keep members interested and involved. This section is designed to provide suggestions for running a successful organization.



Build and Maintain Membership

Member recruitment is important for organizational longevity. Many groups attract members by hosting meetings on issues that could impact a large portion of residents.

Once a project is completed or a problem is solved, active members may dwindle away. Many organizations experience this problem.

Here are some actions your group can take to build and maintain membership:

1. Go door-to-door around the neighborhood asking residents if they are interested in joining the association.
2. A brochure with details on upcoming meeting topics and/or membership forms.
3. Designate block captains that welcome new residents, serve as a sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block and organize volunteers to help with association activities.
4. Community gatherings are a great way to recruit new members. Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event and have membership sign-up sheets as well as other association printed materials on display.

Keeping members involved can be quite challenging. For every member that is active in the association, there are probably two who would be involved if they were properly motivated. Below are some ideas to retain active members:

1. Help new members find their place in the association. Many will offer to help but will not know where to start. Organize a list of activities that need volunteers and have those interested sign their name next to activities they are willing to help with. This will be a great start for your new members and gives them a reason to continue coming back.
2. Always welcome new members and try to help them feel at ease with the group. Officers and other members should watch for new faces at each meeting and welcome them. New or potential members should be introduced to someone who lives near them. Designate an official “greeter” at every meeting.
3. New members who see the same people running every project may feel excluded and be less likely to return. Different people should be appointed to positions of leadership. This will help create a sense of belonging. Delegating tasks and projects to many members ensures that members will take ownership of the organization. The association is less likely to lose members if they are interested and actively a part of the organization.
4. Encourage new ideas and input at all levels of the organization. New members in the organization can provide new solutions to old problems. New perspectives assist the whole group in problem solving.
5. Every meeting should represent the strongest commitment to organization. Having well-planned meeting displays a sense of accomplishment. Have a written agenda for every meeting and stick to it.

6. Maintain current membership records. Keep a file with members' names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest etc.

7. Being part of a neighborhood association is not all work. Have fun! Sponsor parties and celebrations to get to know your neighbors better. Events should appeal to all, including children. This fosters a strong sense of community spirit among your neighbors.



Meetings

Regular meetings are important so that members are informed of current and future issues and projects, as well as the accomplishments of the group.

One thing to remember about meetings is that it is not always necessary to call a full group meeting to make minor decisions. When minor decisions need to be made, using an executive committee or board is better. Most groups have a board meeting once a month unless something important requires an additional meeting. To prevent member burnout, meetings should not be longer than one hour.

If a regular meeting is scheduled, but there is nothing important to discuss, create something. This can be done by inviting a guest speaker, organizing a neighborhood tour or having a potluck. Do not cancel the meeting altogether. It is important for groups to have contact on a regular basis.

Location is an important part of holding a meeting. Choose a meeting place that is centrally located and familiar to the neighbors. Estimate the number of people that will attend the meeting.

The meeting room should be arranged in a way that will encourage people to participate. Avoid having all the chairs facing the speaker as in a typical classroom. Do not use tables unless you need them. However, a large table with everyone sitting around it can be used if people need to write.

Be sure to have enough copies of the agenda available when members arrive for the meeting. Members can begin familiarizing themselves with what is to be discussed and will be aware of the order of topics while waiting for the meeting to begin. The agenda should be short and concise. A sample agenda is provided in the Appendix of this manual.

Many groups are comfortable using Robert's Rules of Order, you are free to use whatever method works best for your group. A special effort should be made to ensure that a vote truly represents the desire of the group as a whole.

Refer to "How to Have Successful Meetings" in the Appendix at the end of the manual for more tips on holding meetings.

General Meeting Rules

Your association should set some general operating rules for meetings so that they run smoothly. The operating rules can be included in the association's bylaws so that all members are aware of them. Implement these rules during first meeting so expectations of the organization are known from the beginning.

Some common rules for all meetings are the following:

- One person speaks at a time
- No derogatory remarks of yourself or others
- Speak from your own experience
- No crosstalk: No side conversations or interrupting the speaker to dispute points.



Committees

Organizations can accomplish objectives through the dedicated work of committees, which are subgroups of association members.

The tasks and the types of committees depend on the overall purpose and structure of your neighborhood association.

Two types of committees can be formed:

1. Committees for Internal Projects – fundraising, meeting arrangements, communications or publicity, bylaws and social events.
2. Committees for Neighborhood Projects – housing conditions, police/neighborhood relations, economic development, neighborhood maintenance, community services and resources and traffic safety.

It can be difficult to keep members on committees active, productive and motivated.

Here are some tips that can help:

- Encourage members to participate in the association and the committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Provide reasons for actions to be considered by the committee or association.
- Give recognition to members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association.
- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible.
- Help members develop their communication skills.



Work Plans

Making work plans for each project will help members stay focused and on track.

Meeting goals, planning events, recruiting volunteers and strengthening the organization will be easier with an outline of expectations and objectives.

Some helpful questions to ask when preparing a work plan are:

- What is the purpose for doing this project? If this is an annual work plan, review the purpose of the organization, then define goals for the year.
- Is there a need for it?
- What resources are available to help attain these goals?
- Have other neighborhood associations attempted this activity? Can they be contacted for help?
- What tasks are involved with this project?
- Who will do the tasks?
- How much time is needed?
- What resources are needed to accomplish this project?
- What are the costs? Does the association have the funds? How will you raise the money needed?
- Are there enough volunteers or members available to complete the project?

Neighborhood Services can be contacted for planning assistance. Staff is available to help associations work toward neighborhood goals.



Raising Funds

Associations need to raise funds for regular operations, special events and projects. Funds can be raised by members, private donations or from public or private grants.

A fundraising committee should be selected to prepare a budget and to oversee projects. This person should also have reliable contacts in your local business area. Most importantly, this person should have the time to dedicate for the fundraising.

Here are some examples of fundraising that worked well for other neighborhood associations:

Rummage or Garage Sales

This type of fundraiser is a simple yet effective event way to raise money for your association.

1. Form a committee of people responsible for the event.
2. Saturdays and Sundays are the best days to hold the sale. Have the sale in the garage of someone who lives on a corner, near a main street or in a neighborhood community center.
3. Decide beforehand what percentage of the profits will go to the association and to the individuals who gave items for the sale.
4. Provide a variety of items to sell. Televisions, dining sets and bedroom furniture are considered highly desirable items. Keep junk items to a minimum. This includes knickknacks, glassware, dolls and children's clothes.
5. Advertise with concise and neatly written signs. Make sure signs are no smaller than 24" square to ensure visibility. Post them on main streets leading to the sale. Another way to advertise your sale is with an ad in the local free and daily newspapers.

❖ **NOTE:** *The City of College Station does not require a permit for garage sales.*

Raffles

Raffles are another useful way to raise funds for your association. Prizes can be donated by local merchants or group members. If prizes need to be purchased, your profits will diminish. Keep costs down by photocopying tickets, keep track of all persons selling tickets and allow plenty of time for tickets to be sold. Ticket prices should not exceed \$.50 or \$1 for high-price items.

❖ **NOTE:** *You do not need a permit to sell raffle tickets if (1) you are designated as a nonprofit organization, (2) your support staff are unpaid, and (3) your raffle ticket sales do not amount to more than \$5,000.*

Local Merchants

Many local merchants will readily help a neighborhood group with either merchandise or a cash contribution. Assess merchants according to the size of their business.

Remember these points when soliciting for contributions:

- A good customer is the best person to approach a merchant.
- Do not solicit a merchant at the beginning or the end of the business day or during peak business hours.
- Bring a letter from your organization (preferably on letterhead) introducing you as the member who is authorized to solicit contributions.

Dues

Many organizations have membership dues to help pay for some of the activities and common costs of running an organization. Members tend to want to contribute for the good of the group. Paying mandatory dues should not be a condition for membership.



Bookkeeping

All associations collect sums of money for various reasons. A management system needs to be in place for dealing with any funds handled by the association.

The best thing to do is to open a bank account for the group. Research the benefits of different types of accounts and decide which will be most beneficial for the group. Check with several banks to get the best deal for the group. A corporation or a designated individual can open a bank account on behalf of the group. If you are a corporation and have nonprofit status, you may be eligible to receive free or reduced-fee banking privileges at some banks.

Two things to consider when determining the type of bank account for your neighborhood association are:

- How often will you withdraw money?
- The amount of money your association must deposit. Do you have enough to keep a minimum balance in your account or pay service fees?

Even though many organizations do not have many funds, it is important to keep track of whatever money comes in or goes out of your organization. An accountant or bookkeeper can help set up the accounts, then the Treasurer or group member who feels comfortable can take on bookkeeping responsibilities. The sooner the system is set up, the easier it is to keep accurate financial records.

The following is a common system to help keep your group's records accurate.

Cash Receipts and Cash Disbursements

Money coming into or out of the organization should be recorded. These transactions are recorded in a format called a journal.

1. Cash Receipts Journal – A record of the total amount of money (cash or checks) and the source of each dollar amount (contributions, grants, sale of advertising, etc.) on the day it is received.
2. Cash Disbursement Journal – Record each disbursement from each bank account. Disbursements made by check should be recorded with the check number, date of check, the payee (who the check is made out to), amount of the check and the purpose of the disbursement. For savings accounts without preprinted checks, record the date of withdrawal, amount and purpose of the funds. Photocopy the withdrawal slip and file with cash receipts journal to create a record of who withdrew the money.

General Ledger

Associations with many different sources of receipts or many different categories for disbursements, particularly those who receive foundation grants that restrict the use of the grant money, may need to set up a General Ledger. The General Ledger is essential for an organization that wants to use the accrual basis of accounting which records amounts owed to the organizations (receivables) and amounts owed by the organization (payables). If you think your association needs a General Ledger or has significant payables or receivables, get help from a trained accountant to set up your system.

Each month, the Treasurer or another designated person should prepare a written financial report. The report should include the results of the month's activities. The report should include at least the following information:

- Cash available at the beginning of the month.
- Total receipts during the month, itemized by source.
- Total disbursement during the month, itemized by type – postage, supplies, printing etc.
- Cash available at the end of the month.



Publicity

You will be planning several great programs for your neighborhood, so do not keep them a secret. Publicity will help others in the neighborhood join you in your efforts and take part in making a difference.

Publicity is an easy way to increase membership in your association. There are different sources that can be used for publicity that groups should take advantage of. A good publicity network is important to ensure residents are aware of association activities and projects and to keep current members informed. Neighborhood Services can help you advertise neighborhood activities through a variety of methods.

News Releases, Public Service Announcements

News releases are used when giving information about an event to the public, such as a neighborhood cleanup or election of officers. Public Service Announcements (PSA) can also be used when you want to announce an event.

When writing a news release, keep the following in mind:

- News releases should be a one-page, typed document.
- Your first paragraph should include who, what, when and where
- Body paragraphs should provide details and background
- Include information for a contact person (name and phone number)
- Include a “release date” and “do not use after” date
- Send a copy of the news release at least two weeks in advanced

When writing a PSA, follow the same format as a news release except for the following:

- PSAs are shorter than news releases, usually only a paragraph
- When sending a PSA to a radio station, be sure it can be read in 30 seconds and attach the details and background on a separate sheet
- When sending a PSA to a large newspaper, find out what section would give your PSA the best exposure. Send the PSA to the editor of that section.

Website / Facebook Page or Group

Establish a website and/or a Facebook page/group so your residents can easily find information on current issues, news, events, contact information and etc. Neighborhood Services also maintains a web page (cstx.gov/neighbor) that includes information about registered neighborhood associations and city-sponsored events. The City of College Station is also on Facebook and Twitter.

Flyers/Posters

Flyers can be used for any activity, project or goal. Some tips to keep in mind are:

- Keep text bold enough to be seen from 10 feet
- Keep the message brief
- Add a phone number, email, website or Facebook page for more information or for questions
- Post flyers on community bulletin boards in restaurants, coffee shops and etc.

Logos

Designing logos is a fun way to bring members together by creating an image that can be associated with the group. The logo can be simple or detailed. The logo should be unique to the group so it can have a maximum impact.

Buttons, T-shirts, and Decals

Once the group has a logo, it can be used on T-shirts, decals and buttons. These can be sold for fundraising or distributed to volunteers. Using these items can also increase awareness of your group around the city.



Projects and Activities

Organizing neighborhood projects can provide opportunities for neighbors to work together and stay active. It also builds credibility for the group as a moving force in the community.

Neighborhood Cleanups

Neighborhood cleanups are a great way to boost pride in your area. Your group can organize to collect debris in alleys, backyards, vacant lots and sidewalks. When most of the litter is cleared, occasional cleanups can be organized to maintain the areas.

Helpful tips include:

- Schedule a cleanup date and time as well as a rain date.
- Notify residents of the project. Inform them of the date, time, and what tools would be helpful (work gloves, rakes, garbage bags, etc.)
- On the day of the cleanup, organize people into teams to get the maximum use of your manpower and tools.
- Be sure to schedule a break for everyone to meet at a centralized location for refreshments and a bit of relaxation.
- Contact Neighborhood Services for planning assistance at 979.764.6262.
- Contact Public Works regarding litter collection dates and methods of pick up.
- Find out if the vacant lots in your neighborhood are city owned. If they are, Public Works can help with the cleanup of those lots. Call 979.764.3690 for information.

Babysitting Exchange

An exchange system can be developed with neighbors where they baby-sit for services. For example, a parent can leave a child at a homebound senior's house while the parent shops for both households. People that register for the service can specify what age children they feel comfortable sitting for. Parents should be advised to leave an address and phone number of where they can be reached in case of an emergency. Police should verify the names of people registering to be baby-sitters to secure the safety of the children.

Crime Prevention Education

By educating your neighbors in safety techniques, you can improve the security of your neighborhood. A well-informed group with an active interest in crime prevention can significantly reduce the local crime rate.

How to get started:

- Contact the College Station Police Department at 979.764.3600 to request a security inspection of homes that will inform residents of safety hazards, such as locks, windows, doors, etc. A speaker can also be provided to discuss security problems and measures to solve them.
- Any information about neighborhood safety programs should be distributed to community residents. Literature concerning safeguarding homes, burglary prevention, car thefts and civilian patrol can be obtained from the Police Department. Once you have a crime prevention program established, you should publicize it to discourage criminal activity in your neighborhood.

Fire Prevention

Plan a Fire Prevention Night by contacting the College Station Fire Department at 979.764.3714 or visit cstx.gov/fire for a list of available programs. A good fire prevention program can be easily organized for residents in your community.

How to get started:

- Call two weeks in advance. Provide alternate dates.
- Have at least 10-15 people committed to going to the presentation.
- Identify subjects for discussion at the presentation.
- Hold the meeting in a home, nearby church or community center.

Neighborhood Improvement Projects

There are a variety of enhancement projects that your group can organize to make your neighborhood a great place to live. Start by identifying what your neighbors value most and what they think needs to be done. Consider a cleanup project, landscaping, entrance signage, park improvements or a friendly code enforcement sweep. Neighborhood Services is available to help make neighborhood projects happen.

Use your imagination and listen to your residents!

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NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM APPLICATION

Neighborhood Services, 1101 Texas Ave., P.O. Box 9960, College Station, TX 77842

Phone: 979.764.6262 Fax: 979.764.3496, Email: **neighborhoodservices@cstx.gov**

Minimum Submittal Requirements

- Completed Neighborhood Partnership Program Application
- Declaration of Participation
- List of association board members and their contact information (phone number, email address, mailing address). Please note that all this information will be subject to Open Records Requests unless contact information is specifically requested by the individual to be withheld. Listing of committee chairs is appreciated, but optional.
- Copy of current association bylaws, including any recent amendments
- Map of neighborhood showing association boundaries

DATE _____

ASSOCIATION NAME _____

☐ **Neighborhood Association** – A voluntary organization of residents.

☐ **Homeowner Association** – A legal entity operating under State regulation.

ASSOCIATION INFORMATION

Describe the geographic boundaries of your association (north, south, east and west).

How many households are in this association? _____

In what month are new officers elected? _____

When and how often will neighborhood meetings be held? _____

Association website (if applicable): _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Neighborhood Services Office requires each association to identify a primary contact who will serve as city staff's first point of contact concerning neighborhood issues. This contact may be changed by the association at any time. Establishing a first point of contact is strictly for efficiency in disseminating information. Neighborhood Services welcomes any association member or College Station resident to contact our staff at any time.

Primary Contact (the first point-of-contact for your association):

Name _____ Title _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *during* business hours: _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *after* business hours: _____

Person in charge of the association newsletter and/or website (if applicable):

Name _____ Title _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *during* business hours: _____

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM DECLARATION OF PARTICIPATION

The

NAME OF ASSOCIATION

- ☐ Homeowner Association
- ☐ Neighborhood Association

declares on this date

MONTH

DAY

YEAR

our desire to participate in the City of College Station
Neighborhood Partnership Program.

We understand the expectations of the association and the
City of College Station and look forward to a mutually beneficial relationship.

Signed by

ASSOCIATION OFFICER

DATE

SAMPLE BYLAWS

Article I. Purpose

Section 1. Name

The name of the neighborhood association shall be:

_____ .

Section 2. Purpose

The purpose of the neighborhood association shall be to promote a better neighborhood and community through group action.

Article II. Membership

Any person residing on _____ between
and _____ is eligible for membership.

Article III. Voluntary Dues

Voluntary dues shall be \$4.00 per person per year.

Article IV. Meetings

Section 1. General Membership Meetings

Regular meetings will be held on the _____ of each month, or whenever deemed necessary.

Section 2. Quorum

At least ten percent of the membership must be present to conduct official business.

Article V. Officers

Section I. Number and Election of Positions

The officers shall be a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, who shall be elected in _____ of each year. The term of office shall be one year.

Article VI. Committees

The membership may establish necessary committees at any meeting. The President may also establish such committees. The President shall appoint committee chairpersons.

Article VII. Amendments

The bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting. Two-thirds of those members in attendance must approve the amendment.

SAMPLE BYLAWS OUTLINE

Article I. Purpose

- Section 1. Name of Organization
- Section 2. Purpose of Neighborhood Association

Article II. Membership

- Section 1. Membership Qualifications
- Section 2. Membership Voting

Article III. Voluntary Dues

Article IV. Meetings

- Section 1. General Membership Meetings
- Section 2. Special Membership Meetings
- Section 3. Agenda
- Section 4. Quorum
- Section 5. Participation
- Section 6. Procedures

Article V. Board of Directors

- Section 1. Number of Board Members
- Section 2. Terms of Office
- Section 3. Eligibility for Board Service
- Section 4. Duties of Board Members
- Section 5. Election of Board Members
- Section 6. Board Vacancies
- Section 7. Duties of Board Officers
- Section 8. Board Meetings
- Section 9. Emergency Powers
- Section 10. Termination for Non-Attendance

Article VI. Committees

Article VII. Conflict of Interest Procedures

- Section 1. Definition
- Section 2. Declaring the Conflict of Interest
- Section 3. Abstention from Voting

Article VIII. Grievance Procedures

- Section 1. Eligibility to Grieve
- Section 2. Complaint Receipt
- Section 3. Final Resolution

Article IX. Procedure for Consideration of Proposals

- Section 1. Submission of Proposals
- Section 2. Notification
- Section 3. Attendance
- Section 4. Dissemination

Article X. Public Meetings/ Public Records Requirements

Article XI. Boundaries

Article XII. Non-Discrimination

This section should describe the association's commitment to include all members of their neighborhood as defined under the "Boundaries" section of the bylaws. Be as inclusive as possible.

Article XIII. Adoption and Amendment of Bylaws

SAMPLE SIGN-IN SHEET

[illegible]

SAMPLE AGENDA

(Keep it short)

- I. Call Meeting to Order
- II. Introduction of Organizers and Guest Speakers
- III. Discussion and Possible Action on the Problem(s) of _____

- IV. Discussion and Possible Action on Forming a Neighborhood Association
- V. Other Neighborhood Concerns
- VI. Adjourn

**Important
NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

Date: _____

Time: _____ p.m.

Place: _____

Directions: _____

Topics to be discussed:

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

***Please attend this IMPORTANT MEETING
Our Neighborhood Needs Your Ideas and Support!***

For more information, call _____ at _____

or _____ at _____.

STEPS FOR PLANNING YOUR FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

1. Gather 2-4 other neighbors together to help you organize the first meeting:

- a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____

2. Determine the boundaries of your neighborhood:

- a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____

3. Decide on a date and time for your first Neighborhood Meeting.

_____ (date) _____ (time - a.m. or p.m.)

4. Decide on an Agenda and any Guest Speakers desired for the meeting. (*See Sample Agenda*)

5. Identify any special needs for your Neighborhood (place check mark next to each):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language Translation | <input type="checkbox"/> Need to be within Walking Distance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance for the Elderly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handicap Access | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impaired |

6. Decide on a meeting place and make necessary arrangements to reserve it. Some possibilities are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood School (Cafeteria) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Library | <input type="checkbox"/> Church/Temple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor's Home or Yard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Business/Restaurant |

7. Contact the Guest Speakers and arrange for them to attend.

8. Prepare a flyer announcing the Meeting (*see sample flyer*).

9. Distribute flyers to every residence within your neighborhood boundaries.

PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCEDURES

1. List below the problems your Neighborhood would like to solve:

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Fill out a Problem-Solving Worksheet for each problem.

5. 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.

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

Issue: _____

1. Explain problem as briefly as possible:

2. List possible causes of the problem:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

3. List possible acceptable solutions to the problem:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

4. List possible means/people (include phone numbers) to help solve the problem:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

5. Things to do:

Date completed

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| 1) _____ | _____ |
| 2) _____ | _____ |
| 3) _____ | _____ |
| 4) _____ | _____ |
| 5) _____ | _____ |

- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____

6. Resolutions/Decisions/Accomplishments:

Date completed

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____

HINTS FOR HAVING SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

1. SMILE! No matter how serious the purpose of the meeting, remember the meeting itself is a positive event. Neighbors are coming together to solve problems.
2. Make everyone feel welcome. Personally greet as many people as possible.
3. Encourage everyone to fill out and wear nametags.
4. Keep the meeting moving. As soon as you can wrap up one agenda item, move immediately to the next.
5. Encourage participants to speak their minds freely but stay on schedule. Be polite, but firm.
6. When a speaker begins getting off the subject, gently but firmly, return their focus. For example, "That is a subject we'd all like to discuss another time, but right now we need to resolve this issue first."
7. Treat everyone with respect. Do not belittle or criticize any participant.
8. Accept all ideas equally, even those with whom you disagree. Use the discussion period to voice your preferences, but be willing to accept the majority opinion gracefully, even if you do not agree with it.
9. Do not let disagreements between participants become personal arguments. Try to stop arguments before they start. For example, "Okay, that's good. We have two completely opposite ideas on this subject. Let's hear some other ideas now."
10. Never complain about members. Praise the people who came to the meeting instead of complaining about those who did not. Praise those who volunteer to help. Never complain about those who do not.
11. Keep the meeting upbeat. Generate enthusiasm and hope. People with positive attitudes can accomplish almost anything.
12. Always adjourn the meeting on a positive note. Thank everyone for their interest and participation.

HOW TO INVITE YOUR NEIGHBORS TO A COMMUNITY MEETING

Hi. My name is _____ and I am one of your neighbors on _____.
(Your name) (Street)

I want to invite you to an important community meeting on _____ at _____.
(Date) (Time)
at _____.
(Place)

[Hand the neighbor a flyer]

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

This meeting will be an opportunity for you to state your concerns about the neighborhood and your ideas for
improving it. _____ will be there to share ideas and answer any
(Guests)

questions you may have. I hope you will be able to attend. We need your ideas and support.

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 extensive, so not all of the areas will apply to your group. Simply mark each point with the using the following scale:

NI (Needs Improvement)

S (Satisfactory)

E (Excellent)

NA (Not Applicable)

You may also add comments to the list. Feel free to recopy this list and add columns for your comments.

Self-Evaluation Checklist

1. Organization

- Has written mission statement and bylaws (or operating procedures)
- Develops annual goals and work plan
- Annually evaluates organizational activities
- Meetings are held regularly, widely publicized and open to the public
- Meetings are well organized; a written agenda is available and is followed
- Meetings begin and end on time
- Written minutes are kept and distributed

2. Leadership

- Reflects neighborhood population
- Articulates issues clearly
- Democratic participatory methods are used to make decisions
- Communicates regularly with group about financial status, key issues and work plan, etc.
- Knowledgeable about local government and how to influence decision making

3. Communication

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

4. Diversity

- Leaders and members reflect the neighborhood's diversity (race, homeowners/tenants, income levels etc.)
- Meeting places are accessible to all persons
- Group involves non- or limited-English speaking persons
- Issues addressed by the group are representative of active and not-so-active members

5. Volunteers

- Group recruits and maintains active members
- Group provides orientation for new members
- Volunteers understand their role clearly in the group
- Volunteers are held accountable for their assignment

- Volunteers are motivated and stay involved
- Volunteers are clear about the group's agenda, goals, and tactics

6. Resources

- Group members have diverse fundraising skills
- Annual fundraising goals are set
- Annual fundraising plan and calendar is developed
- Fundraising events are planned and implemented
- Fundraising plan is evaluated at least once a year
- Timely research is done for sources for renewable money
- Maintains 501(c)(3) tax exempt status

MAJOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGES FOR HOAS

In 2011-12, the Texas Legislature approved several laws (HB 1228 & 2761, SB 101) that majorly impacted the way homeowners and property owners operate. Many of these laws call for more compliance with the state than Texas HOAs/POAs have in the past. As of Jan. 1, 2012, all of these laws are in effect and must be followed.

Below are some of the areas where there are considerable changes to HOA operations:

- Open meetings and records retention policies now apply to HOAs. All HOAs must have these policies and procedures as a part of their regular operations.
- HOAs can now be subject to open records requests from property owners, however, information on other residents and their property are not subject to these requests.
- HOAs must give 72 hrs. notices to homeowners before holding board meetings. If no annual meeting occurs, board members can call for a meeting through a voting process.
- Executive session decisions now must be summarized orally in a regular meeting and placed in the minutes in general terms, including any expenditures, approvals and personal information regarding homeowners.
- Annual mandatory meeting and elections are required.
- HOAs are required to get a court order before proceeding to foreclose on properties.
- HOAs must establish payment plans to prevent foreclosure due to non-payment of fees.
- Additional notices must be sent to residents before turning over an account to an attorney or collections.
- Associations are restricted from banning religious displays, flag poles, solar panels and rain harvesting equipment.
- More defined HOA election procedures and member voting rights clauses are required. More restrictions on what constitutes a quorum and the proxy voting system for HOA boards and members.
- Changes in attorney fees and assessments of payments related to foreclosures.
- These laws matter for all HOAs, even small ones. Only HOAs with less than 14 homes or properties are exempt from these laws.

These laws are quite a departure from previous laws governing HOAs that were much more hands-off. Many HOAs around the state are still unprepared to deal with the requirements and provisions in these laws. Here in College Station, we have over 90 HOAs, all of whom will be required to abide by these laws.

The Texas Community Association Advocates is the one of the most knowledgeable groups on these issues. TCCA is a statewide advocacy association that works to represent HOAs and the interests of association communities in the legislative process. Though there is no board or commission that is governing HOAs at the state-level, it is still expected that HOAs comply voluntarily with these laws. All local HOAs are urged to find out more about these laws and get in compliance as soon as possible. For more in-depth summary on the laws, please visit **texascommunityassociationadvocates.org**.

2021 LEGISLATIVE CHANGES FOR POAS AND HOAS

The 2021 Texas Legislative Session closed with new bills that affect property and homeowner's associations. Specifically, SB 1588 included changes that will impact your association and may require amendments or adoptions of policies in your governing documents. As of Sept. 1, 2021, all these laws are in effect and must be followed.

Below are some of the changes to HOA operations:

- Directors/Board members, their spouses, or other members of their household may no longer serve on architectural review committees.
- HOAs must give at least 144 hours (6 days) notice of regular board meetings, rather than the previous 72 hours (3 days) notice.
- All budget changes must now be voted upon in open sessions during properly noticed meetings. This is a change from the previous ability to amend an annual budget by less than ten percent outside an open meeting.
- Service contracts for more than \$50,000 now require solicitation of bids under established bidding process determined by the association.
- Collection notice letters ("209" notices,) must provide an owner with 45 days to cure the delinquency rather than the former 30 days. Attorney's fees must be "reasonable."
- Covenant violation appeals must now be made to the board only. Committee hearings have been eliminated. The owner must receive a packet with the evidence the association intends to introduce at least 10 days prior to the hearing. Failure to provide this packet allows the owner an additional 15-day postponement.
- An association may now obtain the name, mailing address, phone number and email address of each person residing at a leased property, along with the start date and term of lease.
- Religious items may now be displayed anywhere on the owner's property and no longer have any size restrictions. Limits may be adopted/enforced if the activity or display:
 - Threatens public health or safety
 - Violates a law other than a law prohibiting display of religious speech
 - Contains any display (graphic or language) that is offensive for reasons other than religious content
 - Is installed on common property or property owned/maintained by HOA/POA
 - Violates setback restriction or is attached to a fire hydrant or traffic control device
- HOA/POA may not prevent an owner from installing a swimming pool enclosure on the owner's property that conforms to state and local requirements. An enclosure that consists of black metal frames with transparent mesh panels can also not be prohibited.
- Any HOA/POA with 60+ lots or under contract with a management company must post the most current version of dedicatory instruments on a website and make them available to membership.

All associations are urged to find out more about these changes and become compliant as soon as possible. Please visit **[TexasCommunityAdvocates.org](https://www.texascommunityadvocates.org)** for more information.