

# A Guide for Starting a Successful Neighborhood Association

Adapted from a publication of the same name produced by the City of Fayetteville, Arkansas\*

## Block by Block

Congratulations on taking the first steps in starting a neighborhood association. A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners, renters, apartment dwellers, and representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches, and schools who organize to improve conditions in the neighborhood. When you start a neighborhood association, 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 will have the stability, credibility, and political clout to be an effective force for a better neighborhood.

This **Neighborhood Association Toolbox** is a guide to assist you in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules that must be followed. It is merely a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize your group.

Organizing a neighborhood association is a big job. The material in this kit breaks down the job into clear steps so that it will be less overwhelming. While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address common concerns and learn to work together as a group. Keep in mind some important guidelines as you begin to organize:

1. Building an organization is a process. It can't be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build them step-by-step.
2. Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, start setting your goals higher.
3. How you treat people is crucial to your success. By treating people with respect and honesty, people will be more likely to get involved in the organization.
4. Adapt the ideas and strategies outlined in this kit to the specific needs and circumstances of your community and your organization.
5. People join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get to know their neighbors better and to feel a sense of community. So, as you build your organization, be sure to have fun.

## Neighborhood Projects

One of the best ways to attract attention and form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your association unless you are doing worthwhile projects for their benefit or the benefit of their area. It's important that you determine the needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success.

Determine the needs of your neighborhood through meetings and personal discussions with neighbors during a walk-through. After you construct a list of possible needs, discuss them in reasonable depth to

identify the issues. When you have identified the issues, discuss each one and agree on the priority of each issue. Sort the issues into short-term or long-term projects and begin to evaluate how your association would like to approach each issue.

In developing your neighborhood projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action and results and that will be visible in the neighborhood. Get the whole community behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or effecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your association is an effective group. This establishes the credibility and worthiness of your association, characteristics which are important to long-term survival. Unfortunately, one problem with concentrating on a single issue is that when that problem is solved, everyone leaves. Therefore, it is important to introduce other issues at the same time and get people to work on them in addition to the main issue. As each issue is resolved, focus on new, short- and long-term projects.

In planning projects, keep the ball rolling with a list of projects and activities that will maintain participation and interest. This requires a lot of anticipation and organization by association members. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Do not suffocate your members with more projects than time will allow. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Slow progress is often better than no progress at all, but keep in mind that one large gap in activity could cost you the participation of a large majority of your membership because of lack of interest. Be careful how you plan and coordinate all projects. Keep people involved in all levels and give people specific jobs (with specific time frames) to do. Everyone is willing to contribute a little bit of time. Do not give too much responsibility to one person when it can be easily delegated to several.

### ***Project Ideas***

The following is a list of possible short- and long-term projects:

- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Community Garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video
- Crime watch program
- Scholarship exchange (Example: Ex-boxer in the neighborhood sets up an afternoon boxing program for neighborhood kids. The kids mow and care for his yard).
- Block party or festival
- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting
- Tool lending libraries
- Tutoring program for youth
- Home tours
- Neighborhood cook-out, picnic, or potluck
- National night out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood t-shirts
- Yard of the month award
- Neighborhood newsletter, web site, directory, or telephone/email tree
- Paint up/fix up projects

- Paint swap
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representative to attend city council, school board, and planning commission meetings
- Philanthropic projects, such as "adopting" a family who needs help with Christmas dinner

### ***Keeping Interest in the Association***

Once you have tackled a few projects, how do you keep people interested? This by far is the biggest challenge for any neighborhood association. In general, members will participate if following are present:

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

## **Effective Meetings**

The way that meetings are run will affect how members become and stay involved in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and will stop coming to meetings. When meetings are well run, people's opinions are respected, and the agenda is followed, members will feel more willing to participate in other activities of the association.

### ***Meeting Arrangements***

The best arrangement for a community meeting is a circle of chairs. People sitting in a circle can communicate better. Tables often form barriers and are easy to hide behind. Avoid using tables unless they are needed for maps or handouts. Choose a neutral room that will just barely accommodate everyone. This will allow the energy of the group to stay within the group and add to your feelings of enthusiasm. Meeting locations could include a neighborhood church or community center, a member's home, or a favorite local restaurant.

### ***Agendas***

Every meeting must have an agenda or purpose. Spend time before the meeting deciding not only what to discuss, but also how long and in what order you will discuss the items. It is sometimes useful to put emotional or controversial issues at the end of the agenda. This will allow you to take care of small, but necessary decisions early in the meeting. When listing agenda items, it's always good to list a time limit. It's possible that you'll go over or under the limit on some items, but will tend to keep the meeting on track. Do not overload the agenda. Try to stay within 1 – 1.5 hours and allow some time for refreshments and mingling.

### ***Running a Meeting***

Start the meeting on time. Don't penalize those on time by making them wait for latecomers. Go ahead and start the meeting with less important agenda items. By doing this, you will reinforce the behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late.

Make sure someone takes the minutes and records the meeting so that those who were unable to attend can still keep up with the activities of the association. If you do not have a secretary, rotate this task.

### ***Dealing with Difficult People***

When a point is being discussed too long:

- Summarize; or
- Suggest tabling the question for a later time.

When two members get into a heated discussion:

- Summarize points made by each and turn the discussion back to the group and/or
- Invite the two to stay after the meeting when the three of you can talk it over.

When coping with the "one-man" show:

- Interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution but politely asking him to hold his other points until later; and/or
- Interrupt with "You have brought up many points that will keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"

When a speaker drifts from the subject:

- Interrupt, give her credit for her idea but explain that she is departing from the main point; or
- Propose to the group the question of whether it wants to stray from the outline or follow it; or
- Bring the discussion back to the topic by using the related idea as the transition.

When a member has difficulty expressing herself:

- Build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then rephrase her material with a preface such as "is this what you mean, Ms. Jones?"

### ***Participation***

Set realistic expectations about attendance. You may not need large attendance at every meeting. Do not focus on what you consider poor attendance. Concentrate on coming up with techniques to increase attendance. Set a tone at meetings where everyone's ideas are welcome and respected and no one is put down. Consider establishing a Membership Committee to focus on recruiting new members. Be realistic about what people can do given their other responsibilities. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.

### ***Ending the Meeting***

It is surprising how many meetings are allowed to just fizzle out. Meetings should end with a plan of action. Ask committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on the date, time and place of the next meeting before members leave.

And, most importantly, in addition to addressing concerns in the neighborhood, plan enjoyable neighborhood activities that will bring the neighborhood together, such as a block party, neighborhood garden, or card club. If those in the neighborhood see the exciting activities happening around them, they will be more likely to want to participate in your neighborhood association.

## **Communications**

The establishment of a good communications and publicity network is absolutely essential to any group. Whether it is a simple flyer, newspaper announcement advertising a meeting, a short telephone call, or an email, groups must take advantage of all media (including word of mouth) to make people aware of activities.

One of the most effective ways to establish a manageable and affordable network is using the following forms of communication:

**Flyers** - Any activity, project, or goal of the group can be announced in a flyer. When designing a flyer, be sure the wording is bold enough to be read from a distance of 10 feet. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for the use of a church or school copying machine. Or better still, have them quickly copied as a donation by a local print shop. Contact the Community Affairs Department if you need help designing and/or copying flyers. Post flyers in markets, laundromats, schools, beauty shops, and other places frequented by the people you want to reach.

**Newspaper announcements** - The Northwest Arkansas Times, the Morning News and the Free Weekly have announcement sections and allow neighborhood associations to advertise their local meetings at no charge.

**Neighborhood walk-through** - This is one of the most effective ways to begin a relationship with your neighbors and get them interested in your association. Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door-to-door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask them about their concerns and respond with how your association can help them effect a change in their situation. Ask them to attend the next meeting to voice their concerns. Also, ask them to bring some of their neighbors. Be sure to leave a flyer with the information about the next meeting. If no one is home, leave a flyer in a visible, but secure location (do not place flyers in mailboxes as it is against federal law).

**Surveys** - Surveys are a key way to bring new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. At your first general meeting, distribute a survey to residents to find out what issues are important to them and what direction they want the group to take. When developing a survey, keep in mind the information you want to get from community residents:

- What are the most important issues in the neighborhood?
- What are the issues people are willing to work on?
- What kinds of skills do people have?
- What are the best meeting times and locations?
- What are people's work schedules?
- What is the age, racial, and economic make-up of the neighborhood?

These are just suggested questions. Brainstorm and come up with questions that fit your neighborhood.

**Telephone tree/email list** - Individuals who want to contribute but have little time may volunteer to be on a telephone tree or email list. Give each person at least six people to contact by phone with a short message. Or, place a neighborhood member in charge of setting up an email database. Information may then be sent out as the need arises. These are easy ways to establish a communication network that is fast and very effective.

**Block representatives** - Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison with your association. They can inform neighbors about what your association is doing and how to get involved. They can also recruit neighbors to support your association and communicate with them by word-of-mouth or telephone. This is a big help when your neighborhood association covers a large area.

**Newsletters** - A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communicating with your members. Short, informative articles that are of interest to the entire neighborhood will keep neighbors

up-to-date. Newsletters can be paid for through association dues or by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively.

A good newsletter might contain the following information:

- Notices of important meeting dates and group events.
- Information about city services
- Recent accomplishments of your group
- Notification of special events
- Recognition of volunteers
- Information about the schools in the neighborhood
- Profiles of neighbors
- Crime/safety information
- Birth/death announcements
- Graduation announcements
- Anniversaries
- A welcome to new neighbors
- Articles of community interest
- Advertising

The newsletter editor will write articles, review articles submitted by others and set deadlines. The newsletter committee should assist with typing, soliciting advertising, and arranging for printing. Decisions will need to be made regarding the title of the newsletter, the number of pages, paper stock, and the arrangement of copy. Consider asking a local printer to donate printing services. Decide how to distribute the newsletter. Newsletters can be sent home with students. Also, consider utilizing boy or girl scout troops or block captains to deliver the newsletters. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the US Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.

### *Website*

There are a number of free web site and listserv resources available for non-profit groups like neighborhood organizations.

- Among the most popular free listerv services, Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>) and Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) offer services like message archives, shared photo storage, group calendars, polls, and links storage.
- Designed specifically as a neighborhood organization resource, Neighborhood Link ([www.neighborhoodlink.com](http://www.neighborhoodlink.com)) is an Internet-based community network that enables every neighborhood in participating metropolitan areas to create their own free, interactive Web sites.
- Several neighborhood organizations in Athens-Clarke County have opted to develop their own independent web sites with the purchase of a domain name through commercial web-hosting companies. While this option incurs annual costs, the rates are often affordable and frequently covered by neighborhood membership dues. Greater storage capacity for online resources and documents is among the advantages of an independent site.

## **Incorporation and Nonprofit Status**

### *Steps for Filing Articles of Incorporation*

If your neighborhood association plans to apply for nonprofit status, you must first file Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Here are the steps to consider when incorporating:

- Call the Secretary of State Corporations Division at 404-656-2817 to check on the availability of your corporate name. The state does not allow duplication of corporate names, and your proposed name may already be in use.
- Write your Articles of Incorporation. If possible, have an attorney check your Articles of Incorporation before submitting them to the State.
- The forms must be notarized. All the officers of the corporation must sign two copies of the Articles of Incorporation in front of a Notary Public.
- For more information about the incorporation process, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at <http://www.sos.state.ga.us/corporations/>.

### ***Applying for Nonprofit Status***

Articles of Incorporation do not make an association a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status is given by the Internal Revenue Service. The decision to apply for nonprofit or 501(c)3 status with the IRS is a big step for a neighborhood association and should be considered carefully. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping.

### ***The following are benefits of nonprofit status:***

- Enables your neighborhood association to accept tax-deductible donations.
- Allows you to avoid paying sales tax on your purchases.
- Allows you to avoid paying income tax on interest earned in the association's bank account and on qualified non-profit income.

### ***A neighborhood association is eligible for nonprofit status if:***

- It is incorporated by the state as a non-profit corporation.
- It is organized solely for charitable purposes.

To apply for non-profit status, you must file IRS Form 1023 seeking tax-exempt status and charitable organization status. IRS Publication 557 explains how to complete Form 1023. The IRS requires the submittal of a filing fee along with Form 1023. To determine the appropriate filing fee for your organization, complete Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request. Many organizations find that professional assistance in filing these forms is necessary.

## **Volunteers**

Recruit people to events and activities—not to business meetings. Sign-in sheets, nametags, and follow-up recruitment calls should be standard procedure in your organization. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, delivering the newsletter, stuffing envelopes, or contacting their friends to come to the next event. These activities should make the volunteer feel useful and productive. When recruiting to an activity, try to consider the volunteer's needs. Try to provide child care, transportation, or a mentor if the volunteer needs it.

When recruiting volunteers, enthusiasm is important. Show confidence by knowing what you would like the volunteer to do and be enthusiastic about the task at hand. Practice explaining your request in a concise, up-beat fashion. In just a few sentences, you should be able to convey the essence of the organization, the purpose of the task, and how the task will enhance the organization and the neighborhood. Here are the six steps to successful recruitment.

### ***1. Be prepared***

Have in mind a mini-strategy consisting of how you will explain your goal and what you want the person to do. Review what you know about the person, such as interests, experience, and family. Look and listen for clues as to what interests this person.

### ***2. Legitimize yourself***

You need to gain quick credibility. Find a common background or a mutual friend. Explain that you have the same problem that they do. Mention people that they might know. Explain why the person's participation will make a difference.

### ***3. Listen, listen, listen***

Draw people out. Listening is more important than just not talking. It is asking good questions, providing encouraging remarks, and using body language that says you are interested. Be sure to listen to for special skills, useful contacts, and organizational networks that can be useful to your organization.

### ***4. Challenge***

Encourage people to produce change. Challenge people to care about the organization's goals.

### ***5. Get a commitment***

Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment with a firm deadline. Write it down, make a note for follow-up and clarify exactly what should happen next.

### ***6. Follow-up***

There is nothing worse than making a big fuss over people while recruiting them and then ignoring them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to experienced volunteers, and keep the lines of communication between you and your volunteers open at all times.

Keeping volunteers is just as important as recruiting them. Recruitment has to be backed up by an organizational plan with clear goals and expectations of what volunteers will do. Have a committee or program designed especially for volunteer and membership issues. This program should include training, supervision, recognition, and leadership development. Always explain the organizational importance of each task and assign tasks to fit the time that the volunteer is able to give. Recognize volunteers and make them feel a part of the team.

Recruiting and keeping volunteers is something that is learned through practice and experience. Have fact sheets for each recruiter addressing such things as how to overcome objections to volunteering, the purpose of the task they are recruiting for, organizational information, and a brief description of the task. Growing, thriving organizations must train leaders on how to recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their on-going program work.

## **Political Action at the Local Level**

### ***Staff***

Administrative support to executive branches of government, (i.e., agency personnel, committee staff, etc.) is a source of information, advice, and opinion. They can make small decisions within the scope of their procedures. As a rule, they have no authority for policy changes.



### ***Elected Officials***

Elected officials are a source of information, advocates for policy changes, intermediaries for citizen groups or citizens.

### ***Committee***

Standing, ad hoc, citizens, or subcommittees are typically advisors of government. Recommendations are prepared for higher levels of government. This is where the work leading up to decisions is conducted. They are characterized by greater informality, more candid and detailed staff reviews, airing of positions of all interested parties, and possibly brokering and negotiating of trade-offs between interest groups.

### ***Councils/Boards/Commissions***

These are the final action, decision-making levels for cities, counties, districts, and other planning bodies. They are characterized by more formal procedures and presentations. In many cases, decisions ratify committee recommendations. However, the policy body may weigh a recommendation against other priorities and override the recommendation or request additional information before making a decision. Likelihood of action without prior committee recommendation or referral is remote. This is the most visible arena of the policy making process. Therefore, conflict resolution is difficult and the PR value of confrontation is highest at this stage. Compromises are better worked out ahead of time.

### ***Voters***

Voters have direct access to legislative power through the initiative/referendum process. This applies to legislative action only (contrast: administrative or quasi-judicial) in state, home rule county, or city with appropriate charter provisions. It can either propose grass roots legislation or challenge a decision by policy makers in referring their action to popular vote.

### ***Media***

Mass media is relevant to any discussion of the political process, although in itself not a bona fide category of political action. Letters to the editor, feature stories, radio talk shows on current events, and editorial board support are desirable, no-cost strategies for influencing public officials and contributing to the public debate.

## **How to Influence Decision-Making**

### ***Action Check List***

- Learn the decision-making process.
- Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- Let your elected officials know about you.
- Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- Inform yourself--research the issue.
- Inform the members and the public of the issues.
- Attend meetings.
- Assist your elected officials.
- Know and support your allies.
- Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.

- Focus on the preliminary stages of policy making.
- Never threaten elected officials.
- Form coalitions.
- Identify "swing votes."
- Be discreet.
- Be realistic. You may not win every fight, and at times, compromises will have to be made.
- Thank elected officials for their help.
- Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- Evaluate your efforts.
- Monitor the implementation of decisions.
- Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

### ***Tradition***

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

### ***Power Clusters***

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

Networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include the Federation of Neighborhoods and other individual neighborhood associations, city-county committees primarily made up of citizens, and other volunteer organizations with similar interests.

## **Working With Local Government**

Since a large part of a neighborhood association's time may be spent advocating for change at the local level, it is important to know how to work with local government. The next few sections give ideas for how groups like neighborhood associations can effectively work with local government to influence decision making. These sections deal with general principles, such as how to choose the best channel to go through, how to give public testimony, and how to be politically effective as a group.

### ***Set Your Goals***

What is most important for your neighborhood association to accomplish in order to maintain livability? If you have a neighborhood plan, some goals have likely been set. If not, set aside some time for your Board to set its direction. Prepare needs statements for the City budget process and prioritize issues for Board involvement.

### ***Know Your Issues***

Do your homework. Find out who is affected, to what degree, and the consequences of no action. On a long-range issue, document your process, dates of events, who was involved, and correspondence. Determine which issues will need to be addressed by a local government agency and which will need to be addressed by the neighborhood itself. Only neighbors working together and along with government can solve short- and long-term neighborhood problems.

### ***Know the Structure and Purpose of City Government***

Contact the City Clerk's Office at 575-8323 or access the website for information regarding City of Fayetteville Departments and structure.

### ***Become Acquainted with Procedure***

Visit a few meetings of your public officials (e.g., City Council, boards, commissions, etc.). Understand how they operate, discover the guidelines they have to follow, and realize the pressures they are under. Have someone explain to you the procedure if it isn't otherwise clear.

### ***Work Personally***

Allow your officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is on the personal level: (1) personal appearance, (2) phone call, (3) letter, (4) e-mail. See [www.accessfayetteville.org](http://www.accessfayetteville.org) on ways to contact city officials.

### ***Keep Your Public Officials Informed***

Do not surprise your officials with unexpected actions. Bring written copies of your concern when meeting with them, and follow up your concern and action with letters. (Keep copies of everything you do!) Make reference to things you have sent. Keep up an ongoing relationship. Show your appreciation as well as dissatisfaction. Send carbon copies to other individuals or agencies involved (citizens, City staff, others).

### ***Work on all Levels***

Try the chain of command first by going to the person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials. If you don't know whom to talk to, do not hesitate to go to the top. Be sure to keep your City Councilors informed. If necessary, address the Council as a whole to be sure you are heard.

### ***Make it Clear if You Represent a Group***

Identify the name of your group and its purpose. Use appointed contact persons to establish continuity and identity. Document attendance at general meetings and votes taken. Ensure that you have the group's approval/authorization before acting.

### ***Get Solid Answers***

Don't be satisfied with vague answers. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on. Ask for and remind your officials of specific information--dates, places, times, etc.

### ***Be Open to Suggestions***

Take the suggestions of your officials seriously and follow up on them. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in the same direction.

### ***Follow Up***

Follow up on a discussion with a memo summarizing the discussion and its outcome. Check back to see if whatever has been agreed to is being done or to see if decisions are being made. After the decision has been made, check back with the appropriate staff or government official to be certain it is carried out.

### ***Keep the Neighborhood Informed***

Use your neighborhood association's meetings and annual newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed. Talk with neighbors and businesses about what is happening. Contact the neighbors and friends about what is happening. Contact the newspapers to let them know your concerns. You may wish to issue a press release. Make your written information interesting.

## **Increasing Your Group's Effectiveness**

The following are a collection of ideas to make your citizen's group more effective. Pick and choose, selecting those that are most appropriate for your situation.

### ***Analysis***

- Develop an independent understanding of the causes of social problems.
- Discuss social problems and their political and economic roots.
- Understand national trends (especially those which concern many people) and show your program's relationship to them.
- Identify and challenge decision-makers' assumptions about problems.
- Identify who else is concerned with the issue. Talk with them, form an alliance, share information, work together.
- Understand concerns, viewpoints, and priorities of your opponents and allies.

### ***Vision***

- Define your ideas, your vision of a society where problems which concern you have been resolved.

### ***Structure***

- Assign one citizen group member to each relevant decision-maker to lobby, to research (voting record, interest, etc.)
- Develop new ways of solving a problem which by-passes uncooperative decision-makers.

### ***Image***

- Get listed or featured in other groups' newsletters.
- Start or improve your own newsletter and send it to as many influential people as possible.
- Become better known (a "household word").
- Launch a public education campaign.
- Get radio and TV stations to help you develop your own public service announcements.
- Use CAT (Cable Access Television).
- Raise the consciousness of the general public on what it means to be an active, effective citizen.

### ***Strategies and forms of involvement***

- Neighborhood
  - Choose "win-able" issues.
  - Set up a demonstration project which shows how a problem should be dealt with; form partnerships; get funding if needed.
  - Canvass neighborhoods to gather opinions and build support.
  - Support community issues and concerns.

- Celebrate community events (holidays, local history, successes).
- Hold block parties.
- Resources and Assistance
  - Assess organizational history and strengths; they are among your most important resources.
  - Make a budget for your citizen involvement activities and get funding without strings.
  - Use community resources such as school buildings for space.
  - Draw on technical experts for advice and testimony.
  - Enlist the support of people with clout.
  - Use process consultants and facilitators when appropriate.
  - Seek in-kind services (free printing, auditing, legal assistance, etc.)
- Organizational Development
  - Set long-range goals and allocate time in accordance with them.
  - Initiate plans and policies rather than reacting to those of some government agency or other organization.
  - Manage time carefully and realistically (within a single meeting and during implementation of plans).
  - Develop leadership and membership skills. Make training an on-going part of your activities.
  - Evaluate your progress regularly.

## How to Give Public Testimony

Giving public testimony before Boards and Commissions can be frightening if you have never done it before. There are several things you can do to make your thoughts and presentation clear and successful. You may not always have the time to follow the outline listed below. However, whenever you can, it is beneficial to spend as much time as possible preparing your testimony. Carefully prepared testimony may influence action. Also, testimony becomes part of the public record and may be referred to later on.

### *How to Prepare Public Testimony*

- Know your time frame

Find out when, where, and before whom (Mayor & Commission, Planning Commission, Hearings Board, etc.) the issue will appear. This will let you know how much time you have to prepare--there is a big difference between having one day and one month to prepare.

- Know your issue

Support opinions with as many facts as possible. Do your homework: information is power. Read newspapers, magazines, etc., to find out about the issue. Talk to local government officials, when possible, and other citizens. Be knowledgeable of the opposition's arguments and be prepared to counter those arguments. Also, draw on your own knowledge and experience.

- Start writing down main points

Construct a rough outline from scattered thoughts, research, plus any additional brainstorming. Begin thinking about any extra visual aids that might be important (posters, charts, fact sheets, flyers, cartoons, brochures, etc.).

- Know how much time is allowed for the testimony

Typical time limits range between three and ten minutes. However, effective testimony can generally be held to three minutes. If your ideas are well-organized, three minutes should be ample time to make your point effectively.

- Write a draft statement and include the following when possible:
  - Address the governmental body (example: "Mr./Ms. Mayor, Members of the Council"). State your name and address for the record.

- Say if you are testifying for yourself or a group, and give a brief description of why you or your group is testifying on the issue.
- Explain how support for your testimony was solicited from your group (by petitions, vote at meeting, surveys, letters, etc.).
- Bring with you documentation of that support (copies of petitions, surveys, minutes of meetings, etc.) whenever possible.
- Be specific about how many people were involved in making the decision. State whether this is a majority or minority opinion.
- Keep the statement as short as possible (two pages is about right). State the problem, the reasons why you or your group support or oppose, and then summarize.
- Get others to read and make comments on the draft. If you need the approval of a group, use the rough draft so people will feel comfortable making corrections or suggestions on the copy.
- Let the statement sit for a day or so, if you have the time, and then go back and read it again and revise if necessary.
- Write up final copy. Type and double space the final copy, if possible (easier to read, looks neater, etc.). Be careful to check spelling.
- Start anticipating questions from the commission, board, etc.
- Practice giving testimony before friends and get hints on improving the presentation.

### *How to Give the Testimony*

- Be Familiar with the Group's Process— Attend one or more meetings of the group before you testify to get an idea of the room layout and the procedures used.
- Know Your Audience— Try to stress what you have in common with and that you respect the differences of the people you are talking to. The more you can find out about their biases and sympathies, the more chance you have to relate to them.
- Be aware of how you present yourself when you make a statement to the decision-making body. Think about what image you want to project. Most of what we communicate is nonverbal. Be aware of your body language.
- Try to keep your feelings in check while you are testifying. It is all right to have strong feelings on the subject, but you do not want them to overshadow the content and reason of your message.
- Use notes rather than written manuscript so you can develop good eye contact.
- Define What You Want— Make it perfectly clear what action you want the group to take.
- Summarize your written message to emphasize the important points.
- Provide copies of your written testimony for each member of the body, appropriate staff, and the media.
- If you are testifying for a group, make sure different people cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitious.

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[http://accessfayetteville.org/neighborhood\\_resources/neighborhood\\_associations/a\\_guide\\_for\\_starting\\_a\\_successful\\_neighborhood\\_association.html](http://accessfayetteville.org/neighborhood_resources/neighborhood_associations/a_guide_for_starting_a_successful_neighborhood_association.html)