Lansing Neighborhood Resource Handbook:

A Guide for Events and Information on Creating and Implementing a Neighborhood Group

PUBLISHING INFO & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Building Community in Lansing: A Neighborhood Handbook is a joint project published by the Allen Neighborhood Center, the Lansing Neighborhood Council, the Northwest Lansing Healthy Communities Initiative, and the South Lansing Community Development Association. Funding has been provided through grants from Michigan State University, the City of Lansing's Department of Human Relations and Community Services. Community groups are free to copy from this handbook as needed.

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Lansing Neighborhood Council
Lansing Police Department

As part of the ***Building Community in Lansing: A Neighborhood Handbook*** project, we have also prepared an extensive first section of resources for current and new neighborhood groups available at neighborhood centers throughout the City of Lansing, you may request a hardcopy from one of the following organizations:

Allen Neighborhood Center
Northwest Initiative
South Lansing Community Development Association

This resource has been revised by an AmeriCorps VISTA Resource Development Coordinator in order to reflect information and technology changes. 2nd Edition: July, 2015

A Message from the Mayor and Planning & Neighborhood Development Director:

The Planning & Neighborhood Development Department and Mayor Bernero are proud to offer the "Lansing Neighborhood Resource Handbook: A Guide for Events and Information on Creating and Implementing a Neighborhood Group." We would like to acknowledge the hard work of the individuals and organizations listed on the previous page, as well as the AmeriCorps VISTA Resource Development Coordinator for her work in drafting this 2nd Edition.

Volunteering in a neighborhood can be demanding but also rewarding in that it is essential to create a successful city. Pride in one's community starts at the block level, and without all of your time and energy you bring to neighborhood organizations, we could not create the best possible Lansing. Working in a neighborhood creates a set of unique opportunities-from hosting events with neighbors to creating a community project that increase home values. Those projects that are street level improvements are the most tangible for neighbors.

We understand and appreciate the challenges you face and have updated the handbook to help you navigate the framework of neighborhood organizations and plan neighborhood events. This comprehensive handbook provides information on the various levels of being a neighborhood organization, the tasks you may encounter, resources for neighbors, as well as step by step guide for planning and hosting certain neighborhood projects and events.

We hope you find the information contained in the handbook useful. We appreciate your continued efforts to improve Lansing neighborhoods.

Sincerely.

Virg Bernero
Mayor
City of Lansing

Bob Johsnon
Director
Planning & Neighborhod Development
City of Lansing

Useful Telephone Numbers for Neighborhood Residents

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE AGENCIES

Neighborhood Watch Officer 483-6812
Allen Neighborhood Center..... 367-2468
South Lansing Community Development Association 374-5700
NorthWest Initiative 999-2894

CITY OF LANSING

Housing Code Violations 483-4361
Front Yard Parking..... 483-4361
Weeds & Trash 483-4361
Code Compliance 483-4361
Forestry/City Tree Issues 483-4202
Potholes & Street Repair 483-4161
City Snow Removal 483-4161
Missing Sewer Grates 483-4161
City Attorney 483-4320
Landlord/Tenant Issues 483-4328
Mayor's Office 483-4141
Trash Pick Up 483-4400
Recycling 483-4400
Parks and Recreation……..... 483-4277

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Police, Emergency 911
Police General (Dispatch) 483-4600
Special Operations Section (i.e. drug houses) 483-4812

BOARD OF WATER & LIGHT

Power Outage/Street Lights Damaged/Power Lines Downed 1-877-295-5001
Water Main Break 702-6490
Customer Service…….. 702-6006

INGHAM COUNTY

Animal Control ……..676-8370

Go to http://www.lansingmi.gov/Departments to locate the necessary persons and emails for the departments.

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Keys to Success in a Neighborhood Block Party/Picnic

- ☐ Have a main coordinator/planning committee for the event
- ☐ File the necessary paperwork for the party. Contact the Office Manager in Planning and Neighborhood Development at 517-483-4061 for any questions you may have. Please file a noise waiver/ road closure form 30 days in advance of the event: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/Street_Closure_Noise_Waiver_form/3815
- ☐ Create some fun activities for the event. For example:
    - Corn Hole, and Ladder ball
    - Face Painting (please refrain from painting roads/sidewalks)
    - Inflatables or (can be rented through Parks and Recreation at http://www.lansingmi.gov/equipment_rentals)
    - Carnival Games (can also be rented through Parks and Recreation http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/Carnival_Games_Rental_Request_Form_2015/8012)
    - DJ
    - Make a board on www.pinterest.com. Include the planning committee as pinners. This will be a great resource for tips on decorating, theme, activity, and food ideas.
- ☐ Secure Funding: seek grants from the City's Neighborhood Advisory Board, local businesses, ask for donations, or get neighbor collaboration, etc.
- ☐ Determine day, time, and place of event.
- ☐ Develop and distribute flyers. Go to https://www.smore.com/ak501-reotown-block-party to see an electronic flyer option that you can distribute via Facebook, Twitter, email, etc or look at a template on the next page. Make sure it includes:
    - Day, time, place
    - Sponsor names
    - Potluck info, if necessary
    - Program information
    - Contact person and phone number
    - Facebook/Twitter page, if applicable, to receive updates of the event
- ☐ Advertise your event in Neighborhood newsletters, Facebook groups, Next Door, or local venues if your neighborhood has these.
- ☐ Secure picnic tables and chairs if necessary or ask neighbors to bring their own. There are several rental places in Lansing for chairs, tents, etc. Also check with community centers, YMCAs, or other organizations that may be able to loan equipment/supplies out.
- ☐ Additional things you may need on the day of event:
    - Set-Up, Break-Down, and Clean-Up Crew
    - Trash can/Recycling Containers (can be requested on Special Event Application)
    - Photographer
    - DJ/ sound system

- BBQ grills
- Ice tub (be creative with what can be one) and Ice
- Food, Drink, Plates, and Plastic ware
- Games and activity supplies (i.e. projectors with screens, volleyball net, corn hole boards, etc)
- Neighborhood member list with information and sign up
- Donation Box for future events or community work

☐ After the event, remember to thank the volunteers that helped put the event on. Give them a shout out in the local newsletter, paper, or Facebook group. You can also send them heartfelt notes or small gift of appreciation.

☐ Evaluate how the event went and what can be improved for next time. Also, share your successes with other neighborhoods to help them for future planning. Collaboration is a key to success.

At the Bridgeport Block Party, organizers got a clown to entertain the kids. Photo courtesy of LaToya Turner.

Block Party Flyer Template

Include a Picture identifying the event or neighborhood

Include Date, Time, and Place information in a simple format, for example:

Date: 00.00.00
Time:00:00-00:00
Location: On the corner of x and x

Include more information on the event. What games will be played, what food, drinks, or plastic ware will be provided versus what to bring to bring as a potluck. Will your neighbors need to bring chairs, blankets, or picnic tables? Will there be water games where kids have to wear swimsuits? If you have any sponsors for the event make sure to include them here and ask them if they want any additional symbols of their business or organization to include on the flyer. Make this a specific short paragraph to give community members all the information they need.

In a clear, separate place tell community members how they can RSVP to the event. Should they text, call, or email? Try to make it as convenient as possible for them.

NEIGHBORHOOD TRASH PICK-UP CHECKLIST

- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for the event.
- ❑ Contact the Neighborhood Resource Coordinator, Andi Crawford at 517-410-3904 to express interest in doing a trash pick-up. She will then get in contact with the development office who will be in charge of accepting your request. Funding is not guaranteed for a trash-pick up and money will be available based on number of groups that organize a trash pick- up and past use. When you call, the City will reserve a date for your neighborhood provided that you return within two weeks the forms they send you to fill out.
- ❑ Follow the directions on their application carefully, and remember to include a map of the area that will be serviced and a list of 10 volunteers who can be available to help the drivers load the trucks.
- ❑ If you have a newsletter, advertise the month of the pick-up (BUT NOT THE SPECIFIC DATE) well in advance, so that people in your neighborhood can begin setting their trash aside.
- ❑ The week of the pick-up, develop and distribute a flyer that includes:
  - ✓ specific date and start time of the pick-up
  - ✓ information about when to place trash on their curb
  - ✓ name and contact information for neighborhood coordinator who can answer questions
  - ✓ guidelines for what trash will and will not be picked up.
    (**Note**: The City has an electronic flyer available that details most of this information, which you can modify, as needed. See Appendix for example flyer.)
- ❑ Two weeks before the pick-up, contact the Development Office and confirm the time and number of trucks the City will be sending (you will need five volunteers per truck), as well as where in the neighborhood volunteers will meet up with the trucks.
- ❑ A few days before the pick-up, make reminder phone calls to volunteers who agreed to help out with the pick-up, and let them know where to meet.
- ❑ On the day of the pick-up, you might consider having coffee, tea, and doughnuts (or lunch refreshments, if applicable) available for the volunteers and City employees who will be loading the trash onto the City's trucks.
- ❑ In addition to the volunteers who are helping load the trucks, you may wish to encourage each individual neighbor who has placed trash at their curbsides to come out and help load. (This may be impossible for some folks who are elderly and/or disabled, of course.)
- ❑ After the event, say thank you to your volunteers. This can be done with a follow up party to celebrate your accomplishments, or perhaps through a neighborhood newsletter article.
- ❑ Evaluate your trash pick-up and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

NEIGHBORHOOD FLOWER PLANTING CHECKLIST

- ❑ Choose a date, time, and place(s) where flowers will be planted
- ❑ Develop a flyer and/or newsletter article to announce the event to your neighborhood
- ❑ Choose a volunteer who will call people and secure their commitment to participate, as well as remind them of the event just before it will happen
- ❑ Choose a volunteer who will secure all of the necessary tools (shovels of various sizes, compost, trowels, hose and/or watering can & water)
- ❑ Choose a volunteer who will make sure the flowers and plants are available (possible sources include: a perennial exchange among neighbors, donations from local plant nurseries and/or business—such as Meijer, gardeners in the neighborhood, or purchased through neighborhood donations)
- ❑ Chose volunteers who will commit to the longer-term watering and weeding that needs to be done after the plantings have been put in. You could even do a weed pulling challenge with the winner receiving a small prize at the end of the season.
- ❑ After the planting, say thank you to your volunteers. This can be done with a follow up party to celebrate your accomplishments, through a neighborhood newsletter article, or the social media page of your neighborhood on Facebook, Twitter, or NextDoor.
- ❑ Evaluate your flower planting and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

MEET THE CANDIDATES NIGHT CHECKLIST

Some neighborhoods sponsor events in which neighbors can meet candidates for local political offices. These can be an excellent way to promote civic responsibility and increase neighbors' knowledge of both issues and candidates. In order to learn the dos and don'ts of a Meet the Candidates Night and to hold the event, please contact the City Clerk at 517-483-4131 or city.clerk@lansingmi.gov.

- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for Meet the Candidates Night.
- ❑ Select a date, time, and place for the Candidates Night, preferably eight (8) but at least four (4) weeks in advance, and confirm that the day and time are available for the facility you've chosen. (Local community centers, schools, neighborhood centers, etc.)
- ❑ Contact candidates and issues campaigns to get the event on their calendars – again, at least four but preferably eight weeks in advance. Remember to invite only those candidates for whom members of your neighborhood can actually vote, and make sure not to miss any candidates or sides of the issue.
- ❑ Invite neighborhood and other city residents through newsletter , social media, and/or flyers and/or phone calls; you may even wish to pursue advertising the event in local newspapers; and perhaps you want to advertise the event in other neighborhood newsletters, as well.
- ❑ Arrange for refreshments, if any.
- ❑ Arrange for decorations, if any.
- ❑ Arrange for a table on which candidates or issues campaigns may make materials available at the event.
- ❑ A week or two before the event, confirm with the candidates that they will still be able to make it.
- ❑ Arrange to have both a moderator and a timekeeper with a hand-buzzer, so that candidates/issues may receive equal time in an unbiased manner.
- ❑ After the event, send thank you cards to the candidates who participated.
- ❑ Evaluate your Meeting the Candidates' Night event and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

HOLIDAY PARTY CHECKLIST

- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for the holiday party.
- ❑ Determine date, time, and place of party.
- ❑ Give the holiday party a name. Perhaps "Holiday Party" is enough, but maybe you want to emphasize the inclusive nature of the event by calling it something else. Holidays to consider including might be: Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Ramadan (check on time of year, as it varies), and the Winter Solstice.
- ❑ Plan the program. Possibilities might include:
  - ✓ Gift exchange
  - ✓ Potluck meal, featuring foods from a variety of cultural and religious traditions
  - ✓ Cookie exchange
  - ✓ Canned food drive
  - ✓ Warm clothing drive
  - ✓ Food basket assembly
  - ✓ Games and/or movies
  - ✓ Talent show
  - ✓ Arts and crafts for children
  - ✓ Honoring an individual in the neighborhood for service contributions made throughout the year
  - ✓ Presentations from various groups about the significance of their holiday celebrations
- ❑ Create and distribute invitations or flyers about the event to your neighborhood residents, including:
  - ✓ Date, place and time
  - ✓ Name of holiday party
  - ✓ What to bring
  - ✓ Description of the program
  - ✓ RSVP information, if any
  - ✓ Name and contact information for coordinator
  - ✓ Facebook Event Link
- ❑ Make a special effort to reach out to people who may not have family in the area
- ❑ Assemble and set up decorations for the party.
- ❑ Assemble any materials (games, arts/crafts, baskets, etc.) needed for the program.
- ❑ Determine whether you need the following, and assemble them, if needed:
  - ✓ Tables and chairs
  - ✓ Set-up, break-down, and clean-up crews
  - ✓ Trash cans/recycling containers
  - ✓ Photographer
  - ✓ DJ and/or sound system
  - ✓ Movie playing equipment
  - ✓ Paper plates, cups, and plastic ware
  - ✓ Food and beverages
  - ✓ Game and activity supplies
  - ✓ Neighborhood membership list with space for more entries
  - ✓ Donation box
- ❑ Evaluate your holiday party and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN-UP CHECKLIST

Neighborhood clean-ups are a great way to clean up a public space such as a park. If your neighborhood is interested in an individual clean-up to remove items from a house to discard, please refer to the trash pick-up check list located page 8.

- ❑ Determine what needs to be cleaned up in the neighborhood. Is there a park that could be attended to? Are there areas of your neighborhood right along the river that could use some extra tidying? Does the neighborhood, in general, need trash picked up along its residential streets? How about vacant lots?
- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for the clean-up.
- ❑ Determine date, time, and meeting place for clean-up.
- ❑ Get the word out among residents (through flyers, newsletters, phone calls, social media) and recruit volunteers to help on the day of the clean-up.
- ❑ Gather trash bags, yard waste bags (for leaves, etc), rakes—whatever materials you will need—for the day of the clean-up.
- ❑ Determine whether you will have refreshments available during the work party, and secure those, if necessary.
- ❑ A few days before the work party, make reminder phone calls to your volunteers.
- ❑ After the event, say thank you to your volunteers. This can be done with a follow-up party to celebrate your accomplishments, or perhaps through a neighborhood newsletter article.
- ❑ Evaluate your clean-up and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

Some ideas for making the event fun and challenging:

-Make an Instagram challenge. Take before and after pictures of the space cleaned in order to have a clear representation of the difference you made. Have volunteers take pictures of the clean up during the event and posting them on social media (like Instagram) in order to encourage and others to come join and show followers and the rest of Lansing what you are doing. Also, include these pictures on your community's social media page and newsletter.

-Keep track of how much trash you collected. If you do a weigh in of the trash, you could use this as a yearly measure if you decide to do this event again.

-Get kids involved! Put together small groups of kids with an adult supervisor to do a trash pick up challenge. On a basketball court or cemented area, lay out a line of painter's tape for each team. Have the kids layout the trash along the line and the longest line wins. Remember to have each person wear gloves and instruct the adults to pick up all glass, sharp objects, or suspicious material.

NEIGHBORHOOD YARD SALE CHECKLIST

Sponsoring a neighborhood yard sale can be an excellent way to pool resources and bring people together. In addition, they usually attract larger crowds, so they mutually benefit all participating households. Neighborhood yard sales can also be used as fund raising opportunities, where you might ask participating households to make a flat fee donation or share a percentage of their profits with the neighborhood organization. When holding a yard sale, please be mindful of the city sign ordinance (do not place sign on right away or utility pole, etc). The Lansing State Journal is also a great resource to advertise your sale and receive tips on holding a yard sale. To hold a community yard sale on a city parking lot, please contact Parking Services at 517.483.4240 or parking@lansingmi.gov for permission.

- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for the neighborhood yard sale.
- ❑ Select a date/days and time(s).
- ❑ Determine whether you will require participants to make a donation to help cover advertising and/or other costs, and how much that donation will be. If no donation will be required, determine how you will cover the costs of advertising your yard sale.
- ❑ Advertise the yard sale to your neighborhood and seek out households who wish to participate, keeping track of those who are interested.
- ❑ Write and place notices in the Lansing State Journal, City Pulse, etc. advertising the event. It can be helpful to poll participating neighborhoods about what types of items will be for sale, so you can include that in your ad.
- ❑ Develop and post signs at entrance points to the neighborhood on the day(s) of the yard sale to help people find it.
- ❑ Remind interested neighbors of the yard sale a week or so before the event, and collect donations in advance from those who are participating, if applicable. Remind people to have cash on hand so they may make change for customers.
- ❑ Determine whether you want to set up a refreshments stand, what will be offered, at what cost, and who will staff it. Again, this can be an excellent way to fundraise for your neighborhood organization (or another organization, if you wish to do it as a community service).
- ❑ If you are collecting a percentage of profits as donation to the organization, contact participants soon after (preferably the last day of) the yard sale to collect money and give receipts.
- ❑ Remove signs posted at entrance points to the neighborhood after your event is over.
- ❑ Evaluate your yard sale and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

Park Events

Having events in the park is a great way to gather your community and highlight an amazing resource right in or near your neighborhood—the park. To host an event in the park from a movie to pavilion rental, please contact Carol Munroe in Parks and Recreation at least **90 days in advance** of the event. Her email is carol.munroe@lansingmi.gov and her phone number is (517) 483-4276. There are also Pavilions to rent at Moores Park, Francis Park, Washington Park, and Hunter Park—please contact Carol to learn more about each of the amenities at the pavilions.

Moores Park Neighborhood and the Department of Parks and Recreation hosted a concert in the park. Photo Courtesy of Moores Park Neighborhood.

Chapter 1 Your Role as a Leader

Leadership -- the art of helping people work together toward a common goal -- is a critical factor in the work of advancing community health and development. Chapter 1 introduces some basic ideas about leadership, suggests important ingredients of effective leadership, shares ideas for identifying leadership partners or "teams," and suggests how best to be in contact with neighbors.

At the end of the chapter, you can find additional information on leadership, including a set of guidelines for community organizing developed by former Lansing Mayor David Hollister, entitled, *On Organizing: A Simple Recipe for Social Change*.

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WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Everyone is a leader. There are different ways to demonstrate leadership and different styles of leadership. A specific style may be better-suited for a particular situation , but worse in another situation. Therefore no single method is ideal.

There are both formal and informal forms of leadership. A person may assume formal leadership roles in some situations and informal roles in others. ***Formal leaders*** assume 'titled' leadership roles, organize activities and people, serve as contact persons, and communicate (sometimes publicly) with groups of people. Examples of formal leaders include neighborhood presidents, neighborhood watch coordinators, program coordinators, elected officials, etc. ***Informal leaders*** exhibit leadership in less obvious ways, by participating in neighborhood organizations (associations or watches), mentoring, volunteering, or just mowing a neighbor's lawn. Both types of leaders are needed to create a successful organization. T*he trick is to assume leadership roles that are well-suited not only to the situation, but also your nature and interests.*

Myth #1: Large numbers are needed to be effective.
Most groups revolve around a small core of individuals who have the trust of the larger group. The size of a group is only a liability if it stops growing and/or is unable to develop coalitions

Childhood friends in Brdgeport got together and held a Block Party for the neighborhood.
Photo Courtesy of LaToya Turner.

Qualities of Good Leaders

Regardless of your style or skills, there are some ingredients that can contribute significantly to effective leadership:

1. **Be inclusive**: It's important to include all of your neighbors, including
   a) Residents from all economic, religious, ethnic backgrounds;
   b) Other "neighbors" like faith communities, schools, and businesses who play important roles in the neighborhood and have valuable leadership skills, resources, and networks of contacts to offer.
2. **Cultivate networks of relationships:** Relationships do not exist in a vacuum. One person is connected through relationship to many others. Cultivating a relationship with that person, therefore, is like connecting with the entire "network" of relationships they have already developed. Cultivating networks of relationships, then, can be about building relationships with others who have specific expertise that might also benefit your neighborhood.
3. **Delegate**: Share responsibility (either through forming committees or asking individuals to take responsibility) for the major neighborhood functions, including meetings (logistics, agendas, minutes), finances, communication (phone calls, newsletter, flyers, etc.), point of contact (both within the neighborhood and with the City, County, the LPD, and other important bodies), social gatherings, neighborhood projects, and other activities.
4. **Assist others to develop their leadership skills**. Help people discover skills in service to the neighborhood's needs—cultivate the next generation of leadership. One good way of assisting others to develop their leadership skills is to release control over how others approach the tasks they've volunteered for. That is, avoid micromanaging!
5. **Communicate**, particularly with those who don't attend meetings and events. Be sure to share information both about neighborhood activities and other events/activities of interest. Useful skills include dialogue (as opposed to debate), listening (as opposed to lecturing), and transparency (as opposed to hoarding information and/or being secretive).
6. **Provide a vision** that will keep people engaged. Remind people of the big picture and long-term goals. Always have a vision-driven purpose for having a meeting.
7. **Know your and your neighborhood's assets and limits**. Build on your strengths and don't exceed your limitations.
8. **Be a learner**. Acknowledge both your successes and your mistakes and use them all as ways to improve your leadership skills.
9. **Appreciate and Celebrate**: Thank people for the work they do and celebrate your neighborhood achievements.
10. **Motivate Self and Others:** When times are tough or slow you have to be able to motivate yourself and others to push through.
11. **Relate to others:** Leaders have to present themselves in a way people can relate to and be considerate of others. This means not engaging in gossip and respecting other people's privacy.

12. **Collaborate**: Work with other neighborhood groups and community leaders on tasks and issues in order to get the most information and create strong neighborhood connections.

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

If you are new to your neighborhood, or your neighborhood lacks a neighborhood organization**, or if you simply want to address an issue that no one else in your neighborhood seems to be acting on,** then you want to identify others who are also interested in addressing it.

Here are some things to think about:

> **Myth 2: You need special training.**
> The key to leadership is gaining trust of your group and working with them, not for them.

- You can't do it alone. First you need determine who can help organize your group. To do this, first make a list of friends on the street and ask them to help contact your neighbors.

- Next include those in your neighborhood you "know." Perhaps you are acquainted with other parents on the block? Or with other people who have dogs? Or with the kind person down the street who snow blows everyone's sidewalk after particularly heavy snowfall? Any point of contact is a good place to start!

- Finally, take a walk and talk informally with your neighbors about their concerns regarding the neighborhood.

- Through these contacts, pave the way for developing a leadership team of four or five people.

- Now that you have a leadership team, invite your leadership partners to your home to help with plans and arrangements for a meeting with everyone in the neighborhood.

- At the leaders meeting be prepared to:

  * Discuss conditions in your block and neighborhood that are of concern.
  * Talk about the great things in your neighborhood and how to utilize and promote them.
  * Decide whether you want to work together to improve these conditions. Do you need an organization to do it? Or perhaps you are comfortable working independently?
  * If you decide to form an organization, determine the geographical boundaries of the proposed organization.
  * Set a time and place for a meeting that invites <u>all</u> the residents within the proposed geographical boundaries to be held in a home, school, church or hall.
  * Agree on a plan for inviting everyone to the meeting, and for how it shall be conducted, what shall be on the agenda, etc. And remember…**FREE FOOD** holds great capacity for attracting people!

MAKING IT HAPPEN

1) **Be there.** Find out who makes the real decisions and be there when they make a decision. You have to understand how the system works to be able to get it to accomplish your goals.
2) **Be informed.** If you don't know the details about your topic, you are likely to exaggerate or get something wrong. This will quickly cost you all the legitimacy you've earned
3) **Count.** We live in a society where the majority rules. This means you need to know how many people are needed to get a resolution, law or ordinance passed. Policy makers know these numbers and you need to know them too.
4) **Don't be intimidated.** Often the system is intimidating because of the large number of bureaucrats, large desks and already developed networks. But if you know what you're talking about and have your support team developed, then you'll find your fears soon disappear.
5) **Don't accept no.** You should never expect a new idea to be accepted at face value. Instead expect hostile questions and to be turned down the first time. In fact if you're accepted the first time, odds are it means the policymakers will just sandbag your proposal.
6) **Follow Through.** The group's efforts can be lost if you fail to follow through. If you get an easy victory, then the group may quickly dissolve. Stay on task with your mission.

COMMITMENT

Everyone has different forces that drive them but they can be broken down into two broad categories, *emotional and intellectual*. A group needs both types of commitments to be effective.

People with an *emotional commitment* are traditional activists. They are motivated and driven but often lack historical perspective and can't articulate a group's goal. The people with an *intellectual commitment* understand the historical significance of the change but often lack the ability to follow through. The ideal group leader has both these characteristics, but if the leader doesn't it is important that they make sure the group contains members with each type of commitment.

This page is excerpted from David Hollister's "Recipe for Social Change." The entire document is found at the end of this handbook.

CHAPTER 2 Bringing Your Community Together

In efforts to bring your community closer together, it may be important to learn more about your neighborhood and residents within it. What physical assets and liabilities exist in your neighborhood? Who are your neighbors? What do you share in common and how are you different? What do folks see as neighborhood priorities? How do you know if an issue that is important to you is also important to others? What rallies people around a cause?

Chapter 2 addresses these and other questions by beginning with a handbook called *Building Neighborhood Connections: An Introduction to Successful Neighboring* that gives some great ideas for how to meet neighbors and what you can do together in service of your neighborhood. You can find this handbook through this link-- http://ced.msu.edu/upload/handbooks/place.pdf Next we share some specific strategies for learning more about your neighborhood and its residents, including making personal connections, going door knocking, and planning and hosting house meetings.

Holmes Street School Neighborhood hosts a neighborhood trash pick-up. This is a great way to bring the community together and get rid of clutter. Photo courtesy of Holmes Street School Neighborhood.

Building Neighborhood Connections

An essential part of neighborhood organizing is contacting other people in the neighborhood. There are a number of good communication channels used by neighbors and neighborhood organizations, such as posters, social media pages and events, fliers, yard signs, and announcements in community or church newsletters. Perhaps the most effective channel is ***personal contact*** through phone calls or stopping by.

Personal contact is advantageous because:

a. It lets people know you are interested in them and in hearing their ideas and perspectives.
b. It assures people they will know at least one other person at the meeting – ***you***.
c. It gives you an opportunity to explain what you are working toward and why.
d. It gives you a chance to hear what your neighbor feels is important and what they would like to see accomplished.
e. If neighbors tell you they will come, and know you are expecting them, they are more likely to show up.

The rest of this chapter will show different methods—personal visits, going door to door and house parties—of establishing this contact. As with leadership each method has its own benefits and successful use of all three will help your organization. All three methods have the benefit of letting you present your ideas and hear theirs. This will be invaluable in the future.

Officer Elton participates in National Night Out activities in South East Lansing, Oct. 2015. Photo Courtesy of City Council President, Tina Houghton.

PERSONAL VISITS

Making personal connections through visiting homes is one strategy for learning more about your neighbors. The purpose of such "personal visits" is to establish a social connection with your neighbors through which you may build a foundation for future work (and play) together. Especially if you are unfamiliar with the people in your neighborhood, it is a good idea to go on personal visits with a partner.

What is a personal visit for?

- 20-30 minutes of quality one-on-one time
- To make a connection and learn about a person
- To ask for specific commitments
- To evaluate previous actions/activities
- To set up house meetings or other future activities
- To prepare for upcoming activities

With whom should you do personal visits? Do personal visits with a leader or potential leader; allies or potential allies; and opponents or potential opponents.

Tips for good personal visits include:

- Make an appointment
- If you can't get the person by phone, drop by
- Don't take notes—keep it informal
- Be on time
- Relax, enjoy the person's company and let them enjoy yours
- Don't bring more than two people with you
- Get a specific commitment
- Ask questions, listen, and focus – try to get past what they do and learn why they do it

DOOR TO DOOR

Going door to door is another strategy you can use for learning more about your neighborhood and addressing specific issues. As with making personal visits, it is always good to go door to door in pairs. It is a give-and-take process of listening, persuading, and asking. For example:

Here is a **sample door:**

1. **Introduction**
   - Introduce yourself, the organization you are working with (if any), and explain why you are at their door.
   - Ask if you may have a few minutes of their time to talk with them about the problems in their neighborhood. At this point, they may invite you in.

2. **Purpose**
   - After sitting down, repeat your name and organization, and thank them for their time.
   - Get their name, confirm address, get phone #, and write it down.
   - Glance around. Ask or acknowledge something you observe.
   - Ask them how long they've lived in the area and if they know their neighbors.

3. **Listen**
   - Ask what they think are the major problems in their neighborhood.
   - Ask if they would like to do something about these problems.
   - Explain that you (or your organization) are working to bring people together to work on issues such as those the neighbor suggested as priorities.

4. **Solution**
   - Explain the issue that members are working on. Ask if they support the issue.
   - Ask the person if they would like to join others in their neighborhood in fighting these issues. Name other people on the block who joined.
   - Explain what membership means and ask them to become a member.

5. **Next step**
   - Invite them to the next meeting or action.
   - Ask for names of neighbors that may also want to join.
   - Ask them to do something for the organization (deliver flyers, contact neighbors, host gathering).
   - Congratulate, thank, flatter, acknowledge.

This may not happen at the first sit down, instead think of this as a sequence of visits to create a solid relationship with the person.

HOUSE MEETINGS

A house meeting is a small gathering of friends who meet at the home of someone they know and trust. The purpose of a house meeting is to discuss issues of concern and develop specific ways to work together, as a group, to address these issues.

House meetings are also an effective way to bring new members into a community group. They provide a personal and comfortable environment where people can get to know each other, learn about community issues, and become familiar with the group. Because they are small gatherings, house meetings provide an opportunity for people to listen to each other, ask questions, share ideas, and become informed. In the process, people can discuss ways to get involved in the organization that are best suited to their skills and interests.

A house meeting involves a host or hostess, a leader from your neighborhood group or organization and some guests. The host/hostess plans the house meeting with a neighborhood leader. They pick a time and date for the meeting, decide who to invite and plan what will happen. The host/hostess invites the guests. Five (guests) is a good number.

The house meeting itself should last an hour and a half, at most. During the meeting, the host/hostess and organization leader work together to make the guests feel comfortable, lead the discussion, present the issues of concern, and generate interest in the group. The goal of each house meeting is for the guests to become informed and involved. Each guest should leave with something specific to do. At the end of the meeting, it is a good idea for guests to leave with written information such as fact sheets, or a "things to do" list.

The host/hostess should follow up on the meeting by checking back with the guests to get their reactions and encourage their involvement. The organization leader should follow up with the host/hostess to evaluate the house meeting and discuss ways for the guests to become active members in the group.

A successful house meeting will inspire guests to join your group and possibly even sponsor their own house meeting. If your organization is growing at a fast pace through the use of house meetings, a coordinator should be selected who is responsible for keeping track of each house meeting, what actions people agreed to take, and who committed to them. A sample house meeting agenda is found in the appendix.

And remember to SERVE REFRESHMENTS!

THE 1ST NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Your first neighborhood meeting provides an opportunity for residents to learn, discuss issues, solve problems, and get to know one another. But if the meeting is not run efficiently, it will not be effective. More importantly, badly run meetings can discourage participation at future meetings and group activities. Remember that your first meeting will be different than future board, committee and general meetings. More information on planning those meeting can be found in chapter 3.

An effective meeting results in residents feeling they have made a contribution and that the organization is worthy of their time and has good direction. Below are eight basic steps that you can take to help ensure meeting is effective.

1. **Set goals -** Think about why you are having the meeting. Determine what you want to accomplish. Does the organization need to make decisions? Do committee assignments need to be made to accomplish a larger goal?
2. **Set up a meeting time and location -** If your organization will meet frequently, establish a standard meeting place, date and time. The location should be central and well-known with adequate parking. The size of the space should accommodate the anticipated attendance. Neighborhood centers, churches, schools and community centers are excellent. Weeknight meetings after 6:30 p.m. often have the best attendance.
3. **Prepare the agenda -** The agenda should be designed to help you meet your goals. Each topic should have a time limit and the name of the person addressing the topic. ***Limit the meeting to one and a half hours***. Here is a sample agenda:
    - Welcome and Introductions
    - Guest Speakers
        - Discuss neighborhood concerns
        - Make sure to ask people what issues are important to them
        - Determine your organizations goals possibly using a visioning session
            - Consider tackling short term achievable goals, like flower planting, that have immediate return on investment
            - Remember the City takes a long time to get things done, so include more structural things (like getting speed bumps in as longer term goals
        - Discuss what sort of organization you would like to form (more information in upcoming chapters)
        - Assign members to fill key roles
        - Suggest Agenda Items for Next Meeting
4. **Know who will attend** – Since this your first meeting it is extremely important that your proposed leadership team be at the meeting to run it effectively. You also want to ensure that as many neighbors are in attendance as possible. Make sure that everyone who attends signs in and a neighborhood list with contact info and addresses.
5. **Advertise the meeting -** If the entire neighborhood is invited, prepare a flier that is simple, yet eye catching. The flier should include the meeting date, time, location and purpose or goal. Fliers can be mailed, hand delivered, and posted on social media. Create a Facebook event of the meeting. Have your leadership team make reminder phone calls or texts to their neighbors. If only the leadership team is

meeting, mail a reminder notice or make phone calls.

6. **Set up the meeting space** - Arrange tables and chairs in a manner that is conducive to discussion. Set up displays or set out handouts before the meeting starts. Offer refreshments.
7. **Facilitate the meeting** - Have someone welcoming people as they come in. Start the meeting on time. Everyone should sign-in and someone should be taking notes or minutes. Follow the agenda, stick to the times allowed for each topic, and remain on-track. Encourage participation and summarize comments you hear. The meeting should focus on real problems rather than being a gripe session. Treat everyone with respect and remain open minded. Make sure that once a discussion about an issue is finished that the group is aware of final decisions, assignments and deadlines. Conclude the meeting on a positive note and thank everyone for attending. Consider inviting an experience facilitator to keep your meeting running smoothly and positively.
8. **Follow-up** - Confirm assignments or deadlines with a phone call or memo. Acknowledge help and significant contributions by others. Identify ways to improve the meeting and attendance. Make sure everyone knows how information will be passed out (newsletter, flyers, e-mail, etc)

Mayor Bernero speaks at the unveiling of the Osband Orchard Project. Photo Courtesy of Moores Park Neighborhood Organization.

Chapter 3 Getting Organized

Now that you've sparked the interest in the neighborhood, you need to decide how to carry that though. One of the most important questions is choosing how much, if any, formal organization you need is an important question in the life of a neighborhood. In Chapter 3, we provide some helpful considerations for new groups grappling with whether or not to form an organization, share suggestions on how to start a neighborhood organization, provide ideas for various functions to be addressed by neighborhood groups (if officers are not the way you choose to go), talk about preparing for neighborhood meetings, and then we also cover such topics as elections and representation, legal filing requirements, recordkeeping and bookkeeping, and outlining the basics of the Neighborhood Watch Program.

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SHOULD WE FORM AN ORGANIZATION? AND IF SO, WHAT KIND?

Form follows function. In other words, the organizational structure of any group of people should be designed to serve the group's needs. Too little organizational structure can limit a group's effectiveness, while too much can become a burden for the group's members.

For instance, in one neighborhood in Lansing, there is a well-established network among neighborhood residents – neighbors know each other and talk regularly about neighborhood goings-on. They also organize several annual neighborhood events, like a block party and holiday lights. They established boundaries, have bylaws, and elect officers, but they try to keep "organizational maintenance" to a minimum, so they don't have regular business meetings or a bank account.

In contrast, a nearby neighborhood publishes a quarterly newsletter, co-sponsors annual garden and home tours, actively fundraises, and has a scholarship program. To meet its organizational needs, it applied for and received tax-exempt status under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. They have quarterly neighborhood-wide meetings, including an annual meeting during which Board members are elected. The Board elects officers and has monthly business meetings.

These two groups have dramatically different organizational structures, but *neither has the better* structure. Both have adopted a form of structure that is appropriate for their needs.

The trick for you and your neighbors is to develop the type of organizational structure that meets your needs. Here are some types of organizational structures to choose from, including their advantages and disadvantages:

Organization Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
No formal structure	Limited energy put into organizational maintenance	Can't open bank accounts Can't participate in City's clean-up program Must partner with another organization to apply for Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board grants Less 'clout' with officials
Neighborhood Watch	Required phone trees are fantastic resources Can participate in City's clean-up program if in CDBG-eligible area	Some organizational upkeep required: Coordinator, Block Captains, phone tree, and annual meetings

	Can apply for Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board grants	
Neighborhood association (i.e., organizing document (e.g. bylaws), boundaries, board/officers)	Can apply for Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board grants Can participate in City's clean-up program if in CDBG-eligible area Can obtain EIN # from Feds for establishing a bank account	Maintenance of organization can be rather involved.

Don't forget that you can form more than one type of organization. For instance, you can form both a Neighborhood Watch and a neighborhood organization, thereby reaping the benefits of both. In fact, some neighborhood organizations are watches, some are associations, and some function as both.

If your group becomes a neighborhood organization, you may also become a State-registered nonprofit corporation and/or obtain federal tax-exempt status under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. As a nonprofit corporation, you may open a bank account, but you must also keep careful meeting and financial records (call 241-6400 or go to www.michigan.gov/cis for more information). As a 501(c) (3) organization, you are eligible to apply for many grants, but there are considerable record-keeping, bookkeeping, and filing requirements, which are too burdensome for most neighborhood groups (call (800) 829-3676 or go to www.irs.gov for more information).

Naturally, as the activities and needs of your group evolve, its need for organizational structure may also evolve, so it may be useful to review this document once every year or so.

HOW TO START NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

What is a Neighborhood Association?

A neighborhood association is a group of people organized for the good of a particular geographic area and exclusively accountable by democratic methods to the residents/property owners of that area. If you want to start a neighborhood group, check to make sure there isn't already a group your area that could meet your needs.

How is a Neighborhood Association Organized?

A neighborhood group may organize for different reasons; it could be because of crime, traffic, code compliance, zoning issues, or just to be eligible for resources of flowers or grants to help beautify the neighborhood.

To get started with organizing, one or more people need to talk to their neighbors to see if they would be interested in starting an association, organization, or watch. If you want to start a neighborhood group, but are unsure how to set up an agenda for your first meeting, you can contact the Neighborhood Resource Coordinator through the City of Lansing. The current coordinator is Andi Crawford. She can be reached at andi.crawford@lansingmi.gov or her cell phone number, which is (517)410-3904. If needed, she can also attend your first meeting to help explain what a neighborhood group does and opportunities for your group. Don't be afraid to ask her questions you may have.

After creating your neighborhood group, most groups create a board—which includes a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc. These individuals will help keep the group on task and provide leadership and a listening ear to the group.

Many neighborhood groups have holiday parties, Halloween parties, picnics, Easter egg hunts, and numerous other social events to bring neighbors together. They also have fundraisers throughout the year to help raise money for youth opportunities, senior programs, or anything else needed in the neighborhood.

You also have the opportunity to attend Leaders in Neighborhood and Community Service (LiNCS) meetings. These meetings work to have community and neighborhood groups collaborate in order to create an efficient means of getting information out to Lansing citizens. They are held the last Thursday of each month at 6:00pm and the last Friday of each month at 8:00am and noon. They are held at the Neighborhood Empowerment Center, located at 600 W. Maple.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM

The Neighborhood Watch Program is a highly successful effort that has been in existence for more than thirty years in cities and counties across the United States. It provides a unique infrastructure that brings together local officials, law enforcement and citizens to protect our communities.

Concerned citizens who work together to establish a Neighborhood Watch understand that the active participation of neighborhood residents is a critical element in community safety - not through vigilantism, but simply through a willingness to look out for suspicious activity in their neighborhood, and to report that activity to law enforcement and to each other. In doing so, residents take a major step toward reclaiming high-crime neighborhoods, as well as making people throughout a community feel more secure and less fearful.

A Watch consists of a Coordinator, Block Captains, and Watch Members. The Coordinator serves as the liaison between the Watch and the police department. The Coordinator also is responsible for sharing information with the Block Captains. Block Captains keep Watch Members who live in their block updated about important information. Watch Members are the "eyes and ears" of the Watch. The success of a Neighborhood Watch depends on neighbors who are alert and who communicate with each other.

Requirements of a neighborhood watch include a once a year meeting and that they give an annual to the Neighborhood and Business Watch Officer. If you are interested in creating or joining a watch, contact the Neighborhood and Business Watch Officer. If a neighborhood watch already exists, he or she will give your information to the watch coordinator, who then may choose to contact you. Information on watches are kept confidential in order to ensure the safety of those involved.

The Police Department has numerous resources on how to start a watch and can answer any questions you may have. You can find these resources at http://www.lansingmi.gov/neighborhood_watch . To answer any further questions you may have, contact the Neighborhood and Business Watch Officer. The current officer in this position is Penni Elton. She can be called at (517) 483-6812 or emailed at lpdcsu@lansingmi.gov

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD INITIAL ISSUE

One factor that will have a huge impact on the form of the organization is why it exists. Below are a few guidelines on choosing your initial issue.

Good issues:

- Have clear, easily understood solutions
- Focus on a clear target—w ho can be exposed and pressured
- Grab attention and are eye-opening
- Are widely and deeply felt
- Are timely
- Increase your organization's membership, leadership and funding base
- Unite people
- Affect and involve a lot of people
- Build your neighborhoods' organization
- Expand the educational and analytical ability of your members
- Provide achievable goals (even if the issue is not winnable)
- Can alter power relations
- Stimulate a high level of "buy in"
- Come from a member of the neighborhood rather than an outsider

HOW TO FRAME AN ISSUE

An issue is different from a problem. There may be many urgent problems in a neighborhood, but…

An issue is something that you can do something about.

In building an organization or strengthening a neighborhood, we must remember that people are tired of losing; they've been losing their entire lives. The goal of this organization is to build the power we need to *win*.

This implies that there first must be a strong interest, anger or the *potential to mobilize* large numbers of people around the issue of concern. For example, would the issue draw 50 to 100 people from your church if we took action on it? Second, we must target something we can win to resolve the problem.

So we ask these questions: Is it controversial? Is it immediate, specific and winnable?

Immediate

- What's controversial right now? (It is very tough to work on flooding during the dry season or a school crossing guard during summer vacation).
- People feel it strongly- *it is affecting them now*.
- Something that we can win quickly (People lose interest after 2-4 weeks).

Specific

- Not crime, but… burglaries between 8:00 pm &10:00 pm
- Not vagrants, but… the three transients that are using the vacant house on 3rd street
- Not bad roads, but… two huge potholes on Magnolia and Francis.

Winnable

- Something important enough for 25-40 people to work together to resolve
- Something small enough to allow a reasonably good chance of success
- Since it's always a bit of a gamble, we must have a decent chance of putting the odds overwhelmingly in our favor
- We can increase the odds in our favor by increasing the number of people involved having all the necessary information. Contact the press and media to enlist public support

Internal Vs. External Issues

- Our job is to unite not divide our neighborhood
- A problem with a person who lives outside the neighborhood is different from a grievance between neighbors.

Issues to Avoid

These "hot" issues have the potential to split your organization:

- Owners vs. Renters in the same neighborhood
- Adults vs. youth are generally very divisive and should be avoided

Roles in an Informal Neighborhood Group

One trap that new groups can fall into is the "Large Organization Wannabe Trap." This is when a small and relatively informal group of three or four people thinks that it has to elect officers and establish by-laws in order to do anything. It may not be necessary, or even practical, for such small groups to aspire to so much organizational structure. Rather than beginning with an excess of emphasis on organizational structure, you may wish to think about "fitting" the level of organization with the personality of your group. Are there individuals present who will only feel comfortable being involved in a group that has a board, by-laws, and a copy of Robert's Rules of Order? Conversely, are there people present who are adamantly opposed to so much formality?

Regardless of how you decide to organize your group, here are some **functions that may need to be addressed**. The "titles" associated with each function are optional, of course, and may be taken on (or changed) by individuals who volunteer to handle those specific functions. Further, a single person may handle more than one function.

Contact Person: Someone who is willing to give their phone number and address to neighbors, agencies, and City Departments, and serve as a conduit for information.

Record Keeper: Someone who will maintain a box or file with: a notebook for keeping track of who attends meetings, a copy of the agendas and minutes from meetings, a telephone directory of neighbors and other important numbers, other organizational information (by-laws, etc.), notes from previously planned events, and any mementos such as photos, flyers, news clippings, or written histories of the area. Google Docs is also a great resource for putting these documents online in a digital format in order to keep the documents for many years without cluttering space or having to be physically transferred from record keeper to record keeper.

Meeting Coordinator: Someone who will set up the place to meet, create an agenda (by calling or emailing anyone who might have relevant agenda items, such as the record keeper, contact person, or calendar czar), and facilitate the actual meeting. The meeting coordinator is also responsible for collaborating with the flyer captain and/or the phone tree guru to make sure that the neighborhood is informed about the meeting. If refreshments are to be part of the meeting, then the meeting coordinator would also take care of this or work with someone else (the "refreshment king" to do it).

Calendar Czar: Someone who will keep track of important dates, look ahead to plan when things need to happen, and who will remind others of approaching deadlines. It makes sense for the contact person also to play this role, as the contact person often receives the mail and can more easily keep track of upcoming events.

Flyer Captain: Someone who is willing and able to type up a flyer on their computer that is attractive and informative and get it duplicated and to the Delivery Captain in a timely fashion.

Delivery Captain: Someone who either can deliver the flyers or who can coordinate others in the delivery of the flyers to the neighborhood (usually a couple of days prior to the meeting or event date.)

Phone Tree Guru: Someone who calls everyone to remind them of meetings or events, or who works with other phone tree "officials" to make those calls.

Finance Officer: In the beginning, this is someone to take up a collection to cover costs, who handles the "money things" and who makes financial reports to the members. Later, if it becomes necessary, the finance officer would be responsible for setting up a checking account, making deposits, etc.

Social Media Chair: This person would be in charge of maintaining your Facebook , Twitter, Instagram, or other social media pages. They should update these pages at least a couple times a week and distribute any flyers you may have onto them.

Then as your group add activities to its agenda, create new captains or committees or any other title that seems to fit (Junk King, Flower Lady, Computer Guy, Party Hostess, etc).

When using this method, remember to choose one month during the calendar year when you will assess and re-assign the various functions/jobs. This avoids elections but also allows someone to do their part and then move on to something else, if they wish. If nobody wants to do a job, then perhaps you can eliminate that activity? If it is vital, re-think how often you meet (some groups meet every month, every other month, quarterly, or during the holidays and 4th of July or once a year), or perhaps divide the job in two.

This method of organizing encourages more people to get involved because their jobs are well defined and finite which makes people more comfortable in volunteering. There is also a sense that everyone is doing his or her part, which encourages more involvement. This method also lends itself well to passing around the leadership so you don't get as much burnout or personality conflict as in the more formal "titles, elections, and terms of office" method.

OFFICER DUTIES IN A TRADITIONAL ASSOCIATION

If you choose to organize as a traditionally structured organization, here is one interpretation of officer duties.

Duties of the President
The President shall preside at membership and board meetings. He or she shall exercise general supervision over the organizational affairs of the corporation and shall perform other such duties as usually pertain to the office of the President. The President shall sign checks as needed.

Duties of the Vice President
At the request of the President, or in the event of his or her temporary or permanent absence, the Vice President shall be authorized to perform all acts and duties pertaining to the office of the President.

Duties of the Secretary
The Secretary or his/her assistants shall attend all membership and board meetings and shall preserve in the records of the organization accurate minutes of the proceedings at said meetings. The Secretary or his/her assistant shall also maintain a register or roll of the members, all other corporate records except those maintained by the Treasurer, and call the roll when required.

Duties of the Treasurer
The Treasurer shall have general supervision of the banking, all monies, and the safekeeping of all property, which shall be given to or vested in the organization/ association. He or she oversees the keeping of accurate accounts of the assets and liabilities as well as receipts and expenditures of the organization/association and shall deliver the same to the Board at their request. The treasurer will sign checks as needed.

City Council Member, Kathie Dunbar and City Employee, Joe McDonald are having a good time at a Moores Park Neighborhood Organization event. Photo Courtesy of MPNO.

ELECTIONS

Elections are an important aspect of representation. It is a good idea to affirm roles that folks play on an annual basis, usually done at the same time each year. Some organizations have term limits, which can great assist in building the leadership capacity of your neighborhood organization.

Bylaws must be read and followed in the election process. If a nominating committee is chosen to identify candidates and make sure that people are willing to serve, the members need to think in terms of representation. The nominating committee must be prepared to present a slate of officers in advance of the election. Nominations from the floor should also be requested.

If you must be a dues paying member to vote, it is important to have the records present at the meeting of those who have paid dues. If paying dues at the time is acceptable, have a receipt book or other receipting device on hand. Prepare ballots in advance. To protect the voting process, prepare ballots with colored paper or ink so that the real ballot is not easy to duplicate. Include on the ballot previously nominated candidates, as well as black space for write-in candidates nominated from the floor. Ask two responsible persons who are organization members, but not candidates, to gather and count the ballots. Announcing the winners without announcing the number of votes cast for various candidates is usually accepted. Observers are sometimes allowed but they may not touch the ballots or interfere with the votes.

To use your meeting time well while votes are counted, offer a speaker and/or refreshments and social time.

Bylaws or some other understanding is necessary to decide whether the voting unit is a family, a house, or an individual in advance of the election. Arguments about spouses who disagree on the candidates, adult children who want a more active role, people who do not live within the boundaries of the association but may own property, a business or be employed in the area have all made reasonable presentations on why they should be allowed to vote. Elections should be celebrations of the health and growth of the group, not reasons to walk away mad.

REPRESENTATION

Regardless of whether you decide to go the formal or informal route, you need to make sure that all parties are represented in your organization. Good representation is when you are able to demonstrate that different sections of the neighborhood, or residents with different interests, are having a real opportunity to present and address their concerns.

When groups are first organizing in Lansing, one of the basic questions they must address is: "What geographical boundaries does our organization serve?" If the geographical area is too big, it is very difficult to have one-on-one conversations about the needs and desires of people who live in the area.

At the City Council level, Lansing copes with the problem of large geographical areas by electing some Council members from specific "wards" that directly represent neighbors in that ward, while electing other "at large" Council members serve the City as a whole. Similarly, a neighborhood association could have representatives elected on the basis of membership in a Neighborhood Watch, apartment complex, or close knit single family home area while others attempt to see the entire area and its connection with nearby neighborhoods, a neighborhood center or social service resource and the neighborhood schools.

If all of the officers or board members live near each other, they can meet informally. Members who are not so close may feel left out. A real effort to reach out is necessary until broader representation is possible.

Mayor Bernero poses for a picture with a couple of Moores Park neighborhood residents. Photo Courtesy of MPNO.

STARTING A BANK ACCOUNT

Opening a Bank Account for Neighborhood Funds

Most Neighborhood Associations accumulate money for their organization and projects. These steps will address what kind of bank account should be opened and how to go about opening a bank account for your organization.

Step One:

DETERMINE SEVERAL THINGS BEFORE OPENING AN ACCOUNT

- Who will be the signers on the account?
- What type of account? Will it be for checking or savings?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining financial records?
- How will these records be audited?

Step Two:

OBTAIN A TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

A tax identification number is a federal tax number that is assigned by the Internal Revenue Service to entities; it is called an Employer Identification Number. This number enables a bank to report earnings of an association's account to the IRS for tax filing purposes. Prior to opening an account a bank is required to obtain this number from an association, even if the account does not pay interest.

To apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN), a form SS-4 must be completed. This form is often available at your bank or can be obtained on the IRS website at http://1.usa.gov/18bJ7JL or by calling 1-800- 829-4933. Once completed, you can call the IRS at 1-800-829-4933, and IRS representative will use the information from the Form SS-4 to assign you an EIN or you can simply apply online. Also, a copy of form SS-4 is included with this account opening information.

Step Three:
Gather other necessary documentation

If you have filed as a Michigan nonprofit corporation, you must bring a copy of the Articles of Incorporation stamped "Filed" by the corporation. Bring a copy of your bylaws or minutes of your first meeting if you are note a corporation.

Step Four:
Opening the account

It is ideal if all signers on the account can be present when the account is opened. Personal identification such as a driver's license (which shows the expiration date) will be required of each signer. At this time signature cards will also be signed. Your corporate board or the members of an unincorporated association must adopt a resolution authorizing the bank account. The bank will provide you with this resolution.

BOARD LIABILITY

(Adapted from Washington Library Trustee liability report)

Governing boards are generally legally responsible for the HR decisions and following applicable state law as well as the groups own by-laws. A board can be sued even if the board is non-liable and acted in an appropriate manner. Because this can cost groups legal fees even if the suit is without merit it is recommended that groups consult legal advice and attend continuing education sessions on board liability.

A general principle to be aware of is that board members do not have power as individuals. The power of a trustee is derived from the board. If an individual is acting in a capacity officially authorized by the board they will normally be protected from personal liability. If, however, such action was not officially authorized, that member may be held personally liable.

Boards can be protected from personal liability under the group's insurance policy. Consult your legal consul to ensure your coverage is adequate.

Residents learn about Lansing Love Your Block at South Lansing Community Development Association. Photo Courtesy of Lansing Love Your Block.

RECORDKEEPING AND BOOKKEEPING

Recordkeeping and bookkeeping can be daunting, but if you start right and follow through it allows your organization to achieve its goals. These two simple rules will make recording easier.

1. Keep it simple.
2. Keep all records in one place
3. Make it digital

Once you have a place to keep your records you need to develop a method for arranging them. A few common ones are:

1. Check number order
2. Alphabetically in file folders
3. In envelopes per month
4. Chronologically by deposit or payment date
5. Keep hard copies of ballots, but upload all the information and agendas online

Records should be self-explanatory

A good way to approach record keeping is to think of it in a way that anyone should be able to walk in and take over without ANY questions. That implies that your system should be easily understandable and all records accessible with all pertinent information, i.e. deposit information filed chronologically, paid bills filed numerically by check number. It is actually a good idea to have a backup perform functions periodically such as when the regular person is on vacation.

Most organizations have at least four major categories: Receipts, Disbursements, Correspondence and Miscellaneous. This section will discuss what you need to include in each of these categories.

Receipts:

All monies received either cash or check need to be recorded immediately. This can be through a cash receipt book, where the payer receives a receipt and you have a carbon intact in the book. Use a book that is already prenumbered, and keep the use consecutive. Ideally, the person opening the mail, writing the receipt and stamping the check "deposit only" should not be the same person making the deposits or doing the bookkeeping. At a special event where currency is received, two people should collect and count the cash. Deposits should be made timely and intact in an account authorized annually by the Board of Directors. Do not pay expenses from cash receipts. List the payers on the deposit slip. Carbon deposit slips should be used. A good way to record the items for deposit is in the same order as the receipts were written. This avoids a missed or overlooked item. If there is a check remittance advice or other document attached to the check, this should either be kept with the deposit slip or attached to the corresponding receipt. After the deposit is made, the bank receipt should be stapled to a carbon copy of the deposit slip.

Disbursements

A cash disbursement is the payment for a good or service. A checking account should be used for this purpose. A financial institution that returns the cancelled check is best. Carbon copies are another option. Avoid cash payouts whenever possible. For a few minor payments, a petty cash system can be utilized. It should be an imprest system – meaning that any given time the total amount of cash and receipts add up to the amount setup as petty cash. Ex. If the petty cash is up to $50, the cash and receipts for payments ALWAYS need to equal $50. The petty cash fund should be the responsibility of one person.

No matter which system is used, all documents need to have the same information on it. That information needs to include:

- Date of purchase
- Amount of service/product
- Name of vendor
- What the product/service is for

All documentation needs to be ORIGINAL. I the case of reimbursing someone who put a cost on their charge card, you need to keep the original receipt and they get a photocopy for their records. For an individual requesting mileage or payment for service, they should handwrite an invoice noting the above information and SIGN it BEFORE payment. Do NOT pay from statements. When a payment is made – The invoice should be noted as PAID listing the date and check number.

Optimally, at least two people should be involved at all times. One should authorize the expenditures and the other should actually write the check. All checks should require two signatures of individuals authorized by the Board of Directors. Invoices should be available for the signers review. NEVER sign a blank check. If the amount cannot be determined in advance (because the check is needed at an event) at least fill in the payee and date. Mutilate voided checks.

Bank reconciliations should be prepared by someone not making deposits or writing checks. If this is not possible, the bank reconciliations should be reviewed and signed by a second individual, preferable the Board President.

Correspondence

All pertinent information, letters received should be kept in the organization's record for a length of time. I have included a guide for the keeping of some documentation. This information can be kept in a file marked "correspondence" or put in a monthly file/envelope or scan the correspondence and keep them online and on your computer.

Miscellaneous

Try to set a specified time aside regularly to do organization's stuff. At ALL costs do not co-mingle your organization's and your personal monies or expenses. In the case of purchasing items along with your personal shopping, have the organization's item rung up on a separate receipt where possible. Otherwise circle the appropriate items on your receipt, total them and use for your backup and get reimbursed through the regular disimbursement process. Do not "net" revenue and expenses at an event. If you MUST, keep detailed records of what was paid from the revenue ad record this in your accounting records. This gives you a better picture of the true revenue and expenses of the event and insures that controls are in place. Because appearances are so important, every step should be taken to insure the safeguarding of the organization's assets. Ex. If the organization has a copy machine and you use it for the organization business but use your electricity – can you use it for personal business?

Again appearances are important. I would suggest that some sort of agreement be in writing allowing for example, so many copies at no charge for personal use to offset your electrical expense. Again two or more people need to be involved, not a trust issue as much as an appearance and CYA. Common sense and courtesy should be foremost here.

Sample records and a list of required records are included in the appendix. Whatever you decide

- Keep it Simple
- Keep it Together

CHAPTER 4 MOVING FORWARD: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & MANAGEMENT

Volunteers power neighborhoods and their organizations. Volunteering helps in the building of strong and cohesive communities. It fosters trust between people and helps develop norms of solidarity and reciprocity that are essential to stable communities. Volunteering can be defined as "*any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment*." In Chapter 4, we suggest ways to encourage volunteering in your neighborhood, talk about reasons for a lack of volunteer participation, and share ideas for recognizing and celebrating volunteer accomplishments.

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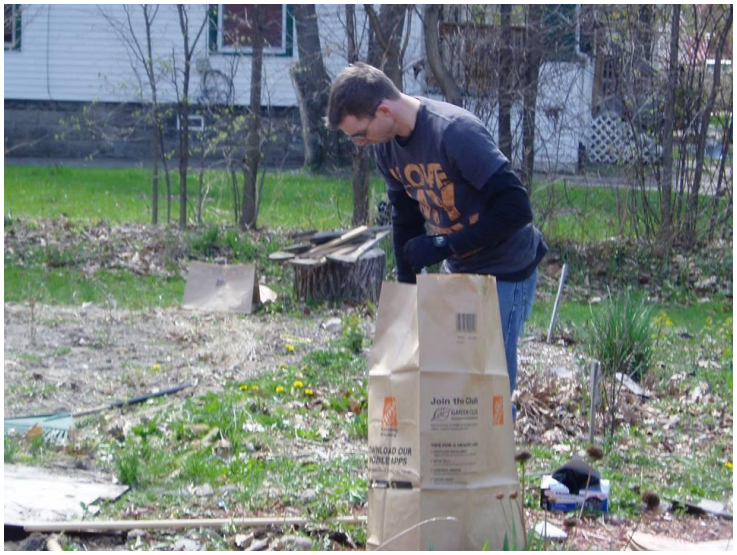

A volunteer cleans up Holmes Street School Community Garden.
Photo Courtesy of Holmes Street School neighborhood.

ENCOURAGING VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Different people have different reasons for volunteering. Some people will want to get involved in meetings and decision making while others are happier just to come in, do their task, and then go. Regardless of the level of commitment, it is important that volunteers feel they will get something in return for their time and effort. Some of the returns might be satisfaction, learning new skills, helping others, gaining information, meeting people, being included, solving a problem, having fun, and personal fulfillment.

We can encourage participation in our neighborhood activities and organizations by:

- Welcoming people to the organization;
- Being open and clear about our purpose and goals;
- Giving people an opportunity to work on a specific project;
- Listening;
- Appreciating whatever level of commitment someone can make;
- Continuously recruiting;
- Matching people's interests to the volunteer work they do;
- Finding out what others are interested in;
- Always recognizing people for the work they do;
- Making one-on-one connections;
- Giving people a variety of volunteer options to choose from;
- Find out and tap into whatever motivates them;
- Appeal to people's higher purpose, their heart strings;
- Identify the strengths, talents, and skills of neighbors so that they can be invited to help in ways that are meaningful to them; and
- Sponsor volunteer commitment campaigns through which people are asked to pledge a small number of hours over a year's time to a specific volunteer activity.

Groups may initially attract members and volunteers through well-publicized meetings on issues that concern many or projects that involve lots of people. If your group is in the public eye, it will certainly boost membership. After the publicity dies away and the problem is solved, active members may disappear.

Therefore, continually finding new members is crucial to keeping neighborhood organizations alive. While many people appreciate what the group is doing for the neighborhood, they may not attend meetings or even come in direct contact with your neighborhood organization.

To maximize membership potential, your neighborhood organization could:

- Undertake a membership drive that directly reaches every household. This might include going door-to-door to every household, armed with printed material and sign up sheets;
- Encourage every board member to bring a neighbor to the meeting;
- Host meetings as potluck dinners;
- Insure that meetings are run well and purposefully, so that people feel their time is spent well.

IDEAS FOR STRENGHTENING AND INCREASING MEMBERSHIP

- **Potluck Suppers**: potluck suppers are festive events and can be modified to suit any occasion. For example, your organization could sponsor a holiday potluck supper preceded by a songfest or caroling in the community. In addition to bringing people together, potluck suppers can be used to attract new members or thank volunteers.
- **Game Nights and Movie Nights**: Hosting game and movie nights are excellent ways to get people in the neighborhood socializing, having fun, eating (assuming you offer refreshments!), and getting to know one another. And the better people know one another, the more likely they are to work with each other to accomplish goals for the neighborhood.
- **Cleanup Days**: A cleanup day is an important way to boost community spirit, involve the community-at-large in your organization, and let everyone know that your group works for the betterment of all.
- **Logo Contest**: Logos are an important part of a group's identity. Sponsoring a logo contest is one way to involve residents of all ages and gain publicity for your organization. Contest entries can be displayed at a prominent location, such as a local bank, and judged by a panel. Prizes, donated by local businesses, could be awarded to winners and runners-up.
- **Block Party**: A block party is a sure-fire way to bring people out and get them together at a pancake breakfast, bar-b-que, ice cream social or similar activity. The block party encourages residents to get to know each other and to spread the word about current or planned neighborhood activities. It is useful to have neighborhood newsletters, brochures, and other neighborhood information displayed at the party.
- **Restoration Celebration**: By bringing do-it-yourselfers together for a social hour, your neighborhood group can reinforce home improvement momentum while simultaneously bringing in new members. These gatherings could be held on a regular basis; perhaps in newly renovated homes so that guests can see for themselves the many benefits of self-initiated home repair, discuss mutual repair problems, and exchange ideas and suggestions on how to fix up older houses. And newly restored home-owners often love to share with others about the work they've done – and you might even get house tours!

Using Social Media

Social Media has become a valuable resource in this digital age. While mailings and paper flyers are a great way to connect to the aging population, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, along with having your own website, are great ways to stay connected with the rest of your neighborhood. Have someone be the administrator of your pages and keep them up to date on a weekly basis in order to keep your neighborhood group fresh in everyone's mind.

Great ways of staying connected to your neighborhood are:

- Do a weekly neighbor highlight. Ask one neighbor to pose with his or her flower garden that looks especially great or talk about the amazing work they are doing the community. This is a simple screenshot for neighbors to get to know one another. Have neighbors submit to be highlighted if they want to proclaim the cool thing they are doing. Maybe the star of the high school basketball team or someone who's writing the next great American novel lives in your neighborhood. This would be a great way to find out. Take their picture with the neighborhood's Instagram account and connect the account to Facebook and Twitter in order to get the picture widely circulated.

- You can also do Instagram or Twitter challenge in various ways. Have neighbors post pictures or write what they think makes their neighborhood unique. Come up with a central hashtag to use, so everyone can see what is being posted.

- Post the agendas of upcoming neighborhood meetings to your website and Facebook page, so everyone has the opportunity to see what is going on. This way if a topic is of particular interest to a resident, they have the opportunity to see that is going to be discussed and will come to tell the group their thoughts on the subject.

- You can use social media to create Facebook events on upcoming fundraisers or block parties, raise awareness to an issue in your neighborhood, distribute flyers electronically (time and cost saving), and have a constant stream of up to date information on happenings in the neighborhood.

Like/follow the City's social media pages to see some best practices at work.

City of Lansing Facebook: facebook.com/CityofLansingmi
City of Lansing Twitter: twitter.com/LansingMichigan
City of Lansing Instagram: instagram.com/cityoflansingmi

Lansing Public Service Department Facebook: facebook.com/LansingPublicService
Lansing Public Service Department Twitter: twitter.com/LansingPubServ

REASONS FOR A LACK OF VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

1) The volunteers might not have a clear understanding of what they are supposed to do, when it is to be done by, or why.

2) The volunteers might not be accustomed to working with the others in the group.

3) Volunteers working together on a project may not get along.

4) Volunteers who don't do what they say they are going to do may erode trust in the group and lead to apathy among other members.

5) A volunteer might feel badly about not following through in the past, so they disappear thinking that others are mad or annoyed.

6) Members fail to participate because they are overloaded and overworked. The organization may recruit the same people to do everything, but by trying to do everything, their members let some things slide along the way.

7) Perhaps the organization has become "leader dependent." Members may be unable or unwilling to participate because for too long one or two at the top have done all the work and made all the decisions, leaving others to stand by and act as rubber stamps.

8) Communication and information sharing may be lacking, so members do not feel part of the group and included in such activities as making decisions.

9) Members cannot see the rewards resulting from participation.

10) Members feel powerless; did not have any successes.

11) Members do not want to participate in a group that wastes their time because the group does not operate effectively and efficiently.

12) Members are not able to work on activities of their choice.

13) Members have been doing the same thing for too long; they may be burned out.

14) The neighborhood may not be rewarding and acknowledging the contributions of its volunteers effectively.

IDEAS FOR RECOGNIZING AND CELEBRATING VOLUNTEER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DAILY MEANS OF RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEERS

- Saying thank you
- Telling them they did a good job
- Suggesting they join you for coffee
- Asking for their opinions
- Greeting them when they arrive
- Showing interest in their ideas
- Smiling when you see them
- Bragging about them to others
- Jotting small thank you notes to them
- Saying good night
- Talking to them about how their day went
- Saying something positive about their personal qualities
- Showing interest in their personal lives

INTERMEDIATE MEANS OF RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEERS

- Taking them to breakfast, lunch, or dinner
- Letting them put their names on products they produce
- Writing them a letter of commendation (with copies to personnel file and other appropriate people)
- Getting a radio station they listen to mention them/their project
- Putting them on important task-forces
- Posting graphic displays, showing progress of project
- Have them present their results to higher-ups
- Writing newsletter articles about their contributions
- Having them present a training session to other or new volunteers
- Celebrating their birthdays
- Celebrating major accomplishments
- Sending letters of thanks to their families

MAJOR MEANS OF RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEERS

- Making special caps, shirts, belt buckles, or pins honoring them
- Encouraging them to write an article about some accomplishment of theirs
- Giving them a plaque, certificate, or trophy for being Volunteer of the Year, etc.
- Renting billboard or newspaper space to thank them

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Chapter 5 Organizing Activities, Events & Projects

In Chapter 5, you will find a variety of tools to assist you in planning and organizing activities, events, and projects. We outline seven steps to conducting an event, include a useful generic event checklist as well as several event-specific "checklists" to aid in planning, share ideas for creating a neighborhood newsletter, and finally we include a section on calendars and planning to help you plan for the many possible activities you can participate in throughout the year.

For more detailed information on events, please see the beginning of this handbook.

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Holmes Street School organizes an annual Yard Sale for the community. Photo courtesy of Holmes Street School Neighborhood.

THE SEVEN STEPS TO CONDUCTING AN EVENT

1) **Choose the type of event.**
   a) What is the overall primary goal?
   b) Is it educational? Fund-raising? Organizational celebration/relationship builder? Other?

2) **Recruit the planning committee.**
   a) Planning committee should be made up of board members and other neighborhood volunteers.
   b) There should be at least two or more co-chair people to oversee the process. Decide if there should be subcommittees for program/promotion/fund-raising/refreshments/decorations, etc.

3) **Create a master task list and budget for each of the following areas.**
   a) Program: What are all the things that need to be done in order to hold the event? What makes the event fun? What will be the financial costs for conducting the event?
   b) Promotion: What mediums will you use to promote the event in order to guarantee turnout? What will be the costs of this effort? Will there be invitations? Flyers to remind people? Newsletter articles? Facebook event? Online Flyer or newsletter? Etc?
   c) Fund-raising: What will be the fund-raising plan in order to cover the costs or to raise money for the organization? Examples are ticket sales, rattle ticket sales, sponsors, ad book/program book, etc. How much will the fund-raising efforts cost?
   d) Refreshments: What kinds of refreshments are needed? A meal or just snacks? Should the event be catered? Should you try and find a sponsor? Should it be potluck? How about drinks? How about plates, cups, bowls, napkins, silverware, serving utensils, etc?
   e) Decorations: who will decorate the event? What will be included: balloons? Party favors? Flowers? Streamers? Banners? Etc?

4) **Develop a timeline.**
   a) It is important that the time line be realistic in order to allow for all of time needed to carry out every task of the event.

5) **Divide up and assign work.**
   a) Assign the tasks to subcommittees or individuals. When you assign a task to someone with no event experience, you might consider whether it would be advantageous to assign it to a two or three person team in order to guarantee that it happens.

6) **Carry out all tasks and hold event.**

7) **Evaluate and reward volunteers.**
   a) Conduct a written evaluation of the event: what went well, what went wrong, and how could it be improved?
   b) If this event is going to become an annual or repeated one, be sure that you document all of the steps in order to leave a blueprint for future guide and reference. And remember to save your evaluations from previous years to remind you what went well in the past, what you wouldn't repeat, etc.
   c) Recognize all the people -- board, volunteers, supporters, and collaborators-who worked on the event. Recognize them individually and publicly at membership meeting, in your newsletter, on Facebook/Twitter/other social media, or with a special dinner. If applicable, take time at the event to recognize the volunteers.

Volunteers pass out water at the Lansing Marathon. Photo courtesy of Holmes Street School.

GENERAL EVENT CHECKLIST

The following checklist provides a general outline of tasks that probably have to be done (or at least considered) for most any event that you plan. If you anticipate needing a noise waiver or small street closure, please fill out this form 30 days advance of the event: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/Street_Closure_Noise_Waiver_form/3815
If you anticipate needing a major road closure or higher capacity event, please fill out the SEPA form located on the next page.

- ❑ Choose a coordinator or planning committee for the event.
- ❑ Determine day, time and place of event.
- ❑ Develop and distribute flyers or invitations, including:
  - ✓ day, time, place
  - ✓ sponsor names
  - ✓ potluck information, if necessary
  - ✓ program information (i.e. what can people look forward to)
  - ✓ RSVP information, if necessary
  - ✓ Contact person and phone number
- ❑ Secure funding: seek grants from the City's Neighborhood Advisory Board, approach local businesses like Meijer, etc. and ask for donations, sponsor the event through neighbor donations, etc.
- ❑ Find volunteers to help with various aspects of the event, such as distributing flyers, set-up, and clean-up.
- ❑ Consider what goals you want the event to accomplish and what should be on the agenda.
- ❑ After the event, say thank you to your volunteers. This can be done with a follow up party to celebrate your accomplishments, through a neighborhood newsletter article, a shout out on social media, or through individualized thank you notes.
- ❑ Evaluate your event and make notes about what went well and what you might do differently in the future.

CHECKLIST FOR MAJOR EVENT PLANNING

PLANNING

- Ideally, planning should begin **a minimum** of eight to twelve weeks in advance. If you are anticipating major street closures or alcohol sale on public property, please fill out and follow the necessary guidelines on this form: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/SEPA_Form/3814
- Contact all principals, participants, clear date, time, and place.
- Write preliminary scenario.
  - Determine nature of event: What goes on? Funding announcement; dedication; groundbreaking; sign lease; ribbon-cutting; first occupant moves in; etc.
  - Set date, time, place. If outdoors, chose alternate site or rain date in case of bad weather. Check to see if there is WiFi at the venue.
  - Determine key elected officials/celebrities that need to be invited
- Entertainment (as appropriate)—music, gospel choir, dj, etc.
- Tents (as appropriate)
- Stage, podium, sound system, lighting (as appropriate)
- Tables, chairs
- Personal letters inviting speakers to participate
- Site visit w/ key planners within 6 weeks before event to plan setup, scope out potential snafus
- Hire caterer, or arrange for refreshments (as appropriate)
- Determine source and responsibility for any on-site visuals to be produced in advance, e.g., mounted photos or drawings, banners, power point presentations.
- Get easels, if necessary.

INVITATIONS

- Create master guest list: neighbors, organizations, government/community officials, etc.
- Determine format: "Dear Friend…" letter (whose letterhead?), printed card?, Facebook invite, other
- Determine RSVP protocol, person(s) responsible for keeping track of guest list/responses
- Review list to be sure that all officials concerned are included: city, county, state, congress (as appropriate, w/ personal letter of invitation)

PROCLAMATIONS

- Write, approve copy
- Send w/ cover letter to appropriate elected official's office (mayor, governor, senator)

REMARKS

- Draft/approve remarks as appropriate for speakers, who should receive text AT LEAST 48 hours before the event.

FINAL SCENARIO

- Write a 1-sheet program outline with date, time, place, key participants, purpose and speakers' sequence, including main points for each speaker to cover.

- All involved should have this within the week before the event.
- Distribute to all participants and news media at the event.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- Create media list
  - If event is in state capitol; include state capitol press room, wire service bureaus
- Determine whether to use PR Newswire
- Determine press kit contents, write, approve copy:
  - Editorial Board letter
  - Pitch letter
  - Media Alert
  - Media Advisory
  - News Release
  - Op-eds
  - Backgrounders, fact sheets
- Mail/email media advisory to be received one week before event.
- Mail/email news release to Lansing State Journal, City Pulse, etc. and to Radio/TV Reports to ensure monitoring
- Messenger/email embargoed advance press kits as appropriate.
- Mail/email/call media alert to be received 1-2 days before event.
- Work with media by phone during the week before the event.
- Set up editorial board meetings following event—optimum: same day.
- Issue full press kits/news release on day of event.
- Send pitch letters along with photos/clippings to (as appropriate):
  - Radio/TV talk show hosts/producers (local/national)
  - Editorial writers, editorial page editors
  - Feature writers/producers for national media, news wires, networks

SIGNAGE/DECORATIONS

- Banners
- Balloons
- Flowers
- Directional sign, if necessary (e.g., for a building tour or bathrooms) Please keep in mind the City Sign Ordinance (no signs in right of ways, utility poles, etc.) Contact the Zoning Adminstrator at 517-483-4060 for more information on the ordinance.

ON THE DAY BEFORE THE EVENT

- Call all media—city desks/assignment desks—to see if they plan to cover. Learn if it went out on city newswire.
- Assemble goodies to bring to event (REMEMBER DUCT TAPE).

ON THE DAY OF THE EVENT

- Call all assignment desks, city desks between 7 & 9 AM to get an idea of press attendance.

AT THE EVENT

- Bring with:
  - Adequate number of scenarios/program outlines

- ☐ Adequate number of press kits, plus extra
- ☐ Blank white paper
- ☐ Pens/pencils/markers
- ☐ Legal pad—for media sign-in sheet
- ☐ Stationary—labels, note & letter stock, envelopes
- ☐ Large flat envelopes
- ☐ Duct tape (better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it)
- ☐ Scissors (same goes here)
- ☐ Tape recorder (be sure to have fresh batteries!)

- Arrive **at least** 2 hours before scheduled start.
- Locate bathrooms.
- Supervise sound, podium, lighting setup, if appropriate.
- Have photographer arrive ½ hour before start; as they arrive, point out key actors, indicate whom to shoot together.
- Be sure all media have checked in and get press kit and scenario.
- Be sure all participants have scenario.
- Tear down/clean up.

FOLLOW UP

- Select/order photos to be used for media (8x10 B/W, SWG)
- Select/order photos to be sent w/ thank you note and press kit to participants w/ clips (as appropriate)
- Send summary memo with clips and analysis to client, other principals.
- Document the event in your organization's albums/archives/files.
- Keep pitching the story to every venue possible.
- Take a deep breath (phew).

CREATING A NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER

A neighborhood newsletter can be an excellent source of communication within a neighborhood. In addition to reminding people of upcoming meetings and social events, it can: educate readers about issues and ideas concerning your neighborhood, build cohesion and a sense of pride among neighbors, spark new interest in your neighborhood organization, and share news or ideas of a more general nature. Have a special place on your website to post the newsletter and consider having extra copies at events you hold.

Possible Steps Involved with Preparing a Newsletter:

1) Form a committee and designate an editor.
2) Determine how many issues a year you will offer the newsletter: monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or as needed.
3) Decide what will be in each issue:
   - Notices of meetings and group events
   - Meeting agendas and/or meeting minutes
   - Reports on the group's activities
   - Issues that affect the neighborhood
   - Community interest articles
   - Community history articles
   - An update from the Neighborhood Resource Coordinator
   - Recognition of volunteer efforts
   - Advertising
   - News from other groups
   - Neighbor biographies
4) Design the layout for the newsletter.
5) Decide who will print, copy, or post the newsletter online.
6) Decide who will be responsible for distributing the newsletter.
7) Decide who should receive it.
8) Write or have others contribute articles.
9) Edit articles for content, style & space.
10) Ask others to help proofread.
11) Take final product to the printer.
12) Check the finished copy for errors in printing or editing.
13) Mail and/or hand-deliver the newsletter (perhaps hand deliver to those in the neighborhood and mail to those outside of it?). Ask neighbors if they would prefer a hard copy or if they would want to just view the digital format.
14) Seek feedback about the issue.

Tips for Words and Graphics:

MASTHEAD: The title on the front page of every newsletter.

- Keep the name of the newsletter short and catchy.
- Consider using a logo or symbol in the masthead.

FONT: The style of typeface.

- For article text, use a serif font (like Garamond or Times New Roman) that is easy to read.
- Sans serif fonts (like Arial or Helvetica) are appropriate for headlines.

- Be consistent with the fonts selected.
- Use italics, bold, and underline sparingly.
- For articles, use a font size of 10 or 12.

HEADLINE: A short title to the article.

- Print headlines in the same color as the article.
- Choose a consistent font for all headlines that compliments article fonts.
- Set headlines like sentences without periods. For example, capitalize only the first letter of each sentence. Or perhaps you want to place the entire headline in BOLD CAPS.

Articles:

→ Organize ideas before beginning.
→ Avoid complicated words and lengthy sentences.
→ Clarity is key. Be concise.
→ Always proofread your article for spelling and grammatical errors.

Layout Basics:

→ Use two to three columns per 8 ½" x 11" page.
→ Justify the text.
→ Limit each page to no more than three or four articles.
→ Use a moderate amount of white space. Keep white space at the edges of the page, not the center.
→ Make sure the page looks balanced. Lighter items should be toward the top of the page and darker ones should be toward the bottom.
→ Use graphics or photographs in moderation to break up the text and give your newsletter a more polished appearance.
→ Consider keeping your newsletter at four to six pages or under. This will keep costs down and make readers less likely to feel that there is too much to read.
→ Consider using a consistent layout that will make your newsletter more familiar to readers.

Cost Considerations:

→ How will you pay for the newsletter? You might seek a grant from the Neighborhood Advisory Council, put paid ads in the newsletter, etc.
→ Delivering the newsletter by hand saves money on postage, although it can also be more difficult in large neighborhoods. If your neighborhood is larger, perhaps you could seek multiple block representatives to deliver them.
→ If you decide to mail your newsletter, determine whether you qualify for non-profit status to lower postage rates. Check into bulk mailing and bar codes. The post office can provide more information about reducing postage costs.
→ Consider selling advertising to help cover the costs. This can be as easy as photocopying someone's business card or as complicated as designing half or full page ads.
→ Decide how often you really need the newsletter to go out.
→ Try negotiating with your printer for a lower printing rate, and, in exchange, offer to place an ad for them in your newsletter.
→ Move through every step of the process of creating your newsletter carefully, and make sure to edit as you go along. Mistakes can be expensive.

Online Format:

To curb costs, try to distribute the newsletters in an online format, saving printed copies for neighbors that you know do not want or have internet access. Post your newsletter on website and link it to your social media pages. You could also make your newsletter blog style on a website like WordPress.

The Moores Park Neighborhood Organization prints a newsletter, but also puts up to date information on their Facebook page to keep residents informed. Next Door is also a great outlet to inform neighbors about the most recent activities.

CALENDARS AND PLANNING

The following calendar is intended as a tool to assist in planning events and projects throughout the year.

JANUARY

- **Neighborhood trash pick-up dates** are usually available at this time. Call Neighborhood Resource Coordinator, Andi Crawford at 517-410-3904 to receive an application
- **Early review deadline for grant proposals** due to the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory

FEBRUARY

- Consider having a Valentine's Day Party or start planning a June Block Party or celebration.

MARCH

- **Eastside Neighborhood's Annual Souper** is usually held in March or April. Call the Eastside Neighborhood Council for further information.

APRIL

- **Bea Christy Award nominations due** April 1 to the Neighborhood Resource Coordinator
- An **Easter Egg hunt** is great fun for younger children and their fans!
- Neighborhood Advisory Council **grants to be funded are announced**

MAY

- May is an ideal month for a neighborhood cleanup, planning a neighborhood yard sale, or a plant exchange.
- **Bea Christy Award Banquet** held on a Wednesday in the middle of the month.

JUNE

- This is a traditional time for the garden tours that neighborhoods use for fundraisers.
- This is the time to begin planning if you are going to celebrate Safe Night in early August.
- Farmers Markets start opening.

JULY

- A **Fourth of July parade float** may be desirable to raise awareness of an issue or a group. Also a good chance for **fund raising**, selling ice cream, popcorn, cotton candy, cold drinks to parade watchers.
- **Begin discussing possible grants** you may want to assemble for the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Council grants program.
- Many neighborhood groups end up canceling their July and/or August meetings because they cannot get a quorum. Be aware.

AUGUST

- The first Tuesday in August is **Lansing's *Safe Night***. Celebrating a crime free

community with pledges to avoid violence, not carry guns, etc., and a block party with porch lights lit to remind everyone of the reason for the fun. Check with the Lansing Police Department, Neighborhood Watch division, 483-4469.

SEPTEMBER

- **Fall neighborhood clean ups and bulb planting** in public places may begin this month. The weather is still mild enough for picnics and outdoor gatherings.
- **Mayor's Grant Kick-Off Night** to introduce grant process for Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Council
- **Plan a candidate's night.** Remember that the candidates for judge, for County Commissioner and some of the less known offices are looking for the chance to attend and provide information. September and October are the traditional time for the home tours that many neighborhoods use for fundraising.

OCTOBER

- Consider hosting a **Halloween** party. A great fall event!
- This is also a good time to remind families that childrens' outgrown winter coats, boots and other clothing is welcome at clothing banks and at many schools where they try to meet the needs of children at recess or when walking home. Organizing a **clothing collection drive** is easy.
- Think about **holiday baskets** for the poor. Check with the Salvation Army about their clearinghouse for donations.
- Schedule a talk on **energy saving and weather proofing your home** from Urban Options and Capital Area Community Services. CACS does home repairs, insulation, etc. free for low income. Check with them for eligibility.
- Now is the time to think about holiday fund raising opportunities. Gift wrapping at the mall, booths at churches, child care for shopping parents, any number of things can be bartered through your members or serve as a fundraiser.

NOVEMBER

- Early November **enroll families in Toys for Tots**, through the Salvation Army.
- **Deadline** for Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Council grants.
- **Thanksgiving** is a traditional time for **food drives, volunteering at shelters and soup kitchens** to help the homeless.
- Consider hosting a **Thanksgiving party** in your neighborhood.

DECEMBER

- Call Salvation Army to connect with a family and provide it with food and gifts, if that is what the group wants to do.
- December is a great time for decorating the neighborhood, caroling, having tree trimming parties, cookie baking etc. Remember that not everyone celebrates Christmas, but may celebrate other holidays like Kwanzaa or Hanukah.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) AND ITS USE IN NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

In a neighborhood group, you may be interested in seeing demographics of your neighborhood, such as how many houses are red-tagged, what is the quality or most common types of homes in your neighborhood, where are neighborhood groups located throughout the city, and more.

The City of Lansing is committed to helping collect this data and map out CDBG areas, flood plains, etc. If your neighborhood is interested in this data or creating data—like mapping where block captains or members of your community group are, then you can contact Sam Quon, the GIS administrator, to either access or create these maps. His email is sam.quon@lansingmi.gov and his phone number is (517)483-6009.

Here are some links to current maps that the City has available:

Flood Plains: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/flood_plain/3314

Future Land Use: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/FutureLandUse/7907

Existing Land Use: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/ExistingLandUseMap/7906

Natural Features: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/natural_features/3316

Lansing Parks and Rec. Community Centers:
http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/natural_features/3316

Lansing Trail Map:
https://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/TRAILS_PATHWAYS_MAP_RIVERTRAIL_EXTENSIONS/8197

Lansing Parks and Rec. Operated Swimming Pools:
http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/Lansing_Swimming_Pools/3126

Lansing Area Schools: http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/Lansing_Schools/3125

Chapter 6 Acquiring Resources

As you engage in community and neighborhood activities, you may find that you need money or other resources to pursue some of your goals and meet operating costs. This chapter is titled "Acquiring Resources" because ‘resources’ encompasses far more than just money. For example, if someone is your neighborhood has access to a cheap copying alternative, then it could save you or your organization money in duplicating flyers and other materials. That copy machine isn't money. But it is a resource. Chapter 7 addresses a number of issues, including how and where to find money, building and sustaining partnerships, and grant writing.

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The Lansing Neighborhood Resource Team learns about the Prospect Place Gardening and Gathering Space. This is a great resource on the Eastside. Photo Courtesy of Lansing Love Your Block.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

The following anecdotes offer examples of how some Lansing neighborhoods have developed partnerships with other community entities (business, churches, schools, etc) in order to meet some of their resource needs. The names have been changed but the cases are real

Business/Neighborhood:

- Elizabeth Schaudt had a problem with neighbors throwing trash and large items over her radio station's back fence and onto her property. She met with her neighbors and cut a deal that they could use the station's dumpster once a month to get rid of large items. This arrangement keeps her maintenance costs down and gives residents a place to put large trash items.
- Neighborhood volunteers helped members of the East Holt Business Association pick up trash on main roads in town. They cleaned up the entrances to neighborhoods and storefronts.
- At least one realtor in town has a personal policy that he will donate to a neighborhood association, upon request, 10% of his retained commission from any home listed and sold through him in that neighborhood. You might contact your realtor and ask about this as a possibility.
- Also, getting to know the realtor of any house for sale in your neighborhood can be positive. He or she will appreciate flyers, brochures, etc. promoting the safety, quality, and stability of the neighborhood because it attracts potential buyers. It also benefits the neighborhood because new homeowners have knowledge of the association before they move in.
- Welcome committees from some neighborhoods give new residents packets of information about their neighborhood. Included are coupons for free stuff or discounts at local stores. One neighborhood has a local restaurant's menu and coupon in their welcome packet. The manager gives the neighborhood a discount on food for neighborhood functions.
- A manager at JP's Sporting Goods included one neighborhood on her list of people who can shop (with sizable discounts) on "Friends and Family Night" at the store. Many people from the neighborhood bought sporting goods for themselves and for Christmas gifts. The manager's sales that night not only beat the other stores, but also set a record for the event. In return, the manager donates gift certificates for raffle prizes at the neighborhood's annual holiday dinner.
- A local print shop may print your newsletter for free or for a reduced fee in exchange for a banner ad acknowledging the store. Or a local business might underwrite all or a portion of the cost of the newsletter for free ad space.
- Contacting the local school, community center, or non-profit for use of their building for meetings helps create a relationship with these organizations, while also getting a space to meet.

Church/Neighborhood:

- Some churches allow neighborhood organizations and watch groups to hold their meetings and have events in their fellowship hall.
- Churches may allow neighborhood organizations, use of their gym for neighborhood

events. They provide scholarships for neighbor kids to attend VBS and they donate food baskets to needy families during the holidays.

- Bethany Baptist provides Baker Donora families food baskets year-round. They supply snacks for after school programs, clothing for children at Christmas and when school starts. Free VBS. Supplies for the Center, like pens, pencils, paper, trash bags (which can sap a budget quickly).
- Faith Fellowship Baptist did a back-to-school rally and donated school supplies to children in the Potter-Walsh neighborhood. They also hosted a community picnic where raffle prizes were equally divided among members of the congregation and the neighborhood.
- One church lends the neighborhood use of a church bus for neighborhood events.
- (Many of these examples show the church doing for the neighborhood. What types of things can neighborhoods do in return for the churches? Remember, we are trying to encourage mutually beneficial relationships where assets are exchanged and organizations work together for a common goal).

Neighborhood/School:

- One neighborhood organization partnered with a local school to apply for a $1400 garden grant. The school also received 100 flats of FREE flowers to use.
- At one school, signs were bought and installed with neighborhood grant money. The stipulation is that the signs be used to promote neighborhood and school activities. There is also more of a trend toward integration with neighborhood schools, whereby neighborhood news is printed in the school newsletter, and updates from schools are included in neighborhood news. Also representatives attend each other's meetings to share information.
- Schools are a valuable part of the neighborhood and should be treated as so.

PARTNERSHIP EXERCISE

Here is an exercise to help you develop partnership ideas that you can use at a future neighborhood meeting where resources and money are a topic of discussion. Ask everyone to take 5 minutes to examine their own organization's current situation and list the following assets and needs:

- **Human Assets** (e.g., volunteers, members with certain gifts or abilities, like story tellers, tutors, writers, gardeners, artists, builders, or people connected to other resources)
- **Physical Assets** (e.g., money (grants, donations or sponsorships), lawn mower, garden equipment, church bus, office supplies, advertising space)
- **Technological assets (**e.g., laptops, web-design capabilities, copiers, fax)
- **Existing Partnerships (**between your group and other organizations)
- **Needs** (e.g., a way to share information with the community, more access to information in the community, help building membership, volunteers, help with a particular concern)
- **Envisioned Partnerships** (how can your needs be met by sharing with other organizations?)

Now write words that describe your ideal community. Look back at your assets and determine what you do and don't have to achieve your ideal. Then have representatives share their vision of an ideal community and their list of assets with the group. It is here that you can develop some partnership ideas.

If, for example, you are looking for a more beautiful community, examine the nature of beauty. Are you thinking of flowers in a community space, or a mural on a cinder block wall? Do you have a gardener in your midst, or an artist? If you don't, maybe the local school, or church, or neighborhood does.

Figure out what assets are needed to meet your goals. Find common goals among the various facets of the community that can be accomplished by pooling assets.

MONEY: HOW AND WHERE TO GET IT

I. DONATIONS

A. Identify potential donors
   1. What are you trying to accomplish? Find a donor relevant to your cause
   2. Get a name, not just the company, to contact (community benefits, public relations, marketing director, owner, etc.)
   3. In addition to businesses, you could also seek donations from neighbors…this probably doesn't require written requests, etc.

B. Put your request in writing
   1. Address the request to a specific person
   2. Give a history of your organization or group, whom you serve, accomplishments
   3. Describe your cause or event . . . time, date, location, number of attendees
   4. Specify what you want . . . what type of merchandise, gift certificates
   5. Tell them what the donation will be used for . . . raffle, thank you gift
   6. What's in it for them . . . free advertising/promotion, loyal customer base?
   7. Fill out any additional company donation request forms
   8. Make requests at least one month prior, two months for the holidays

C. Follow up in person or by phone

D. Always send a written thank you
   1. Not only acknowledge the gift, but the impact it had
   2. Send any promotional literature or programs that mention the company
   3. Even if a business does not fulfill your donation request, it makes a good impression to send a thank you and acknowledge their consideration

II. Grants

Local grants are available through the following agencies and organizations. Contact them directly for current applications and information on deadlines, requirements, etc. See following section on Grant Writing for contact information.

A. Neighborhood Advisory Board
B. Capital Region Community Foundation:
C. Online Web Resources for Grant Seeking

III. Fundraisers

A. Garden Tour
B. Home Tour
C. Newsletter Advertisements
D. Car Wash
E. Souper
F. Bake Sale

IV. Membership Fees or Dues

GRANT SOURCES

While most neighborhoods may be able to meet their funding request needs through the Mayor's annual Neighborhood Advisory Board Grant Program, some neighborhoods might be at the point of seeking grants from outside foundations. In this section, we provide a basic primer on grant seeking and writing. If pursuing grants from non-City of Lansing sources, you might consider contacting Andi Crawford, the Neighborhood Resource Coordinator, who is available for guidance in grant writing. Her email is andi.crawford@lansingmi.gov. The Foundation Center, a non-profit dedicated to philanthropy and proposal writing, has a book named *Guide to Proposal Writing*, which can also be a valuable resource.

*****

Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board
500 West Lenawee # 123
Lansing, MI 48933
Phone: (517)- 372-6290

In recent years, the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board has had as munch as $90,000 available in grant monies to award to neighborhoods in Lansing. This is an excellent funding source for innovative projects your neighborhood might like to pursue. Generally, grant applications become available in November and are due the following February. There is an early review process available, where grants are pre-submitted in mid-January. Grants awards are generally announced in April, with funding available in early May. Final grant reports have been due at around October. For more information, go to http://www.lansingmi.gov/media/view/2014_Neighborhood_Grants/7506 to see a past application.

*****

Capital Region Community Foundation
6035 Executive Drive, Suite 104
Lansing, MI 48911
Phone: (517) 485-1630
Email: crcf3@mindspring.com

The Capital Region Community Foundation is a local foundation that awards grants in the Tri-County area.

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Online Web Resources for Grant Seeking
http://www.mnaonline.org/funding/grantseekers.htm
http://www.cmif.org/Grantseeker.htm
http://www.npguides.org/index.html
http://www.wkkf.org/Grants/Grantseeking_Resources.aspx
http://www.tgci.com/
http://www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/

There are countless resources on the web that can help you identify potential funders. In addition, there are many websites dedicated to assisting in the preparation of grant proposals. Those listed above are the tip of the iceberg.

BASIC PRIMER ON GRANT WRITING

"The primary difference between successful grant writing and inefficient proposal submission is the amount of time invested in the strategic identification of appropriate funders." -- Robin Lynn Schultheiss, Michigan Nonprofit Association

Successful Grant Proposals are:

- Well-prepared
- Thoughtfully planned
- Concisely packaged
- Delivered on-time
- Unique; that is, they do not duplicate other projects
- Well-researched
- Aligned with the interests, intentions, and needs of the grantor

Top 10 Pet Peeves of Grant Reviewers

1. Typos
2. Paragraphs that masquerade as sentences
3. Sweeping generalizations
4. Microscopic Detail
5. Boring, boring, boring
6. Lots of flash, little substance
7. Bad addition
8. Getting to the end of a 64 page document and STILL not knowing what you're asking for
9. Not following the specific instructions required for the grant proposal (with proper research, you should know the deadlines, funding priorities, proposal format, required content, desired attachments, and page length restrictions of the targeted funder)
10. Yes, but, we don't fund that…

Basic Components of Grant Proposals:

- Cover Sheet/Letter of Application
- Executive Summary
- Definition of Need
- Program Description/Approach
- Program Goals/Objectives
- Evaluation
- Sustainability/Organizational Capacity
- Budget

Chapter 7 Challenges

Challenges to neighborhood life are many, and they often require artful approaches if solutions are to be reached. In Chapter 7, we address the challenge of burnout, talk about diversity, offer suggestions for resolving conflicts, and suggest strategies for solving landlord and tenant problems as well as dealing with problem properties and suspected criminal activities.

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Residents of Sycamore Park Neighborhood enjoy watermelon at a Walking Wednesday event. Photo Courtesy of Lansing Love Your Block.

BURNOUT CHALLENGES

Businesses, governments, and neighborhood organizations, like families, have problems. A healthy group must have new leadership in training, constructive feedback from its membership, and new ideas coming in if growth and success are to be realized.

Burnout is the result of too few people trying to carry too much, for too long. One example of this might be an individual or leadership group that becomes too tired to address complaints effectively. There could be many reasons for this, including that the person or leadership group may not feel their work is appreciated because they are never thanked for the sacrifices they make for the neighborhood's benefit. The cure is difficult because we do not get into such situations quickly. We have often asked for help and been ignored.

This is sad because the angry, negative, burnt out person finds it very difficult to change their approach to the organization. It takes real courage to say "I will not run for office in this group again for 3 years. I trust that the neighborhood is important to others as it is to me and I have done all that I know how to do. It is someone else's turn to struggle with this mess. Someone has ideas that could be helpful and I want them to have a chance to see how difficult this job is and how important it is." Almost always, someone answers those calls.

Part of the challenge of burnout is that we all do things we know how to do, and then we do them again! If it is distributing notices for a meeting, they are posted in the same places or worded identically from one month to the next in the newsletter. New ideas and new methods come from new people. Those new people will come if we are really able to stand back and allow their creativity to show through. New ways can be scary and uncomfortable. We may feel like we are taking a great risk by trying new ideas. In fact, we may be taking more risk by maintaining practices that are no longer working.

Another way to combat being burnt out is by doing direct service for the community. If you get yourself out there, you may clearly see again why you are in this group or what you can do to help. This may give you a fresh idea of the community's needs.

WHAT DOESN'T KILL US MAKES US STRONGER: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Neighborhood and community conflict is part of life. We can choose to deal with that conflict constructively, ignore it, or even opt for making matters worse. Some problems are best left to proper authorities, such as instances where laws are broken or clear code violations exist. Others problems, like conflicts over a shared driveway or nuisances that are not breaking any laws, may be handled better by approaching that conflict with the "right attitude."

What can we do about issues of shared space, lack of cooperation, or lack of consideration???? How do we gain the "right attitude?" Well, one way to attempt this is to try putting oneself in the other person's shoes, to see through their eyes. Also, it is helpful to think about what you may want or need from this relationship, long term.

Let's look at the example of a shared driveway and think through a basic approach to addressing it without the addition of third parties.

Shared Driveway.
You and your neighbor are constantly blocking each other in, sometimes even making it difficult to get places on time. Here is one way you might approach a conversation about it: "I would really like to be a responsible neighbor. And I know we have to share this driveway. I realize it's probably as difficult for you when I block you in as it is for me when you do it. So, I'm wondering if we can figure out some system so that we can both use our shared space without inconveniencing each other? Do you have any ideas?"

If the situation begins to get more difficult, you might try saying something like: "I would prefer to work this out between us. We both have to share this space. Can we talk about this?"

If you are not successful working the problem out together, you may want to consider mediation.

Here are some further examples of basic non-confrontational approaches to problem solving:

"I'm having a hard time understanding why you did this (any behavior that is bothersome). Can you explain why this is important to you so that I have a better understanding?" This shows someone that you are really trying to see the world through their eyes.

"I need for you to listen to me right now. I feel strongly about this issue and I just need you to hear me out."

THE OPTION OF MEDIATION

When negotiating with another party doesn't work out, you might try using a mediator, i.e. a NEUTRAL third party. The mediation process allows each party to tell their side and have a neutral TRAINED third person help reframe explosive issues and help the parties arrive at a mutually agreed upon solution to their problem. This usually results in the mediator writing up an agreement that can even become a legal document, if necessary. Most of the time, if neighborhood issues end up in court, it is a win/lose situation. If people have to continue to live together, problems can best be worked out through a process like mediation, where parties come up with their own solutions, with the assistance of a mediator.

Most communities in Michigan have community mediation centers, offering free or low cost mediation through trained volunteer mediators. Mediation Centers across the state can be reached by calling 1.800.873.7658. Many of these local mediation programs have people trained to handle policy issues that may crop up for certain municipalities, such as development controversies.

The local mediation center in Lansing is the:

Resolution Services Center of Central Michigan
516 S. Creyts Road, Suite A
Lansing, MI 48917
Phone: 517-485-2274
Fax: 517-485-1183
E-mail: gtrice@rsccm.org
Website: www.rsccm.org
Contact: Gretta McHaney-Trice

In addition, Lansing has a private mediation organization:

Mediation Management Services
423 W Grand River
Lansing, Mi 48906
Phone number: (517) 316-7766
Fax number: (517) 316-7909
Email: smiley_aw@yahoo.com

You might also be able to obtain free mediation through the Lansing Department of Human Relations and Community Services, 483-4477.

STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING LANDLORD/TENANT PROBLEMS

- Work proactively with residents and landlords. Offer to help landlords learn more about landlord responsibilities, improve their properties, and screen potential tenants. Find out if landlords in your neighborhood are a part of the Landlord Association.
- Encourage landlords to use the computer available on the 6th floor of the District Court to see if potential tenants have criminal records
- Reward/acknowledge good landlords
- Support tenants to make sure their needs are being met while issues with their landlords are being resolved
- Work with the Lansing Police Department's landlord/tenant detective, the City attorney's landlord specialist, and the City Council's public safety committee.
- If landlord/tenant issues arise, please contact the MSU Law Clinic at 517-336-8088. MSU also has a Tenant Resource Center. Michigan Legal aid can also be a great resource. You can find their information at http://www.michiganlegalaid.org/Organizations/legal_services_of_south_central_michigan__lansing_office/organization_view
  Finally, you can also receive services by calling 2-1-1. They are available 24/7 and can provide rent and utility assistance.

The **Allen Neighborhood Center** has been successful in implementing some best practices when it comes to issues with renters. They have a drafted letter that they send out to the Landlord when contacted by neighbors about issues. If the issue doesn't get resolved, they then send another email/letter including the City Attorney's office to express the seriousness of the issue. The City Attorney's office follows up with a letter of support and reminding Landlords of their responsibilities. If you are having renter issues, please contact the Allen Neighborhood Center for support in your endeavors to create a better neighborhood. You can find their contact information at **allenneighborhoodcenter.org**.

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING PROBLEM PROPERTIES AND SUSPECTED CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

- Document/log specific activities
- Work closely with your police team
- Write a letter to the homeowner or resident in which you (i.e. the neighborhood watch or association) outline specific concerns
- Work with the Lansing Police Department's landlord/tenant detective, the City attorney's landlord specialist, and the City Council's public safety committee.

ON ORGANIZING: A Simple Recipe for Social Change

From the Kitchen of David C. Hollister

Ingredients:
credibility
assumptions
commitment
power
hope
courage
goals
strategy

Directions:
be there
be informed
be able to count
don't be intimidated
don't take "no" for an answer
follow through

A DEFINITION

"Organize" as defined by Webster means: "to provide with an organic structure: systematize; to arrange; establish; institute; bring into being; to unify into a coordinated functioning whole." This Web presentation seeks to expand this definition to a more practical level giving down-to-earth suggestions to individuals who want to become involved and who want to learn and practice the simple skills which are involved in organizing any group to achieve specific goals.

TWO POPULAR MYTHS

You need large numbers to be effective: False. Most groups revolve around a small core of individuals who have the trust of the larger group. The core group must learn how to build coalitions and he able to draw on larger numbers at the appropriate time. Don't be discouraged if only a small group shows up to key meetings. The important thing is not to exclude anyone from the core group and to learn when and how to involve the less committed allies. For those people who miss meetings, keep them involved and up-to-date with phone calls and mailings. The smallness of a group becomes a liability only if it remains small and/or is unable to develop coalitions.

You must have special training to he able to organize a group: False. Some of the most savvy and effective organizers are grassroots people who know the wishes of the community and can articulate them. The key to leadership is gaining and keeping the trust of the group, and this is accomplished by working with the group—not for them.

THE BOTTOM LINE: YOUR CREDIBILITY

To organize, you must identify and bring together a core group of individuals. The core group has basically two initial tasks (1) To clearly develop a focus or set of goals; and (2) to decide how to expand the group to represent as many viewpoints as possible so that the group's

legitimacy and credibility cannot be challenged. The makeup of your group will, of course, help shape your goals; a group's membership and its goals usually shift somewhat overtime.

ASSUMPTIONS

Before the group can develop a focus or a set of goals, it is important to state the assumptions the group might share.

First, when dealing with institutions (government agencies, etc), it is helpful to keep in mind the Peter Principle: Large organizations develop bureaucratic hierarchies or "pyramids of power" People are often promoted to positions of power beyond their level of competence. In other words, just because they have impressive-sounding titles, don't assume they know what they are talking about! (*The Peter Principle*, by Lawrence J. Peter, W. Morrow Publishers, 1969)

Second, our society is organized into institutions that were initially set up to achieve some special social goals. It is always a smart strategy to accept at face value the stated goal of each institution as a legitimate ideal you can embrace, if that goal is consistent with the social change your group wants to achieve. The key to your success in changing the **real** policies and practices of that institution depends on how effectively you can demonstrate the institution's failure to meet its own stated goal, thereby destroying its legitimacy. You then can demonstrate how your group can do the job more effectively and, hopefully, at a lower cost.

LEGITIMACY AND THOSE WHO HAVE IT ARE THE KEYS TO CHANGE

Once you have effectively exposed the institution for its inability to achieve <u>its own stated goals</u>, the institution has basically two alternatives: (1) to make changes to achieve the goal, or (2) to become defensive and attack your group.

Most institutions will initially resist change, especially if it is initiated from within. If they do begin to change, <u>be on guard</u>. Your group could be co-opted or sandbagged when a policymaker gives superficial lip service to your suggestion but has no intention of implementing the policy or change. Your group, thinking they have won, will become diffused and apathetic—losing interest even though the critical work of implementing the change will require continued oversight and pressure. **Quick success is almost always fatal to a community group!**

If the institution reacts defensively and begins to attack your group, it means you have hit a sensitive point and are on the right track. You can be sure you have become a threat when the institution begins to challenge your group's credibility. You must expect this kind of attack and not become defensive. You can judge the merit of your recommended change by the intensity of the institutional attack. The more defensive and hostile their response to you and your group, the more on target you are. You should move ahead aggressively.

TWO KINDS OF COMMITMENT

It is always important to remember that there are two levels of involvement and commitment to any movement for change. On one level is the emotional commitment—the feeling that something is wrong and the willingness to do something to change it. There is also the intellectual level personified by a well-read, knowledgeable, thoughtful individual. A group needs both levels of commitment to be effective.

a) Those with the emotional commitment are the traditional activitists. They are highly motivated and are anxious “to get involved" to try to change conditions. They normally have little historical perspective and are unable to articulate the group goals. They are often, but not always, hot heads, and can be an embarrassment to your group. They are important to your group, but must learn to subordinate their own interests to those of the larger group.

b) The intellectual level requires individuals who understand the historical significance of the change being advocated. These people have a sophisticated understanding of the interrelationships, the nuances and the subtleties of the situation. Unfortunately, many intellectuals are unable to translate the thought into action and, therefore, are not helpful to a group. The ideal group leader has both an emotional and intellectual commitment (i.e., Martin Luther King, Jr. and Caesar Chavez) and can harness the energy of the emotions and the thoughtfulness of the intellect to give direction to a group. Unfortunately, few groups have such unique individuals as leaders. It is, therefore, the leader's task to be sure that both the emotional and intellectual commitment is present in the group. An over reliance on either will lead to a poorly thought out strategy and subsequent clumsy attempts at change or what may be called "paralysis by analysis"—all thought and no action. Either result can be disastrous or counterproductive because it makes future attempts to organize much more difficult.

FORMS OF POWER

Now that you have identified a core group, goals and others who share your interest, it is time to consider what kinds of power you and your group can bring to the coming struggle.

It is important to recognize that when you advocate change, you take on special interests that will be threatened by any change. Usually the special interest groups have a great deal of influence, often by default, because they possess an abundance of a few types of power: money, knowledge and personal relationships with the policymakers.

Special interest groups are not necessarily sinister in their use of power. They use money to contribute to policymaker's campaigns, to hire lobbyists, to wine-and-dine and to develop detailed materials to document their particular need(s). Special interests can and do play an important role in policymaking. Community groups can learn a great deal from observing how they utilize power to affect public policy.

Community groups do not have the money to compete with special interests; therefore, they must seek to use other kinds of power. A core group of organizers must learn to mobilize other types of power.

(1) **Numbers Are Power:** Policymakers (city council people, legislators) are very concerned about large numbers of voters especially if they are upset. It is important that you identify other groups that agree with your goals who will show up to a meeting to demonstrate your large numbers. Numbers give you additional legitimacy and credibility.

Policymakers have radar that continually assesses the impact of what they are doing or plan to do. They are extremely sensitive to organized groups. The larger and more diverse your group, the more likely that it will be taken seriously. Seek ways to expand your group. The group, however, must have well-established goals and strategies or it will become divided and ineffective.

(2) **Conditions Are Power:** Although your group might be small you probably can find others who share your concerns. Expanding the numbers of a group involves building coalitions; coalitions involve bringing together diverse groups to work toward a common goal. It's important to identify the goals because there will be areas where the various coalition members disagree. The group must learn to agree on the goals and agree to disagree on the areas of difference.

(3) **Unity Is Power:** A large, diverse group presenting a unified position before a city council or a legislative committee has power. Be careful. Choose wisely the person who speaks for your coalition in public meetings. If the spokesperson gets excited, exaggerates a point or gives misinformation, a smart policymaker will seize upon the occasion to destroy the credibility of all of the information and may discredit the entire group as well. Should the group seek to defend the misstatement, it risks its own credibility. However, if the group disassociates itself from the spokesperson or information presented, the group may become divided and ineffective. Do not let this happen! Unity is essential to maintain your legitimacy and credibility.

(4) **Positions Are Power:** It is important to bring to your group people who hold important, credible positions in your community. Bankers, educators, business people, community leaders and clergy give your group legitimacy. Try to involve them in your group.

(5) **Knowledge Is Power:** Two kinds of knowledge are essential to affect public policy. First, you must be knowledge about the process of decision-making. Each public body has rules and policies that describe how decisions are made. Get the rules. Learn them. Remember there are also informal rules. Get to know those, too. Then monitor the meetings and impact the decisions at the appropriate time.
Second, you must be knowledgeable of the issue you represent. Study. Know the issue. Do not exaggerate or misrepresent the facts. Develop good information. Policymakers will learn to trust you and eventually will depend on you for facts.

(6) **Relationships Are Power:** It is always helpful to know the city councilperson or county commissioner personally. Don’t be afraid to help on a campaign or volunteer to work in a policymaker's office. You will develop a personal relationship with the policymaker, which will give you access and credibility. You should get to know key policymakers to such a degree that you feel comfortable calling them or visiting their offices. You will know that you have power and influence with policymakers when they return your phone calls.

It is also helpful to know that policymaker has a hidden advisor—some trusted friend or associate who meets regularly with the policymaker who has an inordinate amount of influence on the policymaker's thinking and judgment. You can save yourself and your

group a lot of trouble if you get to know that hidden advisor, working to gain this person's trust. This person can do more for your group over a cup of coffee than you and your group can do in months of organizing. The hidden advisor must feel comfortable with you and perceive your group as a broadly based coalition of knowledgeable people who can impact the process if necessary. Hidden advisors can become important allies and key parts of your strategy. Get to know them.

(7) **Voting Is Power:** Elected policymakers listen to voters. Be sure you are registered and vote. Be sure that all of your coalition members are voters and willing to vote as a block.

(8) **Use Of The Media Is Power:** Policymakers dislike bad publicity. You must learn how to develop literature, talk to the press, go on radio, and speak before cameras so you can get your message across. Policymakers will go out of their way to avoid bad press if they can so don't be afraid to use the media.

(9) **Money Is Power:** Although most citizens' groups are at a monetary disadvantage, they must have some funds to develop materials, pay for mailings and keep other members of the coalition informed. You will not be able to compete financially with special interests, but if you have the other elements of power, you can overcome the power of money. No group, however, can function without some funds!

These nine elements of power, if used in combination, will more than offset the special interest groups. No smart public officials will disregard the wishes of a large, unified coalition of knowledgeable voters who have expressed a specific interest to them. The power of money usually will dwindle as the organized community group becomes more knowledgeable, assertive and effective.

THE FOUR KEY INGREDIENTS

Once your group is formed—a process that might take weeks or months—four elements must be present before the group can take any action. If any one of the four is missing, the group will exhibit the classic defense mechanisms (rationalizing, backstabbing, scapegoating, forming more committees) to avoid taking action. The four essential ingredients are:

(1) **Hope:** The group must believe that all the effort, time and toil will result in some change.
(2) **Courage:** The group must be willing to "risk" the confrontation.
(3) **Goals:** The group must clearly understand what it is that is being changed.
(4) **Strategy:** The group must clearly understand how the goal is to be achieved.

As a group leader, one must be constantly aware of the dynamics of the group. If and when the group begins to backstab, rationalize, scapegoat or turn on itself, it is the leader's task to assess which of the four ingredients is missing and to "plug in" the missing one.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Once the group has become a group, has identified its goals and has decided to take an action, there are six simple rules to follow to achieve maximum results:

1) **Be There:** "Being there" means finding out when and where the real decisions are made and then getting the appropriate people to that meeting. This might mean having one person

monitoring a meeting for several weeks just to know what is going on and then, at the appropriate time, bringing in the larger group. "Being there" means making a commitment to understanding the system. There is nothing more frustrating than being at the right place, but at the wrong time, or being at the wrong place and missing the real decision.

2) **Be Informed:** It is important that the group be legitimate. This means developing accurate information and presenting it in the most rational way. Even the slightest exaggeration or smallest piece of misinformation can discredit the group and destroy its legitimacy. When developing specific information for policymakers, assume that they are intelligent but uninformed. Remember, they have more than one issue to be concerned about. It is a mistake to assume they know or care about yours.

   Be prepared to be challenged on your data. Make sure it is accurate. Develop a network of information-gathering which is quick and responsive. Once you have established your credibility, you will be called upon again and again.

3) **Be Able To Count:** This is a democratic society—the majority rules. The group must know the number needed to pass a resolution, law, ordinance or policy. They must know policymakers' stands on issues that concern them and develop arguments that will appeal to the key votes. (This might mean compromise, which every group should consider as part of their strategy.) Remember, policymakers can also count. It is, therefore, important to demonstrate that your group is legitimate—well informed and broadly based. At some point in the process, you may need to produce large numbers of allies to demonstrate your broad base of support, and to do this you must build coalitions.

4) **Don't Be Intimidated:** Intentionally or not, the system is intimidating. To personally a key policymaker, you may have to go through two secretaries, and three doors—and then confront a huge overpowering walnut desk that separates you from the policymaker. During official meetings, the policymakers sit together, usually on a raised platform, surrounding themselves with "experts" from the bureaucracy. If you wish to address the group you must "come down front" to stand before them—alone—speaking into a microphone which distorts your voice, giving you a strange sensation. Don't be intimidated by all of this. If you are informed, if you have the votes, and if your support group shows up, you will find your fears will soon disappear.

5) **Don't Take "No" For An Answer:** You should never expect a new idea, no matter how logical or reasonable, to he accepted on its face value the first time it is presented. Instead, you should anticipate all of the hostile questions and expect to be turned down the first time. In fact, if your idea is accepted initially without much resistance, there probably will be no real change. It may mean the policymakers are going to sandbag your proposal—giving lip service to your idea with no intention of implementing it. In general, the more the resistance, the better the idea. Be prepared to dig in and follow through because it takes a major commitment of time and energy to fully implement a new policy.

   As you monitor implementation, it is important to show how your idea fits into the goals articulated by this particular institution (see "Assumptions") and how your idea can do the job more effectively or at lower cost. You can often avoid the "it will cost more" argument by saying, "we don't expect more money but rather hope to 'reorder priorities'."

6) **Follow Through:** the entire group efforts can be lost if you fail to follow through. In fact, you can be co-opted by an easy victory because the group tends to dissolve. Within weeks or

months, things are back to normal and you will find it difficult, if not impossible, to get the group back together (the group will give up hope—see "Key Ingredients').

FINALLY

Community change means a commitment to the long haul—to the process. Don't be confused with winning and losing. Many times, winning is really losing in the long run, and, conversely, losing is often best for the group. After a period of time, a group leader will learn it is the process of continually participating in change and the integrity of the people participating in that process which is important, not winning or losing a few skirmishes.

Finally, never lose your humanity in order to save humanity. One of the most important assets of a change agent is a sense of humor. Learn to laugh at yourself and with others. Strive to make this world a better place to live, work and love. In doing so, remember, the issue—no matter how important it seems today— is not as important as your commitment to each other and your commitment to the integrity of the process.

Neighbors and City Leaders gather on a trip to Flint to learn best practices concerning communication and volunteerism between city government and its citizens. Photo Courtesy of Andi Crawford, Neighborhood Resource Coordinator.