

Tip Sheet

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES

Businesses are a vital part of our communities. They provide jobs and important services. A healthy residential community can help the surrounding businesses prosper. Developing a partnership between business and residential interests will benefit both. Here are some principles for building positive relationships with local businesses.

REASONS TO APPROACH A BUSINESS

- Businesses and residents share common concerns and can work together for solutions. For example, transforming an empty lot into a basketball court near an ice cream shop will give kids a place to play and bring potential business.
- Businesses may want to advertise in your neighborhood newsletter because your readers live close to their shops. Selling Advertising revenue helps offset your printing and mailing expenses.
- Businesses can provide gift certificates or merchandise for use as prizes at neighborhood picnics or as gifts included in welcome baskets for new residents.
- Businesses can be powerful allies with neighborhoods, especially if they join your efforts to oppose traffic changes or zoning issues.

WHAT TO REMEMBER WHEN APPROACHING BUSINESSES

- Be creative about your requests to businesses. Some may find it easier to lend employees as volunteers than to donate cash. Others may prefer to contribute products, supplies or office space.

- When you ask businesses to buy an advertisement in your newsletter, know the specific quantity to be distributed and the geographic area of your readership. Consider selling a coupon so the business can track the response.
- Before setting your newsletter's ad price, compare the cost of similar ads in other local publications. Try to stay in line with those costs.
- Consider how your group's positions may affect relationships with businesses. Working against one business may sour relations with others.
- Keep in mind that some businesses are independently- or locally-owned and can make quicker decisions about getting involved. Others businesses are branches of regional or national companies that will require approval from their headquarters.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR HELP

- Begin by creating an *asset map* to identify established business associations in your community. Research their members about their interests to determine which may be willing to become involved. This information will lead you to the leaders, managers and doers.



Neighborhood Resource Center of Colorado

899 Logan Street, Suite 311, Denver, CO 80209

Phone: 303.477.0023 Fax: 303.477.9986

www.nrc-neighbor.org

Tip Sheet



page 2

- If there are no business associations near your neighborhood, check with the local Chamber of Commerce to find the businesses active in your community.
- Ask local residents about the businesses they patronize about who may be likely to help.

HOW TO APPROACH A BUSINESS

- Initial contact should be one-on-one and in person—the personal touch works best. Once a relationship has been established, less personal methods of contact may be used (flyers or newsletters) to maintain contact.
- Make initial contacts with businesses a positive and friendly encounter. This will lay a good foundation for later meetings, which may involve potential conflicts or requests for assistance.
- Welcome new businesses by giving them information about your organization. Invite them to your meetings. Share your neighborhood's long-term vision with them.
- Business owners relate well to other business owners so consider asking established business friends to contact other local businesses on your behalf.
- Ask local residents to make the initial contact with a business they patronize. Businesses respond better to a regular customer than to someone who has never used their services.
- Every business has a decision-maker. This is who should be approached about community involvement. S/he may

choose to delegate company decisions to another on your projects.

HOW TO MAINTAIN AN ONGOING PARTNERSHIP

- Often small businesses are “Mom & Pop” operations or are owned by local residents. These businesses may close for the lunch hour or maintain special business hours on weekends. Remember small business owners cannot commit to meetings during regular business hours as easily as those who work in a corporate environment.
- For retail shop owners, consider an early breakfast or coffee meeting. Always ask what is the best time for their participation in a community event or meeting. Remember, too many evening meetings cut into family time and eventually result in less participation.
- Once you begin working with a business, use the same neighborhood person for each contact. Using different spokespeople breaks the personal connection and can send mixed messages.

REMEMBER: ALWAYS SAY THANKS

- Like residents, business leaders deserve to be thanked for their participation. Mention the business' contribution in your newsletter. Thank them in person and follow up with a note.
- Consider a monthly or annual award for businesses that beautify their premises or help a community. This will encourage others and give a positive reason to follow suit.

Former NRC Community Consultant Cathy Kuykendall contributed to this tipsheet.



Neighborhood Resource Center of Colorado

899 Logan Street, Suite 311, Denver, CO 80209

Phone: 303.477.0023 Fax: 303.477.9986

www.nrc-neighbor.org