

# Tip Sheet

## BLOCK ORGANIZING FOR SAFETY

**We all need to feel safe in their neighborhood. Anyone can improve their community, starting on their own block. Create a communication network then follow through with an action plan. Remember, different situations call for different strategies. Below are some of the basics of organizing your block to handle emergencies, crime or other safety issues.**

### WHY ORGANIZE?

- ◆ Knowing your neighbors is the first step toward improving the quality of life in your community.
- ◆ There is power in numbers. You are more likely to get better lighting on your block, for example, if you ask as a group.
- ◆ By creating relationships on your block, you create a safer environment for your family. Kids know who to ask for help when they are alone and elderly residents have more resources.
- ◆ Starting a neighborhood watch group is pro-active. People feel less vulnerable.
- ◆ Because crime comes in waves, an established neighborhood network will keep people aware and prepared.

### BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

- ◆ You don't have to work alone. Find someone to help out. When more people are involved in the organizing, more people will participate.
- ◆ Before organizing a meeting about safety, consider breaking the ice with a purely social event. A block party or neighborhood clean-up may put people at ease.
- ◆ Distribute leaflets about your first meeting. Give an address and explain the

*purpose* of the meeting. Include the time, but don't plan to meet for more than an hour and a half.

- ◆ Make it a point to personally invite a few neighbors on the block to the meeting. A good turnout motivates others.
- ◆ Involve the young people on the block. Kids like to help out, especially in pairs.

### AT THE FIRST MEETING

- ◆ Serve a light snack. Food offers a great opportunity to socialize.
- ◆ Use a sign-in sheet asking for names, addresses and phone numbers.
- ◆ Use nametags to help people learn each others' names and addresses.
- ◆ Set the tone. Your dual purpose is to identify concerns and to establish a communication network.
- ◆ Stay on schedule. You can meet another time for longer discussions of the issues. Ask for general agreement—you'll get it.
- ◆ An agenda is useful for staying on track.
- ◆ Project optimism and your enthusiasm will be contagious.
- ◆ Be sure to start with introductions. Ask neighbors to give their address, how long they have lived there and to talk about their families.
- ◆ Ask neighbors to list their top concerns.



**Neighborhood Resource Center of Colorado**  
899 Logan Street, Suite 311, Denver, Colorado 80203  
Phone: 303/477-0023 Fax: 303/477-9986  
[www.nrc-neighbor.org](http://www.nrc-neighbor.org)

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- ◆ Have someone take notes.
- ◆ Point out successes: the group's interest, attendance and volunteerism.

### DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

- ◆ Reach consensus on the group's top priority for taking action.
- ◆ Volunteer to contact an appropriate city or police agency to get more information. When you volunteer first, others are likely to offer help. Possible calls: to a Community Resource Officer or patrol officer to help you brainstorm solutions, zoning or code enforcement offices, to the principal of a local school, etc.
- ◆ Ask for volunteers to help prepare for the next meeting: phoning other neighbors, leafleting, bringing food, etc.
- ◆ Decide how soon you want to meet again. Less than two weeks is optimal, so people have time to complete tasks and are likely to maintain their enthusiasm.
- ◆ Ask if you may include names, addresses and phone numbers in a neighborhood directory to be distributed on the block. If not, give that person the responsibility of contacting you for follow-up information.
- ◆ Chat with volunteers at the end of the meeting to review what they have offered to do. Thank everyone for their interest and attendance.

### NEXT STEPS

- ◆ Check to see if you have a neighborhood association. Call the Neighborhood Resource Center (561-2204) for assistance in identifying the group. We also can help identify crime prevention resources.
- ◆ Enlist the help of a local business to pay for copies. Organized blocks are in their best interest.
- ◆ Ask someone from your neighborhood association to attend your next meeting. You can introduce this person, and the neighborhood association, to your neighbors as a principal resource in your organizing efforts.
- ◆ Again, phone some neighbors to assure a sizeable attendance. Keep in mind that a personal invitation is worth dozens of letters or flyers.

### BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING

- ◆ Prepare as you did for the first meeting.
- ◆ Send out a flyer restating the group's decision for action. Include the agenda, time and place of the next meeting.
- ◆ Clarify the group's objectives with the speaker before the meeting.
- ◆ Let each person report on what information they gathered since the first meeting.
- ◆ Stay focused on the group's goals. More meetings may be necessary, regular updates are important.

Liz Kreider, former NRC Community Consultant, was the major contributor to this tip

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