

Leadership Support

Cultivate Leadership

Communities start down the path of discontent and failure when the leadership becomes misdirected or stagnate. There needs to be a continuous flow of new leaders in the community. This is not to say that there needs to be a complete turnover of the board or key leaders. Rather, there needs to be balanced transition from one group to the next. Committees need to be meaningful. Board and community meetings need to have purpose.

The importance of qualified leadership is often overlooked as a neighborhood association develops. Strong leadership gives an organization:

- Guidance
- Stability
- Continuity from year to year
- Motivation to take action
- Unity of purpose

A part of your job as a neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop leaders. The task of recruiting and developing leaders has to be an ongoing activity through the lifetime of your neighborhood association.

Some general points to keep in mind are:

- Your contributions to the neighborhood are your abilities and skills to organize. Therefore, try to delegate other responsibilities like event planning.
- Search continually for many "potential" leaders, not just one or two.
- Leaders can become burned out. Have new leaders ready to step in when necessary.
- Identify people who have the time to devote to the work of the neighborhood association.
- New leaders may develop as the concerns of the neighborhood association change. Keep your organization open and flexible enough to bring new members and leaders into your neighborhood association.

Look for individuals who have shown that they:

- Want to succeed and want their group to succeed
- Communicate well with people
- Can motivate people to take collective action
- Are knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its people and their interests
- Have an allegiance to the neighborhood and the association
- Know how to share power

Finding New Leaders

Once your neighborhood association has been up and running for a while, the group should think about how to find and encourage new leadership within the organization.

If the group stays with the same leadership year after year, there is a very real risk of “burning out” those leaders. This is hard on the tired leaders and it is hard on the organization. Although nurturing new leaders takes time and effort, the results are worth it – a healthy organization with leaders who are fresh and enthusiastic.

The first place to look for names of potential officers and/or board members is within your association’s membership. To do that, the group needs to know something about the members, especially those who are also volunteers. Having an organized system of tracking volunteers is a useful approach. Sign-in sheets, 3x5 biography cards, volunteer time slips and a computer spreadsheet are all useful for tracking those neighbors who are showing active involvement.

Another approach is to survey the paid membership. Members of a “leadership committee” can divide up the membership list, directly contact members, and ask them:

- Why did you join the neighborhood association?
- What projects might you want to participate in?
- Would you ever be interested in serving on the board of directors or as an officer?

Many organizations have a vice-president elect, allowing that officer to observe the president for a year. Other groups personally approach residents asking them if they want to serve as a board member or future officer. As new people move into the area, either an individual board member or a group can form a “welcoming committee.” Much like the Welcome Wagon concept, the committee may want to give the new resident samples of neighborhood newsletters, brochures or even coupons to local businesses.

One neighborhood organization keeps track of all volunteers on 3x5 cards that include name, address, phone (work and home), email address, the first year active, interests and concerns in the neighborhood and projects involved in. This method would work on a spread sheet or data base as well. Whatever technology used, it requires someone to consistently collect names at each neighborhood activity and to record the information for future use.

You can also collect the names of residents who have received services from your neighborhood. Who has had alleys graveled, homes painted, sidewalks repaired, garbage hauled away, or a new street tree planted? If you remind them what your group has done for them, perhaps they may feel the need to return the favor.

How to Make Your Job as President More Manageable

1. Introduce yourself at the beginning of a meeting. Don't assume everyone knows who you are. If the group is a reasonable size, have everyone introduce themselves as well.
2. Review the agenda and establish ground rules.
3. Direct the discussion. Keep people on the topic. If irrelevant issues are being brought up, remind the group that there will be a time for new business at the end of the meeting. If people are repetitive, restate the information that they have shared and move on to the next speaker. If a decision needs to be made, call for a motion and take a vote. Keep your own opinions to a minimum.
4. Facilitate voting and decision making. Never assume there is an agreement until it is put to a vote.
5. Do not abuse the power of the Chair. Do not ignore people who want to speak and do not monopolize the floor. A Chairperson should be neutral. If you want to voice your opinion, temporarily step out of your role as the Chair, and then voice your opinion. When finished, return to your role as the Chair. When your turn is finished, do not continue to speak.
6. Disagreement between the memberships is inevitable. Mediate arguments when they arise. Remain impartial and fair. Give each person an opportunity to state his or her own point of view.
7. Publicly state in review what has to be done. Review all discussions, decisions made, and the tasks to be assigned. Make sure that people leave the meeting with a clear understanding of what decisions have and which tasks are to be done by whom.
8. Make every attempt to be as organized as possible. Use a watch and follow the agenda. When it is time to end a discussion, announce that time is almost complete. Select the final speakers and their order from those still indicating a desire to speak. The discussion should end when those people have had their turn.
9. Do not be afraid to delegate duties and tasks. Be aware that you cannot do everything on your own.
10. Follow-up on the assignments after the meeting. Sometimes members need to be encouraged to get things done. You may need a lot of positive reinforcement to get things accomplished. Stay on top of things to ensure completion and success of the assigned task.