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# GENERAL TIPS FOR ORGANIZING

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Every neighborhood and every community association is different; how residents organize as a group is very much dependent on their attitudes and the physical and social characteristics of their neighborhood. Keep in mind, that if your association provides something that people need, if it is forums for truly helping residents improve the quality of life, and if it is useful to them in accomplishing their goals, you will have no problem getting people to join. The key is making sure that the organization is a two-way street – that it serves its residents' needs and reflects its residents' interests. Below are some basic tips for community that may help you get the people in your neighborhood working on collective problem solving.

## **Points To Consider:**

1. Become familiar with your neighborhood and its needs and resources. Talk with residents in the community and find out what they see as problems-poor sanitation conditions, crime, abandoned buildings, or the need for social gatherings to bring people together. Keep a list of potential neighborhood leaders – people who have expressed an interest in becoming involved.
2. Map out the boundaries of your neighborhood. If there are known or natural boundaries, use them for starters. If not, select major streets; railroad tracks; or markers of obvious change of land use, such as a steam, playground, edge of an industrial park, or business area, as tentative community boundaries. Be flexible. How your boundaries are drawn may show your interest in involving people other than residents in your community projects. Businesses, colleges, churches, and hospitals in your area can be important members of your association. Including them within your boundaries allows them to be a part of the community's efforts to solve problems or undertake improvement projects. These members can be especially helpful as sources of technical assistance, supplies, or meeting facilities, and will be far more likely to make their resources available if they are made to feel like part of the community.
3. Begin focusing on issues in your community based on the assessment you made through talking with residents. Call together a few of the concerned residents and discuss major concerns. Identify some specific problems, prioritize them, and work on developing solutions. This handbook can assist you by outlining many projects that your group can undertake to improve the neighborhood

4. Get community residents involved by setting up a large community meeting. Publicize it well. At this meeting, present the results of your neighborhood assessment, and lay out some of the possible solutions to problems that the smaller group identified. Solicit input from those attending, and choose then and there what you, as a group, would like to work on first. If possible, develop a specific plan of action. In this way, people will come away feeling that something has been accomplished. Specific tasks can be given to the people who would like to help.
5. Begin to identify and seek out resources available to assist your group in its problem-solving effort. Be specific about what it is you need. Technical assistance is often available from City agencies, community service organizations, individuals, and businesses – if you know what you want. Make a point to also talk with neighborhood groups that have undertaken a project similar to the one that you are considering. Find out what went right and wrong in their efforts. They may lead you most directly to some of the best sources of assistance, and their advice can help you avoid making unnecessary and costly mistakes.
6. Develop an identity – a name – for your group. This usually happens after a group has banded together to solve a single problem. Once the issue is resolved, many people see the group as a means to solving other community problems, and, thus, an organization is formed. At this time, you may want to set up a structure for your group. You might, then, choose to develop bylaws, elect officers, and incorporate as a non-profit (see the rest of this chapter for more information on these topics).
7. Build coalitions with other groups located around your community. There is strength in numbers and if there are common concerns among the community groups, these groups can work together to solve these problems. Even if you do not jointly undertake problem-solving efforts, you should keep in touch with these groups to find out what they are doing and the issues with which they are concerned.
8. Read through the rest of this chapter on “Getting Organized”, Techniques, skills, and approaches to organizing and remaining a viable community group are outlined.