



My Neighborhood

A Manual for College Station
Neighborhood & Homeowner Associations



CITY OF COLLEGE STATION
Home of Texas A&M University®

City of College Station Neighborhood Services
PO Box 9960, College Station, Texas 77842
(979) 764-6262 cstx.gov/neighbor

Updated: January 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why do neighborhoods organize?.....	3
Benefits to Organizing Neighborhood Associations	3
Role of the Citizen	4
Role of Local Government	4
How to Get Involved.....	6
A Declaration of Neighborhood Roles, Rights and Responsibilities	7
6 Steps to a Neighborhood Association	8
Step 1: The Idea	8
Step 2: Form a Neighborhood Organizing Team	8
Step 3: Meet with Neighborhood Services Staff.....	8
Step 4: Hold a Neighborhood Meeting.....	9
Step 5: Hold a Second Neighborhood Meeting	9
Step 6: Register with the Neighborhood Services Office.....	9
Creating a Formal Structure	10
Neighborhood Associations vs. Homeowner Associations.....	10
Bylaws.....	10
Membership and Officers.....	11
How to Make Your Job as Chairperson More Manageable	12
Tax Identification Number.....	14
Tax-Exempt Status.....	14
Incorporation.....	14
Liability	15
Running a Successful Organization	16
Build and Maintain Membership.....	16
Meetings.....	17
Committees	18
Work Plans.....	19
Raising Funds	19
Bookkeeping	21
Publicity	22
Projects and Activities	24
Appendices	26

Introduction

Neighborhoods are the basic building blocks of the community, and their health and vitality are essential to the future of College Station. Strong neighborhoods are not just a collection of houses within a subdivision boundary; they contribute to a unique sense of place and community identity, with residents contributing to partnerships, leadership, and civic involvement. In many ways, a community is only as strong and sustainable as its neighborhoods.

Neighborhood associations play a vital role in representing the interests of residents and enhancing the local community. The residents of College Station have demonstrated a great willingness to dedicate time and energy to make a difference in the community. This manual will help residents focus their efforts and organize their neighborhoods for action. The City believes that increasing citizen participation benefits the whole community by creating a positive environment of shared responsibility and collaboration.



Why do neighborhoods organize?

Neighborhoods organize for a variety of reasons. Most want to:

Address a particular concern – Many neighborhoods become organized when a particular concern emerges that neighbors can rally around. Residents of the neighborhood will come together to discuss problems and come up with solutions. As an association, members can work together to resolve the issue by using the many human resources already available within their neighborhood.

Empower residents – Some organizers believe the only reason to organize is for power. Power is the ability to act and with it comes a responsibility to the community. When neighborhoods organize, they acquire power by joining together to accomplish something.

Build community – Organizing to build community means improving your neighborhood’s ability to act and unite the diverse skills of its residents. Residents want to become better neighbors by getting to know each other and helping each other out. Whether it is exchanging skills, such as cooking dinner for a neighbor one night in exchange for having him/her run some errands for you, activities such as these enhance the sense of community.



Benefits to Organizing Associations

Through neighborhood organizing, residents get to know each other better while working to improving their community. Other benefits include:

- Facilitating achievement of common neighborhood goals.
- Providing the neighborhood with a common voice and an effective means of communicating with government officials and other instrumental groups.
- Empowering neighborhoods so that they provide input in events happening in their area members take part in the decision making that affects their neighborhoods.
- Organizing and helping members work for neighborhood preservation and improvement.

- Planning and holding social activities for the neighborhood.
- Organizing neighborhood improvement and preservation projects.

The Neighborhood Partnership Program was created to build helpful, collaborative relationships between neighborhoods, community organizations, and the City of College Station. The Neighborhood Services division is the City’s primary liaison with neighborhood organizations and maintains ongoing communications with community groups that can have a positive impact on neighborhoods. As with any successful relationship, all parties share responsibility in creating an alliance that is effective and benefit all involved.



Role of the Citizen

Citizens have a very important role in the health and spirit of a community. Active participation is the best way to ensure that your desired quality of life is fulfilled.

Citizen involvement includes voting regularly, serving in a public capacity, or organizing neighborhood projects or activities. All of these examples are equally important to the process of building strong communities. Citizen involvement and engagement is crucial to improving the quality of life in their neighborhoods and the city. The Declaration on the page 7 describes the roles that residents have adopted in many communities.

Neighborhood Commitment

In the spirit of partnership, neighborhood and homeowner associations that are a part of the Neighborhood Partnership Program will:

- Have an active board with officers in place;
- Provide Neighborhood Services with a list of all association board officers’ contact information and promptly notify Neighborhood Services when there are association leadership changes in personnel or contact information;
- Distribute information communicated from Neighborhood Services to the association’s board to association members, as appropriate;
- Provide Neighborhood Services with a copy of current association bylaws and promptly provide Neighborhood Services with any amendments;
- Provide Neighborhood Services with association meeting agendas at least 72 hours prior to meetings, copies of association minutes within a week after meeting, and an annual update on the neighborhood organization;
- Hold at least one annual meeting where the entire neighborhood is invited to attend;
- Attend at least one Neighborhood Services event annually; and
- Attend at least one Neighborhood Services board member training session annually.



Role of Local Government

The preservation and maintenance of an area’s quality of life is a shared responsibility. Local government is responsible for ensuring that the common good is protected and public services are carried out in an orderly and efficient manner.

City of College Station Commitment

To promote neighborhood integrity – in partnership with College Station neighborhood and homeowner associations, other City divisions, and community organizations – the City of College Station through Neighborhood Services pledges to:

- Provide start-up support to neighborhoods establishing or revitalizing associations;
- Assist with the planning of annual or large neighborhood meetings;
- Host meetings and trainings that provide training for association officers and representatives;
- Host meetings and trainings that provide a forum for networking and education on local and regional topics;
- Help to resolve neighborhood conflicts;
- Administer the Strong & Sustainable Grant Program to foster neighborhood identity and community;
- Administer the Mosquito Abatement Grant
- Assist Homeowner Associations, Neighborhood Associations, and other City departments in their implementation of adopted neighborhood plans;
- Maintain a database of all registered Homeowner Associations (HOAs) and Neighborhood Associations (NAs) to enhance community communication;
- Notify associations of public hearings pertaining to development, public works, and other municipal projects in the vicinity of their neighborhood;
- Distribute a regular neighborhood email newsletter to association board members providing information regarding neighborhood, community, and City events; and
- Act as a central access point within the City to direct questions, concerns, and complaints to various departments. Serve as the liaison between the City departments, City Managers, the Mayor, and neighborhoods.

Registering your neighborhood through the Neighborhood Partnership Program will improve communication between citizens and government and other useful groups. The following describes the benefits the City offers to participating neighborhood organizations and the City's expectations for the neighborhoods in the partnership.

Advantages of the Neighborhood Partnership Program include:

- Registered neighborhood and homeowner associations database: Information is available to city departments, community agencies, developers and other neighborhood partners in order to encourage communication regarding projects, events and programs that may affect the livability of the neighborhood.
- Public hearing notification: Neighborhood representatives are notified of development projects and public hearings that pertain to land or projects in the vicinity of their neighborhood.
- Monthly Neighborhood Partnership Seminar Suppers: These meetings provide a forum for education on local and regional topics and networking between neighborhood leaders.

- Start-up support: Thy city provides support for residents establishing or revitalizing associations.
- Neighborhood email distribution: Neighborhood representatives receive information on neighborhood, community and city events.



How to Get Involved

Whether you are new to a neighborhood, or you are long-time resident, starting or joining a neighborhood association is very simple.

If you know how to reach an officer of the neighborhood association where you live, contact them and tell them you are interested in getting involved and if you don't know how to reach an officer, begin talking with neighbors to find out when regular meetings are or to get a phone number of an association officer. Becoming involved will be a great opportunity to meet your neighbor and have a great time. You will also be a part of making your neighborhood a better place to live.

There are several opportunities to participate, including:

- Attend regular meetings
- Volunteer for activities
- Become a registered member of the association
- Attend regular association events and programs
- Become a block captain

A Declaration of Neighborhood Roles, Rights and Responsibilities

We come together as neighborhood people working to preserve and improve our neighborhoods.

As neighborhood people, we have the right to self-determination and empowerment; to be advised and consulted on public policies and initiatives and private initiatives affecting our neighborhoods; to have our neighborhood values, culture and history recognized and respected; and to have the authority and resources to establish neighborhood organizations that will work to steward expected change that honors tradition and stability.

As neighborhood people, we have the responsibility to advise government and others of neighborhood values, history and culture; to listen to the views of all residents; to help one another care for children, the aging and others in need; to promote self-sufficiency of our residents and economic and social development of the neighborhood; to participate neighbor to neighbor, business to business and neighbor to business in the spirit of cooperation; to guide our youth, to look out for the safety of our homes and streets, maintain our properties, and make proper use of public facilities; and to strive diligently to achieve liberty and justice for all.

As neighborhood people, we look to a variety of governments, voluntary organizations, businesses and philanthropy to meet neighborhood needs for personal, social and economic development; to be receptive to dialogue with all neighbors concerning issues relevant to the welfare of our community to fund neighborhood organizations and services, to respect neighborhood values, culture and history; and to be held accountable for how their actions affect our neighborhoods.

As neighborhood people, we ask that the actions of all neighborhood residents and organizations, governments, business and philanthropy be guided by the principles of equity, participation and accountability.

Adopted by Neighborhoods USA, May 16, 1993

~

Neighborhoods USA is a national non-profit organization providing support for neighborhoods and citizen groups.

6 Steps to a Neighborhood Association

If your neighborhood does not have an existing neighborhood or homeowner association, you may want to create one. The following outlines a 6-step process for forming a new neighborhood association.

Step 1 The Idea

The first step is to recognize that a neighborhood association can make your neighborhood a better place to live. A neighborhood association unites residents and gives them the ability to work with the City to identify concerns and address issues. Before making a new association, make sure that a neighborhood association doesn't already exist in your neighborhood. You can check with the Neighborhood Services office or ask your neighbors if one exists.

Step 2 Form a Neighborhood Organizing Team

If a neighborhood association does not already exist in your neighborhood, you can develop one. You should talk with your to find a strong group of individuals who are also interested in developing your community. Different neighbors will want to join for different reasons; some may have encountered problems in your neighborhood but do not know how to solve them; others will want to make friends and develop bonds with their neighbors. If you find there is an interest and need for a neighborhood association, a team of 2-4 residents should make up the Neighborhood Organizing Team. The Team will be responsible for getting the association started and working with the City's Neighborhood Services staff.

The Neighborhood Organizing Team should meet before speaking with Neighborhood Services. Developing an agenda for this meeting will keep the meeting efficient which will encourage members to come back. Ask the Team to come prepared with their ideas and expectations for the Neighborhood Association; spend time letting your team get to know each other and share why they want to form a Neighborhood Association. There should be an open discussion regarding the goals; this could range from solving a specific issue to developing the community of the neighborhood. Talk about how to get other neighbors involved in the organization, when general meetings should be, possible boundaries (which can be determined by rivers, roads, railroad tracks, parks, land use type, and housing styles) and bylaws, and when the Team should meet next. Ask your Team what went well at this meeting and what could be improved.

Step 3 Meet with Neighborhood Services Staff

The Team will need to establish proposed boundaries and bylaws before the first neighborhood meeting is held. The Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) is operated by Neighborhood Services and will help residents form new associations. The Neighborhood Organizing Team meets with NPP staff who can provide all of the information and assistance necessary to get started. This is the beginning of a continuous relationship; neighborhood associations are expected to maintain open and regular communication with the City's Neighborhood Services Department in order to take part in the benefits that the Neighborhood Partnership Program provides.

Step 4 Hold a Neighborhood Meeting

Once the Neighborhood Organizing Team has decided on the structure and boundaries of the association and created draft by-laws, you are ready for your first neighborhood meeting. The Neighborhood Services staff will help you advertise and put on your first meeting. Find a large common place for the meeting such as a community center, or a school. This meeting will introduce the idea of a neighborhood association, get residents involved and get feedback on the proposed boundaries and by-laws; have an agenda with suggested time spent on each topic ready for all attendants. It is your duty as the neighborhood association initiator to keep time. In addition to the agendas, bring a sign-in sheet with spaces for names, addresses, and emails of meeting attendants, any relevant handouts, an area map, and contact information for members of the Organizing Team. The discussion may bring up new ideas or concerns and changes to the proposal may be needed; do not dominate the conversation with the Organizing Team's original proposal, as it should only serve as a starting point for discussion.

Step 5 Hold a Second Neighborhood Meeting

When there is consensus on the boundaries and bylaws of the new association (which may take multiple meetings), a meeting is held to adopt bylaws and elect officers. The new neighborhood association now exists! Now the real work, and fun, can begin. A committee should be formed to conduct a neighborhood inventory. A neighborhood inventory involves forming a report of facts about the neighborhood including (but not limited to) information about the types of housing (single family, multi-family, rentals, student housing), schools in the area, and information about the residents. Some issues the neighborhood encounters may become apparent during this process, but if they do not, time should be spent determining what problems residents encounter as a whole, as well as what the neighborhood association's goals should be according to the broader community, not just the original Organizing Team's ideas.

Step 6 Register with the Neighborhood Services Office

Neighborhood associations are encouraged to register with the City through the Neighborhood Partnership Program. Registration puts your association in the City's database and lists you as the official representatives of your neighborhood. Your association will be kept informed of events in your area and contacted for feedback by various public agencies. The benefits of registering with the Neighborhood Partnership Program can be found on pages 5-6.

Creating a Formal Structure

Once you have decided to form a new neighborhood association, there are many tasks to be done and decisions to be made. First you must decide how to structure your organization to meet the needs of your neighborhood and be most effective.



Neighborhood Associations vs. Homeowner Associations

A neighborhood association is a voluntary group comprised of property owners or residents in a specified geographic location. Homeowner associations are non-voluntary groups in a specified location which may require dues and fees.

Neighborhood Associations

Neighborhood associations are generally a group of residents and other interested stakeholders that devote their time and energy to improve and enhance the well-defined, geographic area where they live. The neighborhood association meeting is a time to exchange ideas, decide on projects and priorities, propose solutions, and make plans affecting the neighborhood. Associations usually meet monthly to discuss a variety of issues. Some issues could be: sponsoring neighborhood events, economic well-being of residents, improving city services, implementing projects to build neighborhood pride, and publishing neighborhood newsletters. True neighborhood associations have an elected board of directors and bylaws.

Homeowner Associations

Homeowner associations are groups of homeowners who live in an area developed by the same home builder, usually referred to as a subdivision. Homeowner associations usually have a formally elected body and are governed by deed restrictions - a set of rules that homeowners agree to when they purchase their house. These rules, or covenants, often govern construction regulations, membership/dues requirements, as well as a wide variety of other issues. Some homeowners associations also focus on items that affect their neighborhood such as beautification, clean up, crime, street lighting, building issues or concerns, and social events. These issues are similar to those addressed by neighborhood associations.



Bylaws

Neighborhood associations need to have bylaws which describe how they will do business. Bylaws simply establish the rules governing a group. They serve as a constitution that establishes the legal requirements for the association.

Bylaws also govern the way the association functions as well as the roles and responsibilities of its officers. They should be taken seriously because they are important to the maintenance of order and credibility in the organization.

Writing bylaws can be a tedious procedure for new organizations, but they are very important to the success of the organization. They help members clearly define and understand the purpose, procedures, and role of their neighborhood association.

A sample outline from a set of bylaws can be found in the appendix. It contains information that you may consider including when writing your association’s bylaws. Staff at the Neighborhood Services Office is also available to help you create your by-laws. The sample outline is very inclusive, so do not feel your association must have every article or section. When designing your bylaws, use only those areas you are going to need. It is important to customize your bylaws to meet the needs of your group. Be specific, but still allow flexibility within your association. The bylaws will be part of your neighborhood association for a long time.

Once bylaws are written, they should be reviewed periodically to assure that the association’s purpose has not changed. Reviewing bylaws on a regular basis ensures the rules are continuing to meet the needs of the group. Whenever bylaws are updated, they should be re-filed with Neighborhood Services.

Many neighborhood associations also find it helpful to adopt “operating procedures” separate from the bylaws. These rules generally are easier to amend than bylaws. The purpose of such rules is to record agreements of a particular board or set of members about how to conduct meetings and other activities. Such rules should never be in conflict with the bylaws. Instead, they should address more detailed procedures than are covered in the bylaws. The key concept of operating procedures is that they reflect the desires of the current board or members and are changed when the desires or needs of the group change.



Membership and Officers

Once the initial group of interested neighbors is established, the group should select a short-term leader. Later, when the association is formalized, the association will need to choose permanent leaders that are elected to official terms.

Your bylaws should describe all the positions, election procedures, how often they are elected, and the major responsibilities expected from each position. The positions created typically make up the neighborhood association board members.

Membership

It is important for the neighborhood association to be as inclusive as possible. Any person who is a resident or property owner within the neighborhood association boundaries, or who meets the criteria outlined in your association bylaws, is a prospective member and will be able to participate in your association.

Officers and Board Representatives

Elections should be held annually for your neighborhood association to elect a Board of Directors. These officers will handle the business of the neighborhood association throughout the upcoming year. Your association’s bylaws should specify the positions and the general framework of your electoral process. Descriptions can outline the responsibilities of the board and other individual officer positions.

There are a number of duties and responsibilities involved in forming an organization. It is important to have enough people on the board to delegate the many tasks that need to be

completed. The following positions are the minimum number needed for the governing board of your association:

Chairperson or President

This person is responsible for the overall leadership of the association board and sets the agenda and facilitates all meetings. It is important for this person to be objective and judicial. A chairperson should never dominate discussions. The chair keeps the meeting running smoothly while allowing participation and is the person who makes sure people keep to the agenda, both in content and timing.

Some responsibilities of the chairperson are:

- Making sure members are notified about meeting dates, times, and locations.
- Represent the association in a public capacity.
- Keep the meeting focused and within the allotted time frames as outlined in the agenda.
- Mediate membership discussion and clarify decisions made by the group.
- Have an organized agenda and bring issues to a vote, as needed, in an orderly manner.
- Review tasks and make assignments.
- Ensure that all members follow bylaws and procedures.
- Give credit and recognition for accomplishments.
- Follow up on decisions made at meetings.
- Meet with successor and ensure transfer of records, files, etc.

How to Make Your Job as Chairperson 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 which could include not speaking over each other and/or being respectful of all ideas and people.
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.

CONTINUED →

6. Disagreement amongst the membership 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 almost time to end a discussion, announce that time is almost up. 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 and that others have chosen to be an active member because they want to be a part of the association.
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.

Vice Chairperson or Vice President

This person assists the chairperson. The person serves in an advisory capacity to the Chair. In absence of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson conducts the meetings and exercises all of the usual duties of the chairperson. The Vice-Chairperson should also be a person with strong leadership qualities.

Some of the responsibilities of the Vice-Chairperson are:

- Effectively manage and facilitate meetings in the absence of the Chair.
- Assume the Chair position in the event that the Chair is unable to complete his/her term.
- Follow-up on tasks assigned to members of the association.

Secretary

The secretary records the minutes of the meetings and makes sure that copies of the minutes, agendas, and other records are available for the board and the public.

Some responsibilities of the Secretary are:

- Record minutes during all association meetings and send to members after the meeting.
- Maintain current and comprehensive membership records.
- Record all official correspondence of the association, neighborhood plan, and by-laws.
- Pass along important information to be included in association newsletters.

Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for the funds of the neighborhood association. Most boards do not require anything but an occasional status report from the Treasurer. Someone should be selected that will take the duties of the position very seriously since the fiscal condition of the association is crucial to the future wellbeing of the group.

Some responsibilities of the Treasurers are:

- Pay all of the association's expenses in a timely and accurate manner.
- Collect and deposit all funds received by the association.
- Maintain an adequate, thorough financial accounting system for the association.
- Collect voluntary dues from members of the association.



Tax Identification Number

Neighborhood and homeowner associations should have a federal tax identification number to do business with the city. It can also be used to manage financial accounts, apply for tax-exempt status, and limit liability for its members.

Organizations do not need to be incorporated to receive a tax identification number. The required federal form convenient and simple. Contact an Internal Revenue Service agent in Austin, Texas, and ask for Tax ID Form SS-4 or [visit this page](#). Then simply return it to the IRS tax office in Austin at the address noted on the form.

You should receive your tax ID number in six to eight weeks. If you need to use the number before you receive it in the mail (for bank accounts or non-profit status), simply state that you have applied for it, but have not received it yet.

Tax-Exempt Status

In order to apply for tax exemption, a group must be first be incorporated. The federal government gives tax-exempt status upon application to the Internal Revenue Service. This status permits large contributors to your group to deduct contributions from their income tax. Call the local Appraisal District office at 979-774-4100 for information and an application. Tax-exempt status is almost mandatory if your group plans to apply for foundation monies or solicit large donations.

** NOTE: Processing a tax-exempt status application may take up to six months.*

Incorporation

Incorporation is optional to all organizations and may be beneficial to your neighborhood association. When a non-profit organization incorporates, it helps define the group and the organization is deemed trustworthy. Incorporation also protects the personal liability of group members. In Texas, non-profit incorporation costs \$25 to file and there is no renewal fee. If you decide to incorporate, contact the Secretary of State Corporation at 512-463-5555. You will be sent a copy of the law pertaining to nonprofit organizations which includes a sample copy of articles of incorporation that can be used as a model.



Liability

Many board members are fearful of being held liable for board actions. When organizations incorporate, board members can be protected from individual financial liability as a result of board service.

A provision in the bylaws may be placed in order to indemnify board members in the event they are sued as a result of board service. Indemnification promises that the corporation will repay the board member for costs of defending themselves in lawsuits and/or for costs of judgements against board members. However, such indemnification is pointless if the organization does not have funds available to cover the board member's legal costs. Therefore, larger organizations usually carry directors' and officers' liability insurance.

Several procedures should be followed in order to protect board members from potential personal liability:

- Conduct regular board meetings and keep members well informed.
- Utilize a dependable system for keeping detailed minutes of all board meetings, recording which members attended, and the nature and seriousness of all board discussions.
- Obtain adequate insurance coverage for all activities that are sponsored by your organization.
- If your association has employees, you should be absolutely certain that the association has met all tax and reporting requirements under the law.

For a low additional annual fee, several individual homeowners' policies provide coverage for policyholder's volunteer activities. Check with your insurance agent to see what volunteer coverage is available.

Running a Successful Organization

Once you have your neighborhood association up and running, you must keep members interested and involved. This section is designed to provide helpful suggestions for running a successful organization.



Build and Maintain Membership

Member recruitment is important for organizational longevity. Many groups attract members by hosting meetings on issues that could impact a large portion of residents.

Once the project is completed or a problem is solved, active members may dwindle away. Many organizations experience this problem, so you need to be creative to avoid this dilemma.

Here are some actions your group can undergo to build membership:

1. Have association members go door-to-door calling on their neighbors. This can be a week-long effort or be done in a day. You could have a membership drive and then have a party for the members that volunteered in the effort. Your members would have fun and would have an opportunity to share experiences with each other.
2. Pass out printed materials to encourage residents to get involved. It could be as simple as a letter from the president or a brochure with details on upcoming events or issues. Members should also carry membership forms with them and offer both immediate and mail-in membership opportunities.
3. Designate block captains that can pass out flyers and newsletters to prospective new members, welcome new residents, serve as a sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block, and organize volunteers to help with activities they might be interested in.
4. Community gatherings or other events are also a great way to recruit new members. Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Have membership sign-up sheets available. You can also have information packets about the association to hand out at events.

Keeping members involved can be quite challenging. For every member that is active in the association, there are probably two who would be involved if they were properly motivated. Below are some ideas to retain active members:

1. Help new members find a place in the association. Many will offer to help but will not know where to start. Organize a list of volunteer activities and have those who want to help sign their name next to activities they'd be interested in helping with. This will be a great start for your new members and gives them a reason to continue coming back.
2. Always welcome new members and attempt to make them feel at ease with the group. Officers and other members should watch for new faces at each meeting and welcome

them. New or potential members should be introduced to someone who lives near them. Designate an official “greeter” at every meeting.

3. Avoid the appearance of cliques. New people who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return. Different people should be appointed to positions of leadership. This will help create a sense of belonging. Delegating tasks and projects to many members ensures that members will take ownership of the organization; the Association is less likely to lose members if they are interested and actively a part of the organization.
4. Encourage new ideas and input at all levels of the organization. People who are new in the organization can see things in a new light and provide new solutions to old problems. New perspectives can assist the whole group in problem solving.
5. Every meeting should represent the strongest commitment to organization. Busy people will not attend meetings or involve themselves in organizations they consider to be a waste of time. Have a well-planned meeting will display a sense of accomplishment from the beginning. Have a written agenda for every meeting and stick to it.
6. Maintain current membership records. Keep a file with members’ names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest, etc.
7. Being part of a neighborhood association is not all work. Have fun as well. Sponsor parties and celebrations to get to know your neighbors better. Your events should appeal to all, including children. This will foster a strong sense of community spirit among your neighbors.



Meetings

Regular meetings are important so that members are informed of current and future issues and projects, as well as the accomplishments of the group.

One thing to remember about meetings is that it isn’t always necessary to call a full group meeting to make minor decisions. When minor decisions need to be made, using an executive committee or board is better. Most groups have a board meeting once a month unless something important requires an additional meeting. In order to prevent member burnout, meetings should not be longer than one hour.

If a regular meeting is scheduled, but there really isn’t anything important to discuss, then create something. This can be done by inviting a guest speaker, organizing a neighborhood tour, or having a potluck. Don’t cancel the meeting altogether because it is important for groups to have contact on a regular basis.

One important part of holding a meeting is its location. Choose a place that is centrally located and familiar to the neighbors. The location can set the mood and the friendliness of the meeting. Try to estimate the number of people that will attend. The room should be comfortable but not so large as to make the people feel lost.

The meeting room should be arranged in a way that will encourage people to participate. The chairs can be arranged in a semi- or full circle so that everyone can be seen. Avoid having all the chairs facing the speaker as in a typical classroom. Do not use tables unless you need them to hold drawings or literature because they can form barriers to communication. However, a large table with everyone sitting around it can be used if people need to write.

Be sure to have enough copies of the agenda available when members arrive for the meeting. Members can begin familiarizing themselves with what is to be discussed and will be aware of the order of topics while waiting for the meeting to begin. The agenda should be short and concise. A sample agenda is provided in the Appendix of this manual.

Many groups are comfortable using Robert’s Rules of Order, but feel free to use whatever method works best for your group. A special effort should be made to ensure that a vote truly represents the desire of the group. Keep meetings orderly and democratic.

Refer to “How to Have Successful Meetings” in the Appendix at the end of the manual for more tips on holding meetings.

General Meeting Rules

Your association should set some general operating rules for meetings so that they run smoothly and without difficulty. The operating rules could be included in the association’s bylaws so that all members are aware of them. Implement the rules from the first meeting because this meeting will set expectations for the organization. Some common rules for all meetings are the following:

- One person speaks at a time
- No derogatory remarks of yourself or others
- Speak from your own experience
- No cross-talk (i.e. no side conversations or interrupting the speaker to dispute points.)



Committees

Organizations can accomplish objectives through the dedicated work of committees, which are subgroups of association members.

The tasks and the types of committees depend on the overall purpose and structure of your neighborhood association. Two types of committees can be formed:

1. Committees for Internal Projects – Some examples of internal projects are fundraising, meeting arrangements, communications or publicity, bylaws, and social events.
2. Committees for Neighborhood Projects – Some examples of neighborhood projects are housing conditions, police/neighborhood relations, economic development, neighborhood maintenance, community services and resources, and traffic safety.

It can be difficult to keep members on committees active, productive, and motivated. Here are some tips to keep in mind that can help:

- Encourage members to participate in the association and the committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Provide reasons for actions to be considered by the committee or association.
- Give recognition to members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association.
- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible. No one wants to feel their time is being wasted.
- Help members develop communication skills.



Work Plans

Making work plans for each project will help members stay focused and on target.

Meeting goals, planning events, recruiting volunteers, and strengthening the organization will be easier when time is taken to prepare an outline of expectations and objectives, and then make a plan for meeting those goals.

Some helpful questions to ask when preparing a work plan are:

- What is the purpose for doing this project? If this is an annual work plan, review the purpose of the organization, then define goals for the year.
- Is there a need for it?
- What resources are available to help attain these goals?
- Have other neighborhood associations attempted this activity? Can they be contacted for help?
- What tasks are involved with this project?
- Who will do the tasks?
- How much time is needed?
- What resources are needed to accomplish this project?
- Will this cost money? Does the association have the funds? How will you raise the money needed?
- Are there enough volunteers or members available to complete the project?

Neighborhood Services can be contacted for planning assistance. Staff is available to help associations work toward neighborhood goals.



Raising Funds

Associations need to raise funds for regular operations and special events and projects. Funds can be raised by members, private donations, or from public or private grants.

A fund raising committee should be selected to prepare a budget and to oversee projects. Often people who are well known and liked in the community are successful project leaders. This

person should also have good contacts in your local business area. Most importantly, the person should have the time to dedicate for the fundraising. Here are some examples of fundraising that has worked well for other neighborhood associations:

Rummage or Garage Sales

This fundraiser is a simple event to have. It will have a large variety of items since several different group members can donate items.

1. Form a committee of people responsible for the event.
2. Saturdays and Sundays are the best days to hold the sale. Have the sale in the garage of someone who lives on a corner or near a main street, or in a neighborhood community center.
3. Decide beforehand what percentage of the profits will go to the association and to the individuals who gave items for the sale.
4. Try to have a good variety of items. Televisions, dining sets, dressers, and beds draw great crowds. Keep junk items to a minimum. Include knickknacks, glassware, dolls, and children's clothes.
5. Advertise with cardboard signs and use black enamel paint. Make sure your signs are no smaller than 24" square to ensure visibility. Post them on main streets leading to the sale. If you can, invest in an ad in the local free paper as well as the daily.

** NOTE: The City of College Station does not require a permit for garage sales.*

Raffle

Raffles are successful if plenty of tickets are sold and the prizes are either donated or acquired inexpensively. Good sources of donated prizes are local merchants or group members. If prizes need to be purchased, your profits will diminish greatly. Keep costs down by photocopying tickets, keep track of all persons selling tickets and allow plenty of time for tickets to be sold. Ticket prices should not exceed \$.50 or \$1.00, unless the prizes are excellent.

** NOTE: You do not need a permit to sell raffle tickets as long as (1) you are designated as a nonprofit organization, (2) your support staff are unpaid, and (3) your raffle ticket sales do not amount to more than \$5,000.*

Local Merchants

Many local merchants will readily help a neighborhood group with either merchandise or a cash contribution. Assess merchants according to the size of their business. Remember these points when soliciting for contributions:

- A good customer is the best person to approach a merchant.
- Do not solicit a merchant at the beginning or the end of the business day or during peak business hours.
- Bring a letter from your organization (preferably on letterhead) introducing you as the member who is authorized to solicit contributions.

Dues

Many organizations have membership dues to help pay for some of the activities and common costs of running an organization, such as paper, copying, etc. As membership increases and becomes more involved in association events, having dues will not necessarily be a hardship for some members because they will want to help out. However, paying mandatory dues should not be a condition for membership.



Bookkeeping

All associations collect sums of money for various reasons. A management system needs to be in place for dealing with any funds handled by the association.

The best thing to do is to open a bank account for the group. But with so many different types of accounts available, how do you know what kind of account to set up? Research needs to be dedicated to finding out the benefits of certain types of accounts and a decision can be made on an account that will be most beneficial for the group. Check with several banks to get the best deal for the group. Whether you are a corporation or just a designated person, either can open a bank account for the group. If you are a corporation and also have nonprofit status, you may be eligible to receive free or reduced fee banking privileges at some banks.

Two things to consider when determining the type of bank account for your neighborhood association are:

- How often will you withdraw money?
- The amount of money your association has to deposit. Do you have enough to keep a minimum balance in your account or pay service fees, if any?

Even though many organizations do not have much money, it is important to keep track of whatever money does come into or go out from your organization. It is a good idea to have an accountant or bookkeeper help you set up the accounts from the start, then the Treasurer or someone who feels comfortable with numbers and figures can take on bookkeeping responsibilities. The sooner the system is set up, the easier it is to keep accurate financial records.

The following is one common system to help keep your group's records accurate. It provides a record of all money received and where it came from, and all the money paid out and the purpose for which it was utilized.

Cash Receipts and Cash Disbursements

Money coming into or out of the organization should be recorded. These transactions are recorded in a format called a journal.

1. *Cash Receipts Journal* – A record of the total amount of money (cash or checks) and the source of each dollar amount (i.e. contributions, grants, sale of advertising, etc.) on the day it is received.

2. *Cash Disbursement Journal* – Record each disbursement from each bank account. Disbursements made by check should be recorded with the check number, date of check, the payee (who the check is made out to), amount of the check, and the purpose of the disbursement. For savings accounts without preprinted checks, record the date of withdrawal, amount and purpose (use) of the funds. Photocopy the withdrawal slip and file with cash receipts journal to create a record of who withdrew the money.

General Ledger

Associations with many different sources of receipts or many different categories for disbursements, particularly those who receive foundation grants that restrict the use of the grant money, may need to set up a General Ledger. The General Ledger is essential for an organization that wants to use the accrual basis of accounting which records amounts owed to the organizations (receivables) and amounts owed by the organization (payables). If you think your association needs a General Ledger or has significant payables or receivables, get help from a trained accountant to set up your system.

Each month, the Treasurer or another designated person should prepare a written financial report. The report should include the results of the month's activities (i.e. from March 1 to March 31). The report should include at least the following information:

- Cash available at the beginning of the month.
- Total receipts during the month, itemized by source.
- Total disbursement during the month, itemized by type – postage, supplies, printing, etc.
- Cash available at the end of the month.



Publicity

You will be planning several great programs for your neighborhood, so don't keep them a secret. This will help others in the neighborhood join you in your efforts and take part in making a difference.

Publicity is also an easy way to increase membership in your association. There are different sources that can be used for publicity that groups should take advantage of. A good publicity network is important to make people aware of their activities and projects and to keep members informed. The Neighborhood Services Offices can help you advertise neighborhood activities through a variety of methods.

News Releases, Public Service Announcements

News releases are used when you want give information about an event to the public, such as a neighborhood cleanup or election of officers. Public Service Announcements (PSA) can also be used when you want to announce an event.

When writing a news release, keep the following in mind:

- News releases should be about one typewritten, double-spaced page
- Your first paragraph should include who, what, when, and where
- Following paragraphs should provide details and background
- Include information for a contact person: name and phone number

- Include a “release date” and “do not use after” date
- Send a copy of the news release at least two weeks ahead of time

When writing a PSA, follow the same format as a news release except for the following:

- PSAs are shorter than news releases, maybe only a paragraph
- When sending a PSA to a radio station, be sure it can be read in 30 seconds (7 or 8 lines) and attach the details and background on a separate sheet
- When sending a PSA to a large newspaper, find out what section would give your PSA the best exposure. Send the PSA to the editor of that section.

Website

Many people have access to the internet, making it a great place for your association to publicize events. You can build a homepage for the association and post current issues, an association calendar, and an e-mail address so the association can be contacted. The Internet is a great way to distribute information and associations should utilize it. The Neighborhood Services Office also maintains a web site that includes information about registered neighborhood associations and events.

Flyers

Flyers can be used for any activity, project, or goal. Some tips to keep in mind are:

- Keep wording bold enough to see from a distance of ten feet
- Use colorful paper
- Design one and quick-copy the rest
- Post flyers in markets, laundromats, schools, stores, or any other place frequently visited by the people you are trying to reach

Posters

Making large posters can be effective when using these tips:

- Use large pieces of cardboard boxes
- Use black enamel paint to rainproof your poster
- Keep the message brief
- Keep artwork to a minimum

Logos

Designing logos can be fun and can bring members together when an image can be associated with the group. The logo can be simple, such as an attractive way to display the group’s name. The logo should be unique to the group so it can have a maximum impact,

Buttons, T-shirts, and Decals

Once the group has a logo, you can transfer it to T-shirts, decals, and buttons. They can be sold for fundraising or distributed to volunteers. Using these items can also increase awareness of your group around the city.



Projects and Activities

Organizing neighborhood projects can provide opportunities for neighbors to work together and stay active. It also builds the credibility for the group as a moving force in the community.

Neighborhood Cleanups

Neighborhood cleanups are a great way to boost pride in your area. Your group can organize to collect debris in alleys, backyards, vacant lots, and sidewalks. When most of the litter is cleared, occasional cleanups can be organized to maintain the areas clean. Cleanups are a great way for neighbors to feel proud of where they live and provide immediate results. Helpful tips include:

- Schedule a cleanup date (and a rain date) and time. Choose a Saturday or a Sunday, since most people are free on those days of the week.
- Notify residents of the project. Inform them of the date, time, and what tools would be helpful (work gloves, rakes, garbage bags, etc.) You can post flyers or make posters.
- On the day of the cleanup, organize people into teams to get the maximum use of your manpower and tools.
- Be sure to have a break where everyone can meet up at a centralized place for refreshments and some fun. It would be great to have a local merchant donate refreshments.
- Contact the office of Neighborhood Services for planning assistance at 979-764-6262.
- Contact Public Works regarding litter collection dates and methods of pick up. Also, find out if some of the vacant lots in your neighborhood are city-owned. If they are, Public Works can help with the cleanup of those lots. Call 979-764-3690 for information.

Babysitting Exchange

An exchange system can be developed with neighbors where they baby-sit for services. For example, a parent can leave a child at a homebound senior's house while the parent shops for both households. Another example is when a parent has a doctor's appointment, that person can leave their child at a neighbor's home during the appointment. People that register for the service can specify what age children they feel comfortable sitting for. Parents should be advised to leave an address and phone number of where they can be reached in case of an emergency. Police should verify the names of people registering to be baby-sitters to secure the safety of the children.

Crime Prevention Education

By educating your neighbors in safety techniques, you can improve the security of your neighborhood. A well-informed group with an active interest in crime prevention can significantly reduce the local crime rate.

How to get started:

- Contact the Police Department's Community Enhancement Unit at 979-764-3600 to request a security inspection of homes that will inform residents of safety hazards, such as locks, windows, doors, etc. A speaker can also be provided to discuss security problems and measures to solve them.

- Any information about neighborhood safety programs should be distributed to community residents. Literature concerning safeguarding homes, burglary prevention, car thefts, and civilian patrol can be obtained from the Police Department. Once you have a crime prevention program established, you should publicize it to discourage criminal activity in your neighborhood.

Fire Prevention

Plan a Fire Prevention Night by contacting the Fire Department's Public Education Officer at 979-764-3714. A good fire prevention program can be easily organized for residents in your community.

How to get started:

- Call two weeks in advance. Provide alternate dates.
- Have at least ten to fifteen people commit to going to the presentation.
- Identify particular subjects for discussion at the presentation.
- Hold the meeting in a home, nearby church, or community center.

Neighborhood Improvement Projects

There are a variety of enhancement projects that your group can organize to make you neighborhood a great place to live. Start by identifying what your neighbors value most and what they think needs to be done. Consider a cleanup project, landscaping, entrance signage, park improvements, or a friendly code enforcement sweep. The Neighborhood Services Office is available to help make neighborhood projects happen.

Use your imagination, and listen to your residents!

Appendices

Neighborhood Partnership Program Application.....	A1
Sample Bylaws.....	A4
Sample Bylaws Outline.....	A6
Sample Sign-In Sheet.....	A7
Sample Agenda.....	A8
Sample Flyer.....	A9
Steps for Planning Your First Neighborhood Meeting.....	A10
Problem-Solving Procedures.....	A11
Problem-Solving Worksheet.....	A12
Hints for Having Successful Meetings.....	A14
How to Invite Your Neighbors to a Community Meeting.....	A15
Neighborhood Self-Evaluation Checklist.....	A16
Major Legislative Changes for HOAs.....	A18



CITY OF COLLEGE STATION
Home of Texas A&M University

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM APPLICATION

Neighborhood Services, 1101 Texas Ave., PO Box 9960, College Station, TX 77842
Phone: 979-764-6262 Fax: 979-764-3496, Email: neighborhoodservices@cstx.gov

Minimum Submittal Requirements

- Completed Neighborhood Partnership Program Application
- Declaration of Participation
- List of association board members and their contact information (phone number, email address, mailing address). Please note that all of this information will be subject to Open Records Requests unless contact information is specifically requested by the individual to be withheld. Listing of committee chairs is appreciated, but optional.
- Copy of current association bylaws, including any recent amendments
- Map of neighborhood showing association boundaries

DATE _____

ASSOCIATION NAME _____

- Neighborhood Association – A voluntary organization of residents.
- Homeowner Association – A legal entity operating under State regulation.

ASSOCIATION INFORMATION

Describe the geographic boundaries of your association (north, south, east and west).

How many households are in this association? _____

In what month are new officers elected? _____

When and how often will neighborhood meetings be held? _____

Association website (if applicable): _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Neighborhood Services Office requires each association to identify a primary contact who will serve as City staff's first point of contact concerning neighborhood issues. This contact may be changed by the association at any time. Establishing a first point of contact is strictly for efficiency in disseminating information. Neighborhood Services welcomes any association member or College Station resident to contact our staff at any time.

Primary Contact (the first point-of-contact for your association):

Name _____ Title _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *during* business hours: _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *after* business hours: _____

Person in charge of the association newsletter and/or website (if applicable):

Name _____ Title _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number where this person may be reached *during* business hours: _____

**Neighborhood Partnership Program
Declaration of Participation**

The

NAME OF ASSOCIATION

- Homeowner Association
- Neighborhood Association

declares on this date

_____ , _____

MONTH DAY YEAR

our desire to participate in the City of College Station
Neighborhood Partnership Program.

We understand the expectations of the association and the City of
College Station and look forward to a mutually beneficial
relationship.

Signed by

ASSOCIATION OFFICER

DATE

Sample Bylaws

Article I. Purpose

Section 1. Name

The name of the neighborhood association shall be:

_____.

Section 2. Purpose

The purpose of the neighborhood association shall be to promote a better neighborhood and community through group action.

Article II. Membership

Any person residing on _____ between
and _____ is eligible for membership.

Article III. Voluntary Dues

Voluntary dues shall be \$4.00 per person per year.

Article IV. Meetings

Section 1. General Membership Meetings

Regular meetings will be held on the _____ of each month, or more or less often as deemed necessary.

Section 2. Quorum

At least ten percent of the membership must be present to conduct official business.

Article V. Officers

Section I. Number and Election of Positions

The officers shall be a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, who shall be elected in _____ of each year. The term of office shall be one year.

Article VI. Committees

The membership may establish necessary committees at any meeting. The President may also establish such committees. The President shall appoint committee chairpersons.

Article VII. Amendments

The bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting. Two-thirds (2/3) of those members in attendance must approve the amendment.

Sample Bylaws Outline

Article I. Purpose

- Section 1. Name of Organization
- Section 2. Purpose of Neighborhood Association

Article II. Membership

- Section 1. Membership Qualifications
- Section 2. Membership Voting

Article III. Voluntary Dues

Article IV. Meetings

- Section 1. General Membership Meetings
- Section 2. Special Membership Meetings
- Section 3. Agenda
- Section 4. Quorum
- Section 5. Participation
- Section 6. Procedures

Article V. Board of Directors

- Section 1. Number of Board Members
- Section 2. Terms of Office
- Section 3. Eligibility for Board Service
- Section 4. Duties of Board Members
- Section 5. Election of Board Members
- Section 6. Board Vacancies
- Section 7. Duties of Board Officers
- Section 8. Board Meetings
- Section 9. Emergency Powers
- Section 10. Termination for Non-Attendance

Article VI. Committees

Article VII. Conflict of Interest Procedures

- Section 1. Definition
- Section 2. Declaring the Conflict of Interest
- Section 3. Abstention from Voting

Article VIII. Grievance Procedures

- Section 1. Eligibility to Grieve
- Section 2. Complaint Receipt
- Section 3. Final Resolution

Article IX. Procedure for Consideration of Proposals

- Section 1. Submission of Proposals
- Section 2. Notification
- Section 3. Attendance
- Section 4. Dissemination

Article X. Public Meetings/ Public Records Requirements

Article XI. Boundaries

Article XII. Non-Discrimination

This section should describe the association's commitment to include all members of their neighborhood as defined under the "Boundaries" section of the bylaws. Be as inclusive as possible.

Article XIII. Adoption and Amendment of Bylaws

Sample Agenda

(Keep it short)

- I. Call Meeting to Order
 - II. Introduction of Organizers and Guest Speakers
 - III. Discussion and Possible Action on the Problem(s) of
-

- IV. Discussion and Possible Action on Forming a Neighborhood Association
- V. Other Neighborhood Concerns
- VI. Adjourn

Sample Flyer
Important
NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Date: _____

Time: _____ *p.m.*

Place: _____

Directions: _____

Topics to be discussed:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Please attend this IMPORTANT MEETING
Our Neighborhood Needs Your Ideas and Support!

For more information, call _____ at _____
or _____ at _____.

Steps for Planning Your First Neighborhood Meeting

1. Gather 2-4 other neighbors together to help you organize the first meeting:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
2. Determine the boundaries of your neighborhood:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
3. Decide on a date and time for your first Neighborhood Meeting.

_____ (date) _____ (time- a.m. or p.m.)
4. Decide on an Agenda and any Guest Speakers desired for the meeting. (See Sample Agenda)
5. Identify any special needs for your Neighborhood (place check mark next to each):

<input type="checkbox"/> Language Translation	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to be within Walking Distance
<input type="checkbox"/> Child Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance for the Elderly
<input type="checkbox"/> Handicap Access	<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impaired
6. Decide on a meeting place and make arrangements necessary to acquire it. Some possibilities are:

<input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood School (Cafeteria)
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Library	<input type="checkbox"/> Church/Temple
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Room	<input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor's Home or Yard
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Business/Restaurant
7. Contact the Guest Speakers and arrange for them to attend.
8. Prepare a flyer announcing the Meeting (see sample flyer).
9. Distribute flyers to every residence within your neighborhood boundaries.

Problem-Solving Procedures

1. List below the problems your Neighborhood would like to solve:

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="radio"/>

2. Prioritize the above problems and place numbers from 1-10 (with 1 being the most important and 10, the least important) in the boxes to the left of the listed problems.

Prioritizing problems can be difficult, and you may want to get several neighbors' input. What may be top priority to you may not reflect the top priorities of the rest of your neighborhood.

3. Grade the expected ease of solving the above problems, and place numbers from 1-10 (with 1 being the easiest and 10, the most difficult) in the circles after the listed problems.
4. Fill out a Problem-Solving Worksheet for each problem.
5. Choose one or two of the top priority items to address at your first Neighborhood Meeting.

Sometimes it helps to pick a more easily achieved goal to accomplish along with a more difficult goal. An early success can help a Neighborhood bond together and renew strength to solve more difficult, long-term problems.

Problem-Solving Worksheet

Issue: _____

1. Explain problem as briefly as possible:

2. List possible causes of the problem:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

3. List possible acceptable solutions to the problem:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4. List possible means/people (include phone numbers) to help solve the problem:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5. Things to do:

Date completed

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

6. Resolutions/Decisions/Accomplishments:

Date completed

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

Hints for Having Successful Meetings

1. SMILE! No matter how serious the purpose of the meeting, remember the meeting itself is a positive event. Neighbors are coming together to solve problems.
2. Make everyone feel welcome. Personally greet as many people as possible.
3. Encourage everyone to fill out and wear nametags.
4. Keep the meeting moving. As soon as you can wrap up one Agenda item, move immediately to the next.
5. Encourage participants to speak their minds freely, but stay on schedule. Be polite, but firm. (For example: "Basically, then, what you are saying is..." Or "So, you think we should...")
6. When a speaker begins getting off the subject, gently, but firmly return their focus. (for example: "That's a subject we'd all like to talk about another time, but right now we need to resolve (this issue) first." Then call on someone else.)
7. Treat everyone with respect. Don't belittle or criticize any participant.
8. Accept all ideas equally, even those with whom you disagree. Use the discussion period to voice your preferences, but be willing to accept the majority opinion gracefully, even if you do not agree with it.
9. Don't let disagreements between participants become personal arguments. Try to stop arguments before they get started. (for example, "Okay, that's good. We have two completely opposite ideas on this subject. Let's hear some other ideas now." Or, "Would someone else like to comment on these ideas?")
10. Never complain about members." Praise the people who came to the meeting instead of complaining about those who didn't. Praise those who volunteer to help. Never complain about those who don't.
11. Keep the meeting upbeat. Generate enthusiasm and hope. People with positive attitudes can accomplish almost anything.
12. Always adjourn the meeting on a positive note. Thank everyone for their interest and participation.

How to Invite Your Neighbors to a Community Meeting

Hi. My name is _____ and I'm one of your neighbors on
(Your name)
_____. I want to invite you to an important community meeting
(Street)
on _____ at _____ at _____.
(Date) (Time) (Place)

[Hand the neighbor a flyer]

Many of the neighbors are concerned about _____ in
(Problems)
our neighborhood. We believe that by working together we can
_____.
(Solution to the problems)

This meeting will be an opportunity for you to state your concerns about the
neighborhood and your ideas for improving it. _____ will
(Guests)

be there to share ideas and also answer any questions you may have. I hope
you will be able to attend. We need your ideas and support.

Neighborhood Self-Evaluation Checklist

The following checklist provides a way for a group to rate their skill or knowledge in different areas. The list is fairly extensive, so not all of the areas will apply to your group. Simply mark each point with the using the following scale:

NI (Needs Improvement)	E (Excellent)
S (Satisfactory)	NA (Not Applicable)

You may also add comments to the list. Feel free to recopy this list and add columns for your comments.

Self-Evaluation Checklist

1. Organization

- Has written mission statement and bylaws (or operating procedures)
- Develops annual goals and work plan
- Annually evaluates organizational activities
- Meetings are held regularly, widely publicized, and open (and accessible) to the public
- Meetings are well organized; a written agenda is available and is followed
- Meetings begin and end on time
- Written minutes are kept and distributed

2. Leadership

- Reflects neighborhood population
- Articulates issues clearly
- Democratic participatory methods are used to make decisions
- Communicates regularly with group about financial status, key issues, and work plan, etc.
- Knowledgeable about local government and how to influence decision making

3. Communication

- Newsletters are produced and distributed regularly
- An Annual Report or Fact Sheet is produced and distributed
- A record of decisions and policies is well-maintained
- Meetings have adequate publicity throughout the neighborhood and areas where neighbors frequent
- An annual meeting is held for the entire membership/community
- A good relationship with local media is maintained
- Makes presence known at public hearings and before official bodies

4. Diversity

- Leaders and members reflect the neighborhood's diversity (race, homeowners/tenants, income levels, etc.)
- Meeting places are accessible to all persons
- Group involves non- or limited-English speaking persons
- Issues addressed by the group are representative of active and not-so-active members

5. Volunteers

- Group recruits and maintains active members
- Group provides orientation for new members
- Volunteers understand their role clearly in the group
- Volunteers are held accountable for their assignment
- Volunteers are motivated and stay involved
- Volunteers are clear about the group's agenda, goals, and tactics

6. Resources

- Group members have diverse fundraising skills
- Annual fundraising goals are set
- Annual fundraising plan and calendar is developed
- Fundraising events are planned and implemented
- Fundraising plan is evaluated at least once a year
- Timely research is done for sources for renewable money
- Maintains 501(c)(3) tax exempt status

Major Legislative Changes for HOAs

In 2011-12, the Texas Legislature approved a number of laws (HB 1228 & 2761, SB 101) that will have major impacts on the way homeowner and property owners operate. Many of these laws will call for more compliance with the state than Texas HOAs/POAs have dealt with in the past. Some of these laws were passed in the summer and fall of 2011. However, as of January 1, 2012 all of these laws are in effect. Below are some of the areas where there are considerable changes to HOA operations:

- Open records, open meetings and records retention policies now apply to HOAs. All HOA must now have these policies and procedures as a part of their regular operations.
- HOAs can now be subject to open records requests from property owners, however, information on other residents and their property are not subject to these requests. The request is limited to HOA operations.
- HOAs must now give 72 hrs notices to homeowners before holding board meetings. If no annual meeting occurs board members can call for a meeting through a voting process.
- Executive session decisions now must be summarized orally in a regular meeting and placed in the minutes in general terms, including any expenditures approvals and personal information regarding home owners.
- Required annual mandatory meeting and elections.
- Requires HOAs to get a court order before proceeding to foreclose on properties
- HOAs must establish payment plans to prevent foreclosure due to non-payment of fees.
- Sending additional notices to residents before turning over an account to an attorney or collections
- Restricts associations from banning religious displays, flag poles, solar panels usage and rain harvesting equipment.
- More defined HOA election procedures and member voting rights clauses. More restrictions on what constitutes a quorum and the proxy voting system for HOA boards and members.
- Changes in attorney fees and assessments of payments related to foreclosures
- These laws matter for all HOAs, even small ones. Only HOAs with less than 14 homes or properties are exempt from these laws.

These new laws are quite a departure from previous laws governing HOAs that were much more hands-off. Many HOAs around the state are still unprepared deal with the requirements and provisions in these new laws. Here in College Station we have over 90 HOAs, all of whom will be required to abide by these new laws

The Texas Community Association Advocates is the one of the most knowledgeable groups on these issues. TCCA is a statewide advocacy association that works to represent HOAs and the interests of association communities in the legislative process. Never before had there been legislation like this that will require HOAs to comply with so many laws. Though there is no board or commission that is governing HOAs at the state-level, it is still expected that HOAs will comply voluntarily with these laws. All local HOAs are urged to find out more about these laws and try to get in compliance as soon as possible. For more in-depth summary on the laws, please visit www.texascommunityassociationadvocates.org.