

Block Club Manual

Vollintine Evergreen
Community Association



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What is a Neighborhood Block Club?

A neighborhood block club is a group of neighbors who work collectively to address common concerns, find ways to solve issues, form unity, organize events, and ultimately promote positive change in the neighborhood. Block club members are residents who are deeply dedicated to their communities. They appreciate their neighborhoods and maintain their homes in the best ways possible by taking care of their lawns, making sure their homes look manicured, properly disposing their trash, and doing a host of other things to make sure maintenance is ensured.

Block clubs often have a block club leader or community organizer who organizes the club and gets things started. This person does not have any power over anyone. Instead, he or she is to make sure the club's goals are on track and speak on upcoming goals, events, and projects at meetings.

Block clubs usually consist of both sides of a street *or* a small portion of a neighborhood.

Block clubs give neighborhoods a sense of community. They also make neighborhoods and residents safer because everyone knows each other.



Getting Started

Neighborhood block clubs start with the willingness of one person to promote positive change in his or her neighborhood. Subsequent steps are encouraging neighbors to participate and organizing the first block club meeting. Having 2-3 people at the first meeting is okay, but 5-6 or more is better. Everyone on the block should be invited.

First meeting: Get to know each other, and discuss individual issues and concerns of the neighborhood. Also, name tags and snacks are a great idea. Plan to decide on a purpose for your block club and elect officers at the **second** meeting.



Second meeting: Elect officers or assign duties. Do people in your block club have special talents or community organizing skills? Allow them to step up and take on specific roles! When people have responsibilities and leadership roles, they often feel needed and important. This fosters dedication. Offices can include the following: Chairperson, Co-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Also, this is the time for your block club to decide its principle purpose(s). Once the purpose(s) and officers have been decided, change and progress can start to occur.

Naming your block club A name will help give your block club a presence. The name can be the name of your street, or a more creative name can be decided upon.

Purposes for Starting Block Clubs

Neighborhood safety: When neighbors know each other, they are willing to look out for one another and contact police if they see problems nearby. Burglars and criminals are less likely to approach a neighborhood that has close neighbors and/or an established block club.

Social: Do you and your neighbors just want to get to know each other? Establish a relationship? Are you tired of not knowing anyone on your street? In this case, your block club may primarily be geared towards the social aspect. Block club parties and activities with neighborhood children may be ideal for your block club.

Problem Solving: Some neighborhoods have excessive problems that deteriorate the quality of their streets. These problems range from vacant lots, crime, graffiti, untidy lawns, poor housing conditions, and garbage that's not properly disposed. If your neighborhood has these kinds of problems or other issues, your block club should focus on ways to eliminate them. In addition, block club members can report problem properties to the City if the homeowners are unwilling to cooperate or compromise.



Political: If the neighbors on your block share similar political interests or are interested in learning about how local politicians can help your club, a block club with an emphasis on political matters should be formed. Contacting local politicians, councilmen, and elected officials to come speak to your block club and get involved with helping your neighborhood would offer great support.



What's your block club's purpose? Develop a purpose(s) by identifying what your block club defines as *real problems* or *issues that can't be ignored*. The block club should specifically focus on problems that have been ongoing and have caused the most trouble to neighbors and the community. After these issues have been identified, a common purpose can be determined.

Getting Neighbors Involved

Flyers: Flyers are an excellent way of advertising events that take place in the neighborhood. Since they give visual aid, they often help people remember important times and dates. Flyers can be made at the VECA Welcome Center by a Community Development Intern, or members of block clubs can create them.

Talking to neighbors (door-to-door): Personal contact makes neighbors more receptive to the efforts and ideas of block clubs. It allows them to see firsthand the passion of others who are willing to help; this, in return, promotes a domino effect among other neighbors to help.

Phone calls: Phone calls can offer up-to-date reminders, and give neighbors a chance to ask questions before meetings and events.

Social/Unity: Get to know your neighbors through block club meetings, saying hello outside, etc.

- Organize a communication system via emails, a telephone list, etc.



Can't seem to get your Neighbors Involved?

- Encourage neighbors to believe that it's safer to know each other and form a block club. It fosters a close-knit community with residents who are willing to help and lookout for each other.
- Explain to them that in order to solve *neighborhood* problems, the actual neighbors have to unite.
- Block clubs don't require much time; it's just a few commitments throughout the year.
- Give them the opportunity to contribute their special talents to the block club.



Meetings

- Block Club meetings may be held at the VECA Welcome Center.
- Establish regular meeting dates, times, and location in advance (flyers, phone calls, and/or at previous meeting).
- Make sure each attendee stands and gives his or her name. They should also write their name, number, address, and email on the sign-in sheet.
- Reiterate the block club's purpose.
- Have a "Call to Action" for each meeting (agenda: upcoming events, problems to solve, old and new business). This agenda will help keep your meetings organized and on schedule so you won't waste time.
- Have someone take minutes (record information and present information from last meeting).
- Make sure everyone writes down his/her concerns to be discussed at the next meeting.
- Refreshments are always nice, and they attract people to meetings.



Block Club Activities

Block club activities will engage residents in unity and conversation that will ultimately facilitate change. People with ideas should present them at block club meetings.

Activities include, but are not limited to:

- neighborhood clean-ups
- block club parties
- helping neighborhood schools/implementing programs
- holiday parties
- neighborhood garage sales
- guest speakers
- potlucks
- community walks
- neighborhood gardens

Activities for children are also nice. Maybe parents in your block club can alternate days in which they stand at the bus stop with the neighborhood children. This parental presence could make potential gang recruiters, bullies, and other undesirable people hesitant about entering your neighborhood.



New Neighbors

New neighbors should feel welcomed when they enter their new neighborhoods. Current neighbors should greet them and encourage them to join their respective neighborhood's block club.

Crime

- Have the local police department come speak to your block club.
- Report suspicious neighborhood activities or crimes to neighbors, and get police involved.
- If there is a home on your street that has continual action involving people who enter and exit at all times of the day and night, this should be reported.
- Vacant homes attract crime, so these homes should be boarded at all times.



Funding for Block Clubs

Funding is available for block clubs who have good ideas and show strong interest for what they're trying to accomplish.

Leadership Development Block Grants are currently available through the Rhodes College Plough Grant. These grants allow funding for projects and activities that residents would like to see on their respective streets and in the VECA community.

Applications may be found on the VECA website or may be obtained from the Welcome Center in hard copy. The application on the VECA website is under the "Rhodes-Plough Grant Partnership" tab. Block clubs are encouraged to submit proposals.



Helpful Suggestions

- Be creative with your block club, and don't be afraid to introduce new ideas.
- Have structure, stay focused, and work towards obtaining goals.
- Try to include everyone.
- Have events, and don't be a boring block club!
- Have enough meetings so block club members can stay up-to-date with what's going on.
- Contact VECA Welcome Center at least two weeks in advance to schedule a block club meeting.
- Have a block club leader.

Stay in touch with the Community Development block club intern at VECA.

This pamphlet is brought to you by the
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Ready to start a block club?
Let VECA help.