



.....HOW TO START A.....

# block association

So you want to start a block association? Great! You're in luck. It's not complicated and you can do it! In short, it will require a healthy amount of determination, perseverance, a clear plan with goals, an ability to compromise, reliability, and follow through. This effort can be a source of impactful community building work!



## Get your outreach on!

Talk to neighbors, from homeowners to renters, and gauge their interest in starting a block association. (Remember: A block association is not about carrying out one person's vision for the block but to work together as neighbors to carry out a shared vision, which includes plenty of compromise). Make sure to talk to other block leaders - i.e., those people on the block who everyone knows. Getting their support/involvement will go a long way. Reach out to youth as well, particularly teens and those in their 20s. As you conduct outreach, do more listening than talking. Ask your neighbors about their thoughts on the block, what they like about it, what could

be improved, concerns, etc. Explain to them in general terms what a block association is and how it would help the block. Mention some good block associations you may know of, describing some projects they've done. As you talk to your neighbors, invite them to add their name to a sign-up sheet to stay updated on the association. Indicate for yourself who seems very interested.



## Form a core group

Once you've spoken with your neighbors, schedule a meeting with those who expressed strong interest. This will be your core group for the moment - a group as small as three is fine to begin with. The agenda for this first meeting should be simple:

- Each person should share their individual vision for a block association and why it's important to them; agree on an overall shared vision (hold off on details until you get a few more people involved).

- Identify tasks to organize the general meeting, primarily more outreach to make sure you have a good turnout. All core members should do outreach, which can include door-knocking, flyering, and tabling; talk about the association energetically and with excitement-that will make more people interested.
- Schedule an event to further establish the block association e.g., a block clean-up day, a potluck, etc. This event would happen after the general meeting; it would be announced at that meeting to clearly communicate to people that the block association is about action, not just meetings. Events should always include activities for neighbors to meet each other.

One strategy to increase turnout at the general meeting is to incorporate a brief and simple survey into your outreach, no more than five questions about the block and neighborhood. Four multiple choice questions and one open-ended question is ideal. (Contact us if you'd like help thinking up questions). As you survey your neighbors, tell them that the results of the survey will be shared at the first block association general meeting. Surveys also make it easier to approach people, and they in turn feel like their opinions are being heard.

## Organize a general meeting

Before the meeting, develop an agenda with your core members. The agenda should be brief with time allotted for each agenda item. The meeting and future meetings should be approximately 1.5 hours. At the meeting remember to do the following:

- Review the agenda with participants so they know what to expect. Inform everyone about the core group that has already formed to establish the association - invite more people to participate. Commit to a transparent process where all information will be shared.
- Ask people to state their names and how long they've lived on the block.
- If you conducted a survey, share the results of the survey. Point out interesting trends in the responses and share any compelling comments for the open ended question.
- Ask the participants the following questions, (tying it in with the survey if you conducted one): Why should our

block have an association? What purpose would it serve? What would be its goals?

- Ask participants to raise their hand if they're interested in joining the block association. Circulate an attendance sheet, asking those interested to place a check next to their name.
- Identify follow-up tasks: Develop a decision-making structure and guidelines for governing the association (e.g., bylaws); Conduct more outreach; Other relevant items identified by meeting participants.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting to work on the tasks - it should be at a time when the most number of people can attend. Make sure to keep this and subsequent meetings lively and interesting. Incorporate activities like ice-breakers and potlucks to build familiarity and trust among the group. Always circulate attendance sheets at meetings and enter names and contact info into a simple spreadsheet or database.
- Announce the event you had scheduled beforehand with core members (e.g., block clean-up day, potluck, etc.).

Remember that this first general meeting is a beginning and that you won't be able to cover everything that requires attention. Your main goal for the meeting is to get people interested in joining the association. Keep the meeting to an hour and a half, especially if it's on a weeknight. The meeting should be facilitated by one person (identified before the meeting from among the core members). A facilitator makes sure that the conversation stays focused on the agenda, moves in a timely manner, and that everyone has an opportunity to speak. A facilitator does not dominate the conversation. You should also identify a note-taker who writes down the important parts of the meeting, including decisions and follow-up tasks.

You're on your way to establishing a block association! Note that you do not have to register with the city, state, or any government agency to become a block association. Declaring your new group a block association is all you need to do. For more information or support on how to start a block association and grants for community improvement projects, give us a call: Arif Ullah, 212.822.9580; Shawn Whitehorn, 212.822.9563, or visit our website at [www.citizensnyc.org](http://www.citizensnyc.org)