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

*Whether vaccinated or not, if you’re planning to gather with community members, think about what you can do to help keep yourself and your loved ones safe from COVID-19. Washington Department of Health offers the following guidance in a multitude of languages:*

[*https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/safer-gatherings*](https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/safer-gatherings)

# Steps for Planning Neighborhood Meetings

1. Gather 2 - 4 other neighbors together to help you organize the meeting.
2. Decide on a date and time for your neighborhood meeting with input from the community.
3. Draft an agenda and any guest speakers desired for the meeting.
4. Identify any needs for your neighborhood and try to address them. Needs could include language translation, childcare, assistance for the elderly, etc.
5. Decide on a meeting place that will be accessible to all and make arrangements.
6. Contact any guest speakers and arrange for them to attend.
7. Prepare a flyer announcing the meeting.
8. Distribute flyers to every residence within your neighborhood boundaries.
9. Remind community members about the meeting a few days before it takes place.

## Information to Include on Flyers

* **Title**
* [Community Group Name] NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING
* **Date**
* **Time**
* Specify or a.m. or p.m.
* **Place**
* Include directions and/or room location specifics
* **Highlight topics to be discussed or guest speakers**
* **Contact information for the group member coordinating the meeting**
* **Graphic or image**

# Location, Location, Location

Choose a place that is centrally located and familiar to participants. It’s a plus if the venue is near a transit stop or is walkable/bike-able for your neighbors.

* Consider these types of locations for your meetings that are often low or no cost:
  + Neighborhood park, library, or school (cafeteria)
  + Community Center/room
  + Local business/restaurant
* 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 that people feel lost.
* Call ahead to see if the venue is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible.
  + Visit [adata.org/learn-about-ada](https://adata.org/learn-about-ada) for more information on the ADA compliance.

## Room Set-up

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.

# Agendas

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 Community Resource Hub.

Schedule a period for open discussion at the end of the meeting. This is the time for announcements and items that are not central to the point of the meeting. Limit this time so that the meeting does not dribble away at the end. After the discussion period, the meeting leader should review everything decided at the meeting and then formally close the meeting.

# Meeting Rules

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

## General Meeting Rules

Your group should set some general operating rules for meetings so that they run smoothly and without difficulty. The operating rules can be included in the group’s bylaws or in a separate document 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).

# Communication

Consult with as many participants as possible beforehand. Find out their concerns. Let them know what fits or does not fit into the purpose of the meeting. Prepare them. Organize them and get opinions.

Delegate meeting tasks beforehand. This includes everything from making reports to making coffee.

* This helps to guarantee the attendance of the people with assignments and makes you, the organizer, more available to respond to anything unexpected.
* Have assignments in mind to give to specific participants at the meeting. Ask them beforehand if they will accept.

Remind people to come. Don’t rely on mailings or a phone call a week or two before.

* Call, email, or tweet all active members starting three nights before the meeting.
* Have as many people as possible send out the reminders —the people sending the messages will also be more likely to come.
* Remind each member of the date, time, and place.
* Tell members why the meeting is important in terms of the issue the group is working on and mention the main decision that will be made at the meeting.

# Meeting Frequency

If you waste people’s time with dull, unnecessary, and unproductive meetings, they

will resent you doubly: first for wasting their time; second, for taking them away from what

they now wish they had done instead of coming to the meeting. Always ask yourself: *Is this meeting necessary? Is this topic necessary?* Check in with your group on a regular basis to find out how often they would like to meet.

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, try keeping meetings to about one hour. Stick to the agenda as much as possible.

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.

# Meeting Goals

The agenda for your meeting should consist of action; have a clear goal for the meeting and bring in community speakers as needed. It is very easy to slip into the opposite – a program of meetings, not action. If your bylaws say one meeting a month, then you need to include an activity at least once every two months or people will stop coming.

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# Tips for Running Successful Meetings

1. Keep the meeting upbeat. No matter how serious the purpose of the meeting, remember the meeting itself is a positive event. Neighbors are coming together to build networks and trust to get things done.
2. Introduce yourself at the beginning of every meeting.
   * Welcome new people. If the group is a reasonable size, have everyone introduce themselves.
   * Encourage everyone to fill out and wear nametags to help the group get to know each other.
   * When using interpreters for your meeting, introduce them first and get the group settled before moving on to the program.
3. Review the agenda and establish ground rules which could include not speaking over each other and/or being respectful of all ideas and people.
   * Remind the members what has happened since the last meeting and what decisions should be considered at this one.
4. Have an open mind.
   * Treat everyone with respect.
   * Be willing to accept the majority opinion gracefully, even if you do not agree with it.
5. Encourage all participants to speak their minds freely, but stay on schedule.

Keep people on the topic. Use a watch and follow the agenda.

* + Give each person an opportunity to state their own point of view.
  + If people are repetitive, restate the information that they have shared and move on.
  + When it is almost time to end a discussion, select final speakers and their order from those still indicating a desire to speak. The discussion should end when those people have had their turn.

1. Mediate arguments when they arise.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?”)
   * If differences can’t be settled in a positive way, put off deciding and work things out later.
2. Publicly summarize what needs 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 been made and which tasks are to be done by whom.
3. 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 active members because they want to be a part of the association.
4. Always adjourn the meeting with appreciation. Thank everyone for their interest and participation.
5. Follow-up on the assignments after the meeting with the members assigned to each task. Sometimes members need to be encouraged to get things done.
   * You may need to provide a lot of positive reinforcement to get things accomplished.
   * Stay on top of things to ensure completion and success of the assigned task.

Material adapted from the City of College Station Neighborhood Services’ *My Neighborhood* Manual and Lincoln, Nebraska Urban Development Department’s *Neighborhood Association’s How To’s*.