Neighborhood groups need to have bylaws which describe how they will do business. Bylaws simply establish the rules governing a group. Bylaws also govern the way the group 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.

# How do we get started writing our group’s bylaws and what should they include?

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 group.

A sample outline for a set of bylaws can be found in the ***Community Resource Hub Get Organized Toolbox***. It contains information that you may consider including when writing your group’s bylaws. The sample outline is very inclusive, so do not feel your group must have every article or section. It is important to customize your bylaws to meet the needs of your group. Be specific, but still allow flexibility within your group. The bylaws will be part of your group for a long time.

# Do bylaws always remain the same?

Once bylaws are written, they should be reviewed periodically to assure that the group’s purpose has not changed. Reviewing bylaws on a regular basis ensures the rules are continuing to meet the needs of the group.

# How do operating procedures differ from bylaws?

Many neighborhood groups 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 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.

How do we define membership?

Any person who meets the criteria outlined in your group’s bylaws is a prospective member and will be able to participate in your group. It is important for neighborhood groups to be as inclusive as possible. Avoid terms like citizen, resident, homeowner, etc. and instead use participants, interested parties, and community members so as not to exclude anyone.