

North Hartford

Block Club

Organizer Toolkit



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Why?

It may be useful in the beginning to be reminded why organizing a block club or community group is important.

Join a Block Club

We can do more together

We envision people will greet each other with a smile

We will train community leaders

We will grow touchpoints with other groups

We will increase communication between people

We will help good news travel faster than bad news

Setting up

Many groups that operate autonomously or aim to accomplish diverse goals maintain a set of organizing principles to help guide a changing membership and leadership over time.

Similar to a constitution or charter or code, this set of principles may be co-created by the founding members of an organization or affiliation. These principles would be set by the core group before calls were out to the larger community

Here is a draft example of a set of “Organizing Principles” that could be adopted, revised or rewritten by a NoHa organization of blocks to support club activities.

Adapted from: Rotary International, Guiding Principles; Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Traditions; Black Panthers, Ten Point Plan; Unitarian Universalist, Principles. (1)

Organizing Principles

Our common welfare and neighborhood welfare comes first. Personal agendas depend first on the success of our common goals.

Club leaders are trusted servants of the common welfare. They do not govern, but instead serve, understanding that divine spirit is the generous and ultimate authority.

The only requirement for club membership is a desire to improve our neighborhood.

Each club will be autonomous except in matters that affect other groups.

Each club has but one primary purpose — to organize unity among neighbors.

A group should not endorse, finance or promote any related facility or enterprise outside of the normal course of organizing activities for neighbors.

Every club should strive to be fully self-supporting, through contributions & earning

Block organizers should remain voluntary and not earn income from the organization of activities.

Block clubs have no opinion on outside issues so as not be drawn into public controversy.

Block clubs will strive to train, recognize, praise and support their members

Unity is the spiritual foundation of all our habits, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

These organizing habits remain open to update and amendment by future membership as the need may arise.

Setting up

Once there are organizing principles for the groups it may be useful to set up your operational practices.

How often will you meet?

How will you communicate?

Who should be involved?

Operational Practices

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Setting up

Before launching your first community block club recruitment you may wish to gather some sample opportunities and motivators to get the conversation started.

Sample Opportunities

Social

- Block parties
- Potluck, cookouts
- Talent, no-talent show
- Trick or Treating
- Concerts or games

Functional

- Communal Garden
- Snow Shoveling
- Childcare
- Block Watch
- Co-Ownership of tools
- Cost Sharing of services

Organizational

- Set up Block Clubs social media
- Agree to document and archive
- Become a block clubs researcher

Sample Motivations

- Be able to help with something I am good at
- Get help when needed
- Build a social or workplace skill
- Get more exercise
- Build my network
- Know my neighbors

Meeting up

Your initial block club meeting could be based on a concept called the unconference. The agenda is created by the attendees at the beginning of the meeting.

You may have to seed some ideas to get the ball rolling. Any other participant who wants to initiate a discussion on a topic can claim a the topic from the examples you've created or they can create their own.

The only rules are:

The right people are here and they are in the right place at the right time.

The two feet rule. If you are not engaged in the current group conversation, you can get up on your own two feet & attend a different one.

Adapted from: Various sources (2)

The launch party

It could look like this: You probably need a fairly good-sized crowd to make this happen. 15 to 30 people.

20 minutes of casual mingling and food and entertainment if available

10 minutes to share the format of the meeting, the organizing principles that you've already created, and the few challenge/opportunity examples that you gathered.

20 minutes of participant generated challenge/opportunity cards on a common poster board or other table or wall of notes

Participants add their names, or start stickers or other symbol under each breakout session they wish to attend

Participants then join individual groups and discuss individual opportunities based on their own interest. The two feet rule applies

Participants then return back together to share any observations, happenings or insights.

Participants are then asked to share contact information with each other for follow up, or share their information with the organizer. If inclined they may receive this toolkit, operating principles.

30 minutes of commitment and closing.

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The launch party

The organizer begins with three examples posted on a wall, or on tables. Best if these are posters that are graphic and descriptive. Real challenge/opportunities from the neighborhood.

Organizer has markers, blank posters, and tape or pins, etc to allow for participant members to write in their own challenge/opportunities. Once there are several, allow participants to group themselves by the opportunity they feel drawn toward. This could happen by letting people put their name under an opportunity or giving everyone in the room a set of colored stickers where they write their initials and paste it on the challenge they're interested in.

Break into small groups and describe and discuss the challenge/opportunity. Other than the two feet rule, there are really no other defined rules for the small groups. Generally, there is no presenter. However until people get the hang of it, you may find it useful to have one moderator from the event organizer join each group. Here are some prompt questions to start the conversation.
Where is it? Who is involved? Why do you think it exists? What do you think should be done?

Once the group meetings conclude, it's a great practice to report back some observations to the larger group. Offer some kind of handshake, or sign up sheet or other structure, so that members who thought about that specific project, can somehow express their willingness to contribute to it, or can exchange contact information to meet each other later. Here are some commitments that participants could make: Agree to hosting block club meetings. Agree to take pictures and publish to a facebook page for block clubs Agree to recruit members from my block? Agree to s it, throw a party? Closing and sharing of block party organizing principles. Promise of follow up from organizer.

Following up

You may need example roles and rewards to help volunteers understand how they fit into the overall structure of the organization.

Block organizers may want recognition, or to use their experience on the block in their resume or as a reference.

These roles and rewards act as a sample set

Roles and Rewards

Block Captain

Serves as a driving force and a collective leader and representative of the community. Initiates, conducts and lays the agenda for community meetings. Represents the ideas and concerns of the community to other alliances. Oversees the process and discusses it with his/her team.

Estimated time spent: A few hours each each week

Strengths: Understands people, good at scheduling and following up, business background and experience is plus.

Rewards Statement: “Organized and managed volunteers to complete _____ activity. Managed communications and outreach.”

Event Coordinator

Plan and develop activities, budgets, programs, gatherings, events, services. Manage volunteer or vendor contracts.

Estimated time spent: A few hours each week

Strengths: Outgoing, organized. Attention to detail.

Rewards Statement: “Organized and coordinated multiple stakeholders to complete _____ activity.”

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Roles and Rewards

Finance Manager

Manages the block club finances, estimating and keeping a track of incomes and expenses. Documents all receipts and contracts.

Estimated time spent: A few hours a week

Strengths: Prior experience in bookkeeping. Extreme attention to detail. Ability to keep personal and organizational accounting separated. .

Rewards Statement: “Managed financial planning and accounting to complete _____ activity. Used _____ software.”

Designer and Online Manager

Represents the art and brand of the block club. Shares activities on social media and maintains an online presence. Assists event coordinator to keep community updated about the upcoming events and progress of the team.

Estimated time spent: A few hours per week

Strengths: Basic design knowledge and social media understanding. Excited to find new ways to communicate

Rewards Statement: “Managed visual and online communications to complete _____ activity.”

Resources

Tools for additional research

Examples from others

A block association facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/Van-Beautiful-Block-Association-1200961093259691/>

An organizer's pdf

<http://www.plainfieldnj.gov/docs2012/block-association-creation-booklet3.pdf>

New York City Citizen's Tip Sheet

citizensnyc.org/sites/default/files/public-attachments/resource/starting_a_block_association.pdf

More about the unconference: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference>

Neighborhood Association of Hayes Valley, San Francisco: <http://hayesvalleysf.org/>

104th Street Block Association, New York: <http://www.bloomingdale.org/>

Six principles for voluntary organizations.

conservationlands.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Six-Principles-for-Successful-Voluntary-Organizations.pdf

Unitarian Universalists: <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

Alcoholics Anonymous: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Traditions

Rotary: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/guiding-principles>

Black Panthers: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm>

U.S. Constitution: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution