

# A Guide for Successful Neighborhood Associations



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## Sustainable Neighborhood Academy

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### 1. Block by Block

Congratulations on taking first steps in starting a neighborhood association. A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners, renters, apartment dwellers, and representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches, and schools who organize to improve conditions in their neighborhood. When you start a neighborhood association, neighborhood residents get a chance to decide what needs to be done and work together to make it happen. A group that represents their community will have stability, credibility, and political influence as an effective force for a better neighborhood.

This **Neighborhood Association Guide** is to assist in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules to be followed. It is merely a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize your group.

Organizing a neighborhood association is a big job. Material in this kit breaks down the job into clear steps so that it will be less overwhelming. While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address common concerns and learn to work together as a group. Keep in mind some important guidelines as you begin to organize:

1. Building an organization is a process. It cannot be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build step by step.
2. Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, start setting your goals higher.
3. How you treat people is crucial to your success. By treating people with respect and honesty, people will be more likely to get involved in a neighborhood association.
4. Adapt the ideas and strategies outlined in this kit to the specific needs and circumstances of your community and your organization.
5. People join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get to know their neighbors better and to feel a sense of community. So, as you build your organization, be sure to have fun.

## 2. Neighborhood Projects

One of the best ways to attract attention and form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your association unless you are doing worthwhile projects to benefit the entire neighborhood. It is important that you determine needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success.

Determine needs of your neighborhood through meetings and personal discussions with neighbors during a walk-through. After you construct a list of possible needs, discuss these in reasonable depth to identify any issues. When you have identified issues, discuss each one and agree on priorities. Sort into short-term or long-term projects and begin to evaluate how your association would like to approach each.

In developing your neighborhood projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action, results, and that will be visible. Neighborhood residents should be behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or effecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your association is an effective group. This establishes credibility and worthiness of your association, characteristics which are important to long-term survival. Unfortunately, one problem with concentrating on a single issue is that when that problem is solved, everyone leaves. Therefore, it is important to introduce other issues at the same time and get people to work on all of these. As each issue is resolved, focus on new, short- and long-term projects.

Projects help to keep the ball rolling with activities that will maintain participation and interest. This requires a lot of anticipation and organization by association members. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Do not suffocate your members with more projects than time will allow. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Slow progress is often better than no progress at all, but keep in mind that one large gap in activity could cost you the participation of a large majority of your membership because of lack of interest. Be careful how you plan and coordinate all projects. Keep people involved in all levels and give people specific jobs (with specific periods) to do. Usually people are willing to contribute a little bit of time. Do not give too much responsibility to one person, delegating to many will help your project move along.

### ***Project Ideas***

Following is a list of possible short- and long-term projects:

- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Community Garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video • Crime watch program
- Scholarship exchange (Example: Ex-boxer in the neighborhood sets up an afternoon boxing program for neighborhood kids. Neighborhood kids mow and care for his yard).
- Block party or festival
- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting

- Tool lending libraries
- Tutoring program for youth
- Home tours • Neighborhood cookout, picnic, or potluck
- National night out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood t-shirts
- Yard of the month award
- Neighborhood newsletter, web site, directory, or telephone/email tree
- Paint up/fix up projects
- Paint swap
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representative to attend city council, school board, and planning commission meetings
- Philanthropic projects, such as "adopting" a family who needs help with Christmas dinner

### ***Keeping Interest in the Association***

Once you have tackled a few projects, how do you keep people interested? This by far is the biggest challenge for any neighborhood association. In general, members will participate if following are present:

- Business and social events in which to participate
- Issues of importance to discuss
- Clean and visible accomplishments
- Organized, competent leaders
- Events to recognize participants

### **3. Effective Meetings**

The way that meetings conducted, will affect how members become and stay involved in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and will stop coming to meetings. When hosting meetings, respect the opinions of others, members will feel more willing to participate in other activities of the association. Always draft and follow an agenda.

#### ***Meeting Arrangements***

The best arrangement for a community meeting is a circle of chairs. People sitting in a circle can communicate better. Tables often form barriers to communication. Avoid using tables unless needed for maps or handouts. Choose a neutral room that will just barely accommodate everyone. This will allow the energy of the group to stay within the group and add to your feelings of enthusiasm. Meeting locations could include a neighborhood church or community center, a member's home, or a favorite local restaurant.

#### ***Agendas***

Every meeting must have an agenda or purpose. Spend time before the meeting deciding not only what to discuss, but also how long and in what order. It is sometimes useful to put emotional or controversial issues at the end of the agenda. This will allow you to take care of small, but necessary decisions early on. Use time limits for discussion of items. It is possible that you will go over or under time limits on some items, but the meeting will tend to keep on track. Do not overload the agenda. Try to stay within one – 1.5 hours and allow some time for refreshments and mingling.



### ***Running a Meeting***

Start meetings on time. Do not penalize those on time by making them wait for latecomers. Go ahead and start meetings with less important agenda items. By doing this, you will reinforce behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late.

Make sure someone records meeting minutes so that those who were unable to attend can still keep up with association activities and decisions. If you do not have a secretary, rotate task.

### ***Dealing with Difficult People***

When discussion points are too long:

- Summarize; or
- Suggest tabling questions for a later time

When two members get into a heated discussion:

- Summarize points made by each person, turn discussions back to the group.
- Invite residents to stay after meetings when the three of you can talk it over.

When coping with the "one-man" show:

- Interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution but politely asking him to hold his other points until later; and/or
- Interrupt with "You have brought up many points that will keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"

When a speaker drifts from subject to subject:

- Interrupt, give credit for ideas but explain the main point of discussion; or
- Propose to the group a question of whether it wants to stray from the outline or follow it; or
- Bring discussions back to the topic by using related ideas as a transition.

When a member has difficulty expressing:

- Build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then rephrase her material with a preface such as "is this what you mean, Ms. Jones? "

### ***Participation***

Set realistic expectations about attendance. You may not need large attendance at every meeting. Do not focus on what you consider poor attendance. Concentrate on coming up with techniques to increase attendance. Set a tone at meetings where everyone's ideas are welcome and respected and no one is put down. Consider establishing a Membership Committee to focus on recruiting new members. Be realistic about what people can do given their other responsibilities. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.

### ***Ending Meetings***

It is surprising how many meetings just fizzle out. Meetings should end with a plan of action. Ask committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on a date, time and meeting location before members leave.

And, most importantly, in addition to addressing neighborhood, plan enjoyable activities that will bring residents together, such as a block party, neighborhood garden, or card club. If those in the neighborhood see exciting activities happening around them, they will be more likely to want to participate in your neighborhood association.

## ***Communications***

Establishing a good communications and publicity network is essential to any neighborhood association. Whether it is a simple flyer, newspaper announcement advertising a meeting, a short telephone call, or an email, groups must take advantage of all media (including word of mouth) to make people aware of activities. One effective way is to establish a manageable and affordable network some suggestions below.

***Flyers*** □ Neighborhood association activities, projects, or goals can be announced in a flyer. When designing a flyer, be sure wording is bold enough to read from a distance of 10 feet. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for copying machine use from neighborhood churches or businesses. Better still; have fliers' quick copied as a donation by a local print shop. Post flyers in markets, laundromats, schools, beauty shops, and other places frequented by the people you want to reach.

***Newspaper announcements*** □ The Riverfront Times, St. Louis Post Dispatch and American have announcement sections and allow neighborhood groups to advertise their local meetings at no charge.

***Neighborhood walk-through*** □ Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door-to-door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask about neighborhood concerns and respond with how your association can help them effect a change in their situation. Ask residents to attend the next meeting to voice concerns. Also, ask them to tap their neighbors. Be sure to leave a flyer with information about the next meeting. If no one is home, leave a flyer in a visible, but secure location, (do not place flyers in mailboxes as it is against federal law).

***Surveys*** □ Surveys are a key way to bring new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. At your first general meeting, distribute a survey to residents to find out what issues are important to them and what direction they want the group to take. When developing a survey, keep in mind information you want to get from community residents:

- What are important issues in the neighborhood?
- What issues are people are willing to work on? •
- What kinds of skills do people have?
- What are best meeting times and locations?
- What is the age, racial, and economic make-up of the neighborhood?

These are just suggested questions. Brainstorm and come up with questions that fit your neighborhood.

***Telephone tree/email list*** □ Individuals who want to contribute but have little time may volunteer to be on a telephone tree or email list. Give each person at least six people to contact by phone with a short message. On the other hand, place a neighborhood member in charge of setting up an email database. Information may then be sent out as the need arises. These are easy ways to establish a good communication network.

***Block representatives*** □ Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison with your association. They can inform neighbors about what your association is doing and how to get involved. They can also recruit neighbors to support your association and communicate with them by word-of-mouth or telephone. This is a big help when your neighborhood association covers a large area.

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**Newsletters** □ A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communicating with your members. Short, informative articles will keep neighbors up□to□date. Newsletters can be paid with association dues or by advertising dollars from area businesses and can be produced inexpensively.

A good newsletter might contain:

- Important meeting dates and group events
- Information about city services
- Recent accomplishments of your group
- Notification of special events
- Recognition of volunteers
- Information about schools in the neighborhood
- Profiles of neighbors
- Crime/safety information
- Birth/death announcements
- Graduation announcements
- Anniversaries
- A welcome to new neighbors
- Articles of community interest
- Advertising

The newsletter editor will write articles, review articles submitted by others and set deadlines for production. A newsletter committee should assist with typing, soliciting advertising, and arranging for printing. This committee should decide the newsletter title, number of pages, paper stock, and the arrangement of copy. Consider asking a local printer to donate printing services. Decide how to distribute the newsletter. Consider using Boy or Girl Scout troops or block captains to deliver the newsletters. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the US Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.

### ***Website***

There are a number of free web site and listserv resources available for non□profit groups like neighborhood organizations.

- Among the most popular are Nextdoor or listerv services, Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>) and Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) – all which offer services like message archives, shared photo storage, group calendars, polls, and links storage.
- Designed specifically as a neighborhood organization resource, Nextdoor is an internet□based network that enables every neighborhood in St. Louis to create community messages to residents.

## 4. Incorporation and Nonprofit Status

### *Steps for Filing Articles of Incorporation*

If your neighborhood association plans to apply for nonprofit status, you must first file Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Here are steps to consider when incorporating:

- Call the Missouri Secretary of State Corporations Division at 573-751-4153 to check on the availability of your corporate name. The state does not allow duplication of corporate names, and your proposed name may already be in use.
- Write your Articles of Incorporation. If possible, have an attorney check your proposed Articles of Incorporation before submitting them to the State.
  - All officers of the corporation must sign two copies of the association's Articles of Incorporation in front of a Notary Public.
- For more information about incorporation, visit the Missouri Secretary of State web site at <http://www.sos.state.mo.gov/>.

### **Applying for Nonprofit Status**

Filing articles of Incorporation does not make an association a nonprofit organization. The Internal Revenue Service can only give a nonprofit status to groups. Decision to apply for nonprofit or 501(c) 3 status with the IRS is a big step for a neighborhood associations. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping.

### *The following benefits of nonprofit status:*

- Neighborhood associations can accept tax-deductible donations
- Neighborhood associations avoid paying sales tax on your purchases
- Neighborhood associations avoid paying income tax on interest earned in bank accounts and on qualified non-profit income

### *Neighborhood associations are eligible for nonprofit status if:*

- Association incorporated by the state as a non-profit corporation.
- Association organized solely for charitable purposes.

To apply for non-profit status, you must file IRS Form 1023 seeking tax-exempt status and charitable organization status. IRS Publication 557 explains how to complete Form 1023. The IRS requires the submittal of a filing fee along with Form 1023. To determine the appropriate filing fee for your organization, complete Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request. Many groups find that professional assistance in filing these forms is necessary.

## 5. Volunteers

Recruit people to events and activities—not just to business meetings. Sign-in sheets, nametags, and follow-up recruitment calls should be standard procedure in your organization. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, delivering newsletters, stuffing envelopes, or contacting their friends to come to events. These activities should make volunteers feel useful and productive.

When recruiting for an activity, try to consider needs of each volunteer. Try to provide childcare, transportation, or a mentor if a volunteer needs it. When recruiting volunteers, enthusiasm is important!

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Show confidence by knowing what you would like volunteers to do and be enthusiastic about any task. Practice explaining your request in a concise, upbeat fashion. In just a few sentences, you should be able to convey the mission of the neighborhood association. Be prepared to convey why all tasks are important to the association and the neighborhood at large. Following are six steps to successful volunteer recruitment.

### **1. Preparation**

Have in mind a mini-strategy consisting of how you will explain your goal and what you want each volunteer to do. Review what you know about each volunteer, such as interests, experience, and family. Look and listen for clues as to what interests this person.

### **2. Legitimize yourself**

Gain quick credibility. Find common interest to talk about or talk about mutual friends. Explain why and how volunteers can make a difference. Speak to your role as a volunteer.

### **3. Listen, listen, and listen again**

Draw people out by listening to what they have to say. Ask probing questions and provide encouraging remarks. Show that you are interested in what they have to say with good body language. Be sure to listen for special skills, useful contacts, and networks that can be useful to your association.

### **4. Challenge**

Encourage people to contribute to community change. Challenge people to care about goals set by the neighborhood association.

### **5. Get a commitment**

Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment to performing task with a firm deadline for finishing. Write it down, make a note for follow-up, and clarify exactly what should happen next.

### **6. Follow-up**

There is nothing worse than making a big fuss over people while recruiting, and then ignoring them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to others, and keep lines of communication between you and your volunteers open at all times.

Keeping volunteers is just as important as recruiting them. Recruitment should fit a plan of action with clear goals and expectations of what volunteers can do. This plan should include training, supervision, recognition, and leadership development. Volunteer recognition will make recruits feel a part of a team. Recruiting and keeping volunteers involves practice. Most Growing and thriving associations train leaders on how to recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their ongoing program work.

## 6. Local Level Political Action

### *Staff*

Provide support while probing of executive branches of government, (i.e., agency personnel, committee staff, etc.) is a source of information, advice, and opinion. They can make small decisions within a scope of procedures. As a rule, they have no authority for policy changes.

### *Elected Officials*

Elected officials are a source of information, advocates for policy changes, and intermediaries for citizen groups or citizens.

### *Committee Structure*

Standing, ad hoc, citizens, or subcommittees are typically advisors of government. Recommendations are prepared for higher levels of government. This is where work leading up to decisions is conducted.

### *Committees/Boards/Commissions*

Councils, Boards and Commissions promote final action and are decision-making levels for cities, counties, districts, and other planning bodies. These are characterized by more formal procedures and presentations. In many cases, decisions ratify committee recommendations. However, policy bodies may weigh a recommendation against other priorities and override recommendations or request additional information before making a decision. Likelihood of action without prior recommendation or referral from these bodies is rare. In other words, nothing takes place without a process. Therefore, conflict resolution is difficult and PR value of confrontation is highest at this stage. Compromises are better worked out ahead of time.

### *Voters*

Voters have direct access to legislative power through an initiative/referendum process. This applies to legislative action only (contrast: administrative or quasi-judicial) in state, home rule county, or city with appropriate charter provisions. It can either propose grass roots legislation or challenge a decision by policy makers in referring their action to popular vote.

### *Media*

Mass media is relevant to any political discussion, although in itself not a bona fide category of political action. Editorial letters, feature stories, radio talk shows on current events, and editorial board support are desirable, no-cost strategies for influencing public officials and contributing to the public debate.

## 7. How to Influence Decision-making

### *Action Check List*

- Learn decision-making processes.
- Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- Let your elected officials know about you.
- Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- Inform yourself research issues.

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- Inform everyone on public issues.
- Attend meetings.
- Assist your elected officials.
- Know and support your allies.
- Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.
- Focus on preliminary stages of policymaking.
- Never threaten elected officials.
- Form coalitions.
- Identify "swing votes."
- Be discreet.
- Be realistic. You may not win every fight, and at times, compromises may be an option.
- Thank elected officials for their help.
- Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- Evaluate your efforts.
- Monitor implementation of decisions.
- Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

### ***Tradition***

"We always do it this way." Examine traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Alternatively, is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from tradition, "we always do it" requires more explanation to residents before it is accepted.

### ***Power Clusters***

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the state Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. When these groups join efforts, they form a power cluster, sometimes called a coalition.

Networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include the Federation of Neighborhoods and other individual neighborhood associations, city□county committees primarily made up of citizens, and other volunteer organizations with similar interests.

## **8. Working With Local Government**

Since a large part of time is spent advocating for change at the local level, it is important to know how to work with local government. The next few sections give ideas for how groups like neighborhood associations can effectively work with local government to influence decision-making. These sections deal with general principles, such as how to choose the best channel to go through, how to give public testimony, and how to be politically effective as a group.

### ***Set Your Goals***

What is most important for your neighborhood association to accomplish in order to maintain livability? If you have a neighborhood plan, some goals have likely been set. If not, set aside some time for your association to set its direction. Prepare needs statements for the City budget process and prioritize issues for greater involvement.

***Know Your Issues***

Do your homework. Find out who is affected, to what degree, and consequences of no action. On a long-range issue, document your process, dates of events, involvement, and correspondence. Determine which issues will need to be addressed by a local government agency and which will need to be addressed by the neighborhood itself. Only neighbors working together and along with government can solve short- and long-term neighborhood problems.

***Know the Structure and Purpose of City Government***

Contact the City Clerk's Office at (314) 622-3287 or accesses the website for information regarding City of St. Louis Departments and structure.

***Become Acquainted with Procedure***

Visit a few meetings of your public officials (e.g., Board of Aldermen, boards, commissions, etc.). Understand how they operate, discover guidelines they have to follow, and realize pressures. Have someone explain procedures, if not clear.

***Work Personally***

Allow officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is on the personal level: (1) personal appearance, (2) phone call, (3) letter, (4) e-mail.

See: [www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/aldermen](http://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/aldermen) on ways to contact city officials.

***Keep Your Public Officials Informed***

Do not surprise your officials with unexpected actions. Bring written copies of your concern when meeting with them, and follow up your concern and action with letters. (Keep copies of everything you do!) Refer to correspondence sent. Keep up an ongoing relationship. Show your appreciation as well as dissatisfaction. Send carbon copies to other individuals or agencies involved (citizens, City staff, others).

***Work on all Levels***

Try the chain of command first by going to a person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials. If you do not know whom to talk to, do not hesitate to go to the top. Be sure to keep your Alderman informed. If necessary, address the Board of Alderman as a whole to be sure you are heard.

***Group Representation Should Be Clear***

Identify the name of your association and its purpose. Use appointed contact persons to establish continuity and identity. Document attendance at general meetings and votes taken. Ensure that you have approval/authorization of the association before acting.

***Get Solid Answers***

Do not be satisfied with vague answers. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on. Ask for and remind your officials of specific information—dates, places, times, etc.

***Be Open to Suggestions***

Take suggestions of your officials seriously and follow up on them. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in similar direction.

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***Follow Up***

Follow up on all discussion with a memo summarizing outcomes. Frequently, check back to learn about progress. Keep it up until outcomes are a reality.

***Keep Neighborhood Residents Informed***

Neighborhood association and newsletters are a key way to keep residents informed of progress of outcomes. Issue a press release and let the media know your concerns and progress of outcomes.

## **9. Increasing Your Effectiveness of Neighborhood Associations**

Here is a collection of ideas to help make neighborhood associations more effective.

***Analysis***

- Learn as much as you can about neighborhood concerns including political and economic roots.
- Study national trends and understand relationships to these.
- Identify and challenge assumptions of decision makers.
- Identify who else is concerned with similar issues. Talk with them, form an alliance, share information, work together.
- Understand concerns, viewpoints, and priorities of any opposition.

***Vision***

- Define your ideas, your vision of a society with resolved problems.

***Structure***

- Break down problems and assign members to relevant decision maker to lobby for resolution.
- Residents should know voting records of officials.
- Develop new ways of solving a problem which by-passes uncooperative decision makers.

***Image***

- Get listed or featured in other groups' newsletters.
- Start or improve your own newsletter and send it to as many influential people as possible.
- Become better known (a "household word").
- Launch a public education campaign.
- Get radio and TV stations to help you develop your own public service announcements.
- Use CAT (Cable Access Television).
- Raise consciousness of the public on what it means to be an active, effective citizen.

***Strategies and types of involvement***

- Neighborhood Level
  - Choose "winnable" issues.
  - Set up a demonstration project, which shows problem solving; form partnerships; get funding if needed.
  - Canvass neighborhoods to gather opinions and build support
  - Support community issues and concerns

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- Celebrate community events (holidays, local history, successes)
- Sponsor block parties
- Resources and Assistance
  - Assess organizational history and strengths; they are among your most important resources.
  - Make a budget for your citizen involvement activities and get funding without strings.
  - Use community resources such as school buildings for space.
  - Draw on technical experts for advice and testimony.
  - Enlist the support of people with influence.
  - Use process consultants and facilitators when appropriate
  - Seek in-kind services (free printing, auditing, legal assistance, etc.)
- Organizational Development
  - Set long-range goals and allocate time in accordance with them.
  - Initiate plans and policies rather than reacting to what comes to you.
  - Manage time carefully and realistically.
  - Develop leadership and membership skills. Make training an on-going part of your activities
  - Evaluate your progress regularly

## 10. How to Give Public Testimony

Giving public testimony before Boards and Commissions can be frightening if you have never done it before. However, whenever you can, it is beneficial to spend as much time as possible preparing your testimony. Carefully prepared testimony may influence action. Testimony becomes part of public record and may be referred to later on when decision-makers are deliberating.

### *How to Prepare Public Testimony*

- Know your time frame

Find out when, where, and before whom (Mayor, Commissions, Committees, and Boards) will meet. This will let you know how much time you have to prepare—there is a big difference between having one day and one month to prepare.

- Know your issue

Support neighborhood positions with as many facts as possible. Do your homework because information is power! Read newspapers, magazines, etc., to find out about the issue. Talk to local government officials, when possible, and other citizens. Be knowledgeable of arguments and be prepared to counter those. Also, draw on your own knowledge and experience.

- Start writing down main points

Construct a rough outline from scattered thoughts, research, plus any additional brainstorming. Begin thinking about any extra visual aids that might be important (posters, charts, fact sheets, flyers, cartoons, brochures, etc.).

- Know how much time is allowed for testimony. Typical time limits range between three and ten minutes. However, effective testimony can generally be made in three minutes. If ideas are well-organized, three minutes should be ample time to make your point effectively.
- Write a draft statement and include the following when possible:

- Address governmental body (example: "Mr. /Ms. Mayor, Members of the Council"). State your name and address for the record.
- Say if you are testifying for neighborhood association, and give a brief description of why you or your group is testifying on an issue.
- Explain how support for your testimony was solicited from your neighborhood (by petitions, vote at meeting, surveys, letters, etc.).
- Bring with you documentation of that support (copies of petitions, surveys, minutes of meetings, etc.) whenever possible.
- Be specific about how many people were involved in making decision. State whether this is a majority or minority opinion.
- Keep statements as short as possible (two pages is about right). State problems and reasons for support or opposition, and then summarize.
- Get others to read and make comments on drafts of the testimony. If approval of the full association body is needed, invite people will feel comfortable making corrections or suggestions.
- Let the statement sit for a day or so, if you have the time, and then go back and read it again and revise if necessary.
- Write up final copy. Type and double-space final copy. Carefully check spelling.
- Anticipate questions from the commission, board, etc. Be prepared to answer these.
- Practice giving testimony before friends.

#### ***More preparation suggestions***

- Be Familiar with Group Processes— attend one or more meetings of the body before you testify to get an idea of the room layout and procedures used.
- Know Your Audience— try to stress what you have in common with and that you respect differences of people you are addressing. The more you can find out about their biases and sympathies, the more chance you have to relate to them.
- Be aware of how you present yourself when you make a statement to the decision-making body. Think about what image you want to project. Most of what we communicate is nonverbal. Be aware of your body language
- Try to keep your feelings in check while you are testifying. It is all right to have strong feelings, but you do not want them to overshadow content and reason of your message.
- Use notes rather than written manuscript so you can develop good eye contact.
- Define What You Want— Make it perfectly clear what action you want the body to take.
- Summarize your written message to emphasize important points.
- Provide copies of your written testimony for each member of the body, appropriate staff, and media.
- If you are testifying as a group, make sure different people cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitious.