

How to Build a Blockbuster Block Club

A Practical Guide for Detroiters

By Ben Washburn

Copyright © 2013

CREDITS

This handbook reflects the work and best thinking of many community folks.

This work is copyrighted. My intent is not to make a profit from it but to prevent other people from doing so. If your community group would like to use this handbook or modify it, give me a call and we can probably work that out for a dollar or less. My contact information is listed below.

Ben Washburn
benwashburn@msn.com
313-330-7700

Introduction

This handbook aims to help Detroiters build more and better block clubs. Blocks that have never had a block club –blocks where no one knows how to set about forming a good one--will find this handbook especially useful. If you already have a pretty good club, you may still find much of interest to your group.

This handbook includes:

- **DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS** - This handbook contains plenty of detailed instructions. I go into detail to make sure you understand WHY each of the smaller details is important. If you don't understand the WHYS, it's easy to take shortcuts that may trip you up later.
- **BUILD ON SUCCESS** - Good clubs take a lot of work by a lot of people. People love to pitch in on successful efforts, but not on those that are a big drag or that involve a lot of aimless meetings. So it is very important to make every effort a success and to hold everyone's time in high regard.
- **LEADERSHIP SKILLS** - TV and movies have given us a warped idea of what it takes to be a good leader. Too much focus is placed upon "looking important", and too little upon the real work skills of being a leader. Most of us can do little to change our looks but we can all improve our understanding and our work skills.
- **PLAIN AND SIMPLE** - I have tried to make this handbook easy to read and understand, so everyone can use it. Plain words hit home harder, take less space, and help us think clearly. When you are able to put your thoughts into simple words, it usually means that you have really thought things through.
- **WORKSHOPS WORK BEST** - This handbook is written to be used in a group setting, for workshops or study groups. I don't expect anyone to pick it up and read straight through to the last page. This subject is challenging, but not always exciting. A study group will help you and others build basic skills in the least amount of time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. <u>Why Form a Block Club?</u>	5
Projects that work	6
Projects that won't work	8
2. <u>Getting Off to a Good Start</u>	10
3. <u>Setting Up Club Committees</u>	19
Meetings Committee	
Newsletter Committee	
Books and Budget Committee	
Projects Committee	
4. <u>Ground Rules</u>	20
Picture of a Block Club	20
General Rules for Running a Club	22
How Best to Run Meetings	26
5. <u>Are You the Right Person?</u>	28
6. <u>Attachments</u>	
Attachment 1: How to Be a Good Facilitator	30
Attachment 2: Suggested Kick-Off Letter	31
Attachment 3: Home Visit Checklist	32
Attachment 4: How to Put Out an Effective Newsletter	33
Attachment 5: Projects Committee Two-Year Plan	35
Attachment 6: How to Make Your Own T-Shirts	
Attachment 7: How to Set Up a Traded Services Co-Op	

1. Why form a block club?

Nowadays many of us have lost our sense of belonging, of being-at-home. It's probably due to the fast pace at which we live, work, and move from place to place. We live next to each other and don't even know one another's names.

To bring back that feeling of home and caring, many Detroiters have formed block clubs. In a block club, people work together, come to know one another in a caring way, and make their block a better place to live, raise a family, and retire in comfort.

MAKING THE BEST OF WHERE WE LIVE NOW

The best reason for forming a block club is often the hardest to see: Many, if not most, folks feel that they are just passing through their neighborhood on their way to something better. To them, it seems dumb to plow time, money or effort into fixing up their present home or improving their neighborhood and schools.

In fact, however, over the past 50 years, the future of our country has passed into the hands of the rest of the world's population. While our U. S. population doubled, the world's population tripled. For each of us, there are now 50 of them, and they are getting better and better at competing with us. Worldwide corporations control most jobs. Oil now costs 40 times as much as it did 50 years ago. Super-ships are able to cheaply carry goods to us from faraway places. Computers and satellite communications enable third-world countries to compete with us with much cheaper labor.

There is not much that our national government can do about any of this. For most of us, the leapfrog game to a better place has come to an end. The homes that we live in right now are likely to be the best that we (and our children) can ever afford. We cannot afford to let them go to pot.

The best thing that we can do is work hard together to stretch what we already have as far as we can, and make our homes, neighborhoods and schools into better places to live, raise our families, and retire in some comfort. Working together in block clubs, we can do this with a lot less work and sacrifice than it takes to move on to some "greener pasture."

SELF-HELP WORK GROUPS

The BEST block clubs are first of all, self-help work groups, not social gatherings. As folks work together, they forge new things in common, and that in turn paves the way for many new true friendships. But friendship is not the main purpose for a block club.

People do not need to see eye-to-eye on most things to become good neighbors. They don't even have to like one another. But they do need to see that it is in their own best interest to be a good neighbor and to be surrounded by good neighbors.

People differ in their interests; blocks differ in their concerns, needs, and improvement opportunities. Block clubs therefore differ from one another. But they also have a lot in common. In this handbook, we allow for differences, but also show the ways and means that have worked best for the more successful block clubs.

PROJECTS THAT WORK

Now let's look at several different kinds of projects that some successful clubs have done, projects that make a block club worth the investment of your time and effort:

▪ **GETTING FASTER AND BETTER ACTION OUT OF CITY HALL**

It is often hard for just one person to get fast action out of City Hall. But City Hall will often sit up and take notice when a strong block club calls. City Hall folks get a lot of crank calls, so many that they often don't know who to believe or when to respond. When a block club calls, they then know that most people on the block are concerned and that the matter has probably already been screened and investigated.

Here is a list of the kinds of things on which you can expect a faster than average response (realizing that all responses will be slower during cut-back times):

- Traffic signs and lights – repair of broken ones, or adding new ones.
- Street and curb repairs.
- Street lighting repairs.
- Repair of city-owned sidewalks.
- Any hazard or nuisance on public property.
- Weed-cutting on public property.
- Alley cleaning.
- Special rubbish pick-up.
- Stray-dog pick-up.
- Removal of dead trees or stumps from berms and other public property.
- Playground clean-up and hazard removal.
- Demolition of dangerous buildings.
- Securing of vacant buildings.
- Removal of abandoned cars from public streets.
- Rat control.
- Closing of dope pads, pornographic bookshops, etc.
- Response to speeders, drag racing, etc.
- Problems with real estate solicitors, door-to-door salesmen, etc.

▪ **ORGANIZING THINGS THAT YOU CAN BUY CHEAPER OR DO BETTER AS A COOPERATIVE GROUP.**

There are many things that you can do better or buy cheaper when you join with

others in a co-op or exchange. Block clubs make good springboards to start these things that help everyone who takes part and offend no one. Co-ops are a way to raise your standard of living, even in tight times, by stretching your dollars and making better use of your spare time. They build more in common with your neighbors and forge common interests that bring you closer together. In some cases, there are enough folks on your own block to put together a worthwhile co-op. In other cases, you may need to reach out to surrounding block clubs, but your club is a good starting point.

Here is a list of co-op activities your block club could organize. If you want to know more about how to organize these projects, check the appendix section at the end of this manual for more details.

- **Printing t-shirts** for your block club. You can make this a do-it-yourself project and save money.

- **Street-long yard sales:** Yard sales are much more successful when everyone joins together in a sale that is several blocks long.

- **Tool pool:** Keeping up a home takes tools. Many people have the basic tools, but the more expensive items are often difficult for individuals to afford. Instead, these can be bought and owned collectively, like snow blowers, leaf blowers, power washers, air compressors, extension ladders, table saws, electric sanders and many more items that neighbors decide they need and can share.

- **Traded services co-op:** Parents of young children need help with childcare. Childless residents need help with other items – grass mowing, rides to shopping centers, raking leaves, shoveling snow. Trading services helps everyone save money and also builds bonds among neighbors.

- **Food-buying co-op:** Food prices continue to rise. By joining together and going to wholesalers at Eastern Market to buy direct, neighbors can save almost half the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables.

- **Healthy meals circle:** Households can join together and take turns planning and buying the food for a group meal, but everyone joins in the cooking tasks.

- **Gardening and canning co-op:** If there's room on your block for one, a community garden can bring interested neighbors together to grow their own food and can it. Keep Growing Detroit provides seeds and classes for a modest annual fee. Free classes on canning are available from the MSU Agriculture Extension.

- **Flower co-op:** Neighbors can save time and money by joining together to buy flats of annuals, trading excess perennials, and taking cuttings from existing plants.

- **Car pools:** gas prices keep rising, along with insurance rates. A block club is a

natural place to organize a car pool, saving everyone time and money (and building stronger ties between neighbors in the meantime).

- **Joint ownership of a car:** Our public transportation system stinks and is not likely to get better anytime soon. Plenty of people can't afford a car on their own but could afford to share in the ownership of one with trusted neighbors.

- **Block directory:** Once neighbors begin to work together and establish bonds, it becomes possible to establish a block directory that includes everyone's names, phone numbers, and email addresses. (Some may need help with computer access but others on the block can assist.) Getting to the point where everyone is willing to share information with each other makes all the other block club undertakings possible.

- **Protecting vacant homes:** Vacant homes are vulnerable to strippers and squatters. Both destroy the value of the vacant homes, and can greatly decrease the value of the occupied homes. A strong block club is the best way to prevent the kind of damage done to vacant dwellings.

- **Sidewalk and driveway repairs:** By joining together to get their driveways or sidewalks repaired at the same time, neighbors can get a better quality job at a cheaper price.

PROJECTS THAT WON'T WORK

While there are many things that a block club can do successfully, there are also many other things that **it should not try to do:**

- A block club should not try to do anything that many people on the block are strongly opposed to or strongly divided about. There are just too many good things to do, about which nearly all would agree, without getting hung-up on things that divide neighbors.
- A block club should not tackle problem households on the block. And a block club should not ask City Hall to take actions against their members or neighbors to enforce City Ordinances. Those efforts should only be undertaken by a larger neighborhood association or organization.

Here are examples of the kinds of issues that are best handled by larger neighborhood associations. These larger organizations can put pressure on people to:

- Clean up their back yards
- Keep their dogs on leashes
- Hold down noise that disturbs others
- Park in their driveways and not on the street
- Keep better control of their children

- Cut their grass and trim their trees and hedges
- Not take in boarders
- Not build fences and structures that violate deed restrictions or city ordinances
- Not leave broken-down cars in their driveways or on the street
- Not operate businesses out of their homes against the zoning code

Neighborhood associations can also lobby for changes in city ordinances that will help some but may offend others.

AVOID DIVISIONS, BUILD BONDS INSTEAD

Block clubs should stay away from the kinds of issues that can divide neighbors and create bad feelings. When the club does only things that help everyone and offend no one, neighbors become more involved and dependent upon one another, more caring and respectful of one another, and a lot of the past problems and irritations will evaporate. Honey still gathers more flies than vinegar.

Many of the things that block clubs do could just as easily be done by other groups, like church congregations, parent-teacher associations, trade unions, non-profit organizations, and others. The best reason to do them as a block club is the added benefit of forging new and caring bonds between neighbors.

2. Getting Off to a Good Start

In the first part, I have shown what a block club can do for folks on your block. I have tried to show WHY the investment of your time and energy is worth the effort.

Now it's time to focus on HOW to get your block club off to a good start. Block clubs are funny things. If you get them off to a good start, they tend to keep up that first high level of energy and achievement. But if you get off to a slow and faltering start, it is hard to ever get out of that rut! (In fact, it is much easier to start a whole new organization than it is to pull an older one out of a rut.) It's your block and your long-term interests that are at stake. It is well worth it to do the best job possible right from the get-go.

In this part, I give you a complete and detailed roadmap to get your club off to the best possible start. Read it with care and read it over several times. Then you will have a clear notion of what has to be done next week and next month and you will be ready to cope with it.

ARE YOU THE RIGHT PERSON?

As you read and think over this start-up process, you should also think about whether you are the best person on the block to start the club. Do you have the time and patience? Are you ready to charge ahead or do you first need to find more people to help you? After reading this section, you will be better able to answer these questions and begin to form a plan.

Also, please be aware that the experience you will gain in starting a block club will become a valuable workplace asset for you. The practical skills you learn in forming a strong voluntary group also apply to forming more productive workplace teams. Most of us rely too much in our workplaces on our "authority," rather than upon our ability to coax the best out of our fellow workers

SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

With the help of this handbook and about 10 hours a week for the next 6 months, you can start a blockbuster block club on your street. It will make your home worth more and your life more worth living.

But what if you don't have that much time to spare now? Wait until you do or find someone else who has the time and motivation. A new block club won't succeed if its founders don't have enough time to get it off to a solid start.

In this handbook, I show how to put every hour to good purpose. Without this roadmap, it is easy to spend lots of time but get little or nothing done. I explain what to do and why each step is important to get the best result.

After the first six months, the demands on the founders taper off. If you take the extra care to get off to a great start, success will breed success. People like to join in on successful efforts and will take on more of the initiative. But if you start off dragging, you will end up carrying all of the load yourself and really not getting anywhere.

STEP #1: READ THIS MANUAL. *Takes 10 hours.*

Read all of this manual, at least twice, before doing anything else. Being familiar with all this information will help you be effective and efficient.

STEP #2: FIND CORE TEAM MEMBERS. *Takes 20 hours of your time and 10 hours of each core team member's time.*

One-on-one, find four or five people on your block who share your concerns and who will help. Begin with folks that you know. They may know others. Have them read this manual. Talk it over. Most good clubs begin with a strong Core Team.

STEP #3: CORE TEAM MAKES KEY DECISIONS. *Takes 30 hours from you and 20 hours from each core team member.*

Before you rush to call your first full block meeting, there are several things your Core Team must decide. These decisions are key to getting off to a great start.

- **How big will your club be?** The Core Team should decide how big the block club is going to be. Clubs usually take in just the houses on a block that face one another. BUT SOMETHING DOUBLE THAT SIZE CAN BE BETTER. No block is an island. You have as much in common with your back-fence neighbor as with the neighbor next door or across the street. What's more, when you also include the first two or three homes on the next block each way, you will get folks on those blocks interested in copying your club. You will become more strongly linked into those blocks and clubs. See below for a diagram.

You can get more and better things done with a larger club.

And don't limit the size of your club because no one has a house big enough to hold everyone for a meeting. Space will be the least of your problems; overcrowding is a good thing to have. Clubs that have 50% attending a meeting are doing very well. Most blocks have at least two or three homes with a layout big enough to pack in that many people. Sure, make people as comfortable as you can, but no club has ever failed because people felt packed in at meetings.

I HAVE A GRAPHIC TO GO HERE SHOWING THE OUTLINE OF THE RECOMMENDED AREA, AND OF DIFFERENCES TO CONSIDER IN ASSESSING DUES IN THE OVERLAPPING AREAS. BUT I HAVEN'T FIGURED-OUT YET HOW TO INSERT IT INTO THE WORD FORMAT.

And the truth is, most people overrate the value of full meetings. These meetings can be useful when well planned and timed. But most of the real work of the club will be done in small committees, where people talk to each other rather than at each other. And most committee members will be engaged and recruited one-on-one, not by asking for a show of hands at a meeting.

Before you spread over into other blocks, of course you should contact their block leaders, if they have them, and get them on board. Courtesy pays. Ask that they do the same and overlap onto your block. Once you set your block club dues, ask only half that amount from those over the back fence and on the other blocks.

- **Make a list of needs, opportunities, and problems on your block.** List the things that the block might do together. Think each one over and rate its chances of success. Success breeds success. For your first projects, chose some that are positive, important to people, and highly likely to succeed. Once your club has some successes under its belt, it can take some risks, but not at the beginning. You also need to be well prepared to steer a meeting away from tackling a no-win problem.

For example, even though everyone may be upset about a bad neighbor on the block, it seldom helps to band together and confront that person. Start instead with something that helps everyone, including that bad neighbor, and try to get the bad neighbor to join in. Funny things can occur when you get a good club going. Many of those bad neighbors, even when they don't join in, seem to wake up, take notice that people care, and straighten up without being asked. When that happens, you know you have a club working at its best. The key comes in getting people to care and not just gripe. Honey still catches more flies.

Of course, some people will never shape up without some prodding. To deal effectively with them, it is best to help organize a larger neighborhood association, separate from your block club. If some arm-twisting is needed, get the neighborhood association to do it. If you try to use the block club in both roles, you close the door to pursuing the more positive approach and may lose most of your leadership.

After your core team has worked up some concrete ideas about what issues or activities to address first, they will be better able to get folks out for a meeting. Most people have little interest in attending meetings that wander aimlessly. You will also be set to keep the meeting focused and moving briskly. Most people like being where the action is.

- **Determine how best to run your club.** This is an area where clubs can easily go wrong. Many of us fall back on our experiences in other kinds of organizations that use the common model of a 'strong president' organization that uses *Roberts' Rules of Order* to run meetings. The "strong president" model works well in certain situations, but it's not a good approach for running a successful block club.

Successful block clubs depend on the strength and depth of their working committees. Instead of a “strong president” model, block clubs need a “strong committee” model that focuses on setting up strong working committees. The club needs a facilitator, not a president or a chairperson. A facilitator has a clear role and duty but no formal power. It’s even good to keep rotating the job of the facilitator.

To set up a strong committee club, you need to draw clear lines at the beginning as to what each committee is to do and how they are to link up and work together. I show a good set-up on pages ?? to ?? at the end of this handbook.

Don’t worry that neighbors will be upset that your Core Team has made this “decision.” When they see how “power” is spread around broadly and that no one is out to “grab” power or “feather their own nest,” most will pitch in. Most will also be glad that someone has taken the time and interest to get these things right.

- **Choose someone to facilitate the first full meeting.** Choose the facilitator for the first meeting from the Core Team. Most Core Team members will staff the Meetings Committee at the beginning. Pick someone who knows how to keep a meeting moving and focused, who can give everyone a chance to have their say, and who can pull it out of those who usually keep their thoughts to themselves until later. You need someone who is tactful, has good judgment, and understands what can make the group stronger and what can split it apart.

You also need someone who is willing to work behind the scenes to get things done and who does not provoke disputes or embarrass people as a means of getting action. Once this person has set the stage, you also need to find others who can rotate in behind that first person and carry on in the same style. Make sure that this job is not “given” in recognition of past things done or to someone who is seeking status or a political career.

Choose the facilitator for the first full meeting before going to the next step of preparing the agenda. A facilitator who is involved in preparing the agenda is much better able to carry it through with speed and good sense.

- **Prepare the agenda for the first meeting.** When your Core Team has a solid idea of what will happen at the first meeting, they will be better able to get folks to turn out for it. This agenda will usually include these items:
 1. **WHY FORM A BLOCK CLUB:** Core Team members explain why they called the meeting and explain why a block club would be a great thing for all.
 2. **DISCUSS AND VOTE:** Call for discussion and vote on forming a club.
 3. **CHOOSE A FOUNDING COMMITTEE:** Choose a committee to review the best way to set up the club. Even though you may think you already

know this, it is good to get as many folks as possible to look into this matter and see for themselves.

4. CHOOSE A FACILITATOR: Chose a facilitator to act for the next 3 months.
5. SET UP COMMITTEES: Find as many folks as are interested to staff the key committees, realizing that most will be later engaged and recruited by direct contact.
6. NEXT MEETING: Set a date, time and place for the next meeting.
7. ANNOUNCEMENTS, ETC. - Other business as needed, but hold the meeting to less than 2 hours.

- **Find a host and set a date for the first meeting.** Give yourself at least 3 weeks to promote the first meeting. Once the club is set-up, this will become the job of the Meetings Committee. But the Core Team will need to do it for the first time, and to set a good example for them to follow.

Keep it simple! Let your host offer tea or coffee, but nothing more. Never allow hosts to begin to outdo one another. It will soon become too much of a burden for some. If someone other than the host would like to bring cake or something, fine. But not the host.

Also find folks to tidy-up after the meeting. Keep the burden on the host as light as possible.

Weekday evenings are usually best.

STEP 4: MAKE UP A MEETING LETTER AND DROP ONE OFF AT EACH TARGET HOUSEHOLD. *Takes ?? hours from you and ?? hours from each of the Core Team members.*

Two weeks before the meeting, drop a letter at the door of every house in your proposed target area (See attachment 2 on page 31 for a sample).

Leave no one out! People do not have to like one another to be good neighbors. They don't have to see eye-to-eye on most things. But they do need to see that it is in their own best interest to be surrounded by good neighbors.

Most people get a lot of junk mail, and pitch it without reading it. It helps if you handwrite their name across the top. If you don't know their name, at least write "Neighbor" on it.

You can also get a free list of names and addresses of the registered voters on your block by calling MOSES (Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength), a faith-based community organization, at (313) 962-5290. You can also get a list of the names of the homeowners on your block at the Wayne County Register of Deeds. (There may be a fee for obtaining this information, but they sometimes give it to block clubs for free.) Note that the Register does not have information on renters, but you may want to invite the owners of

any rental properties in your area to take part in your block club as well, since it is in an owner's best interest for his property to be surrounded by caring neighbors.

STEP #5: CORE TEAM GOES DOOR-TO-DOOR TO PERSONALLY INVITE PEOPLE TO THE MEETING. *Takes 6-12 hours from you and each of your Core Team members.*

This step is crucial to both immediate and long-term success. It will take each Core Team member 6 to 12 hours, depending on how you do it.

For best effect, make visits between 10 and 5 days before the meeting. Core team members must go to each household and personally ask every adult and teenager to come. Don't leave anyone out and especially teenagers. People do not suddenly become adults on their 18th birthday. They have to grow into becoming full and responsible members of the community. The neighborhood needs to be thoughtfully set up to include them. There simply is no better or easier way to do this. Nothing beats one-on-one contact.

The turnout at your first meeting will set the tone for your club. You must be ready for it and you must prime everyone else to be ready for it. Folks in a large group will not make commitments and decisions unless they have first been primed to do so.

Do not depend upon the letter to tell the story. Usually, not more than one in three will have read it. With less than 5 days notice, some will not have time to plan to come. And with more than 10 days, some folks will forget. Five to ten days is the best window.

Plan to take 30 minutes per household. If your 5-person Core Team has 60 houses to cover, it will take 30 hours to do it, one-on-one. That's six hours each. It will take up to 12 hours each if they need to go in teams of two.

If you can spare the time, it is more effective to make your visits in teams of two. One can listen, take notes, and think while the other talks. You will find it easier to make the visits and you will overlook and forget less. If you do not have enough Core Team members, you may be able to pick up some more members as you visit.

By this point, your Core Team will well know what you have in mind, what it can do for the neighborhood, and what's going to happen at the meeting. They will also know what kind of workers will be needed to fill out the club's first committees, and will be able to briefly feel folks out about their own concerns and interests. It takes this kind of insight and contact to get the club off to a rapid and positive start. They should use a form like Attachment #3 on page 32 to keep track of who is interested in what.

Ask every adult and teenager to come. Don't leave anyone out and especially teenagers. People do not suddenly become adults on their 18th birthday. They have to grow into becoming full and responsible members of the community. The neighborhood needs to be thoughtfully set up to include them.

As you go door-to-door, also remember this: Most people like to be asked, even when they cannot come. Very few will be annoyed by your visit (and most of those are folks who just feel out of place in big groups). These folks will need some tender coaxing. Nearly all will feel assured that they live on a block where other people care enough to come by and ask them to take part in some good things.

Use your visit to get some feedback on what people see as the needs, problems and opportunities for improvement in the neighborhood. Find out what they might like to do to help the club along.

Take good notes as you go. After visiting four or five households, it becomes hard to remember who said what. Rely upon Attachment #3 on page 32 to take note of these facts.

When you finish your visits, you will just about know where the club ought to go, and also where you stand in filling in the needed committees.

Keep in mind that the main work of your club will be done one-on-one and in committees. It is always more effective to ask people personally to do something, and not ask for a show of hands at a meeting or placing a notice in the newsletter.

A typical visit will run something like this: Say who you are and note that you are a neighbor. Mention the letter and the upcoming meeting. Ask to come in for 20 minutes, but also mention that you have many other stops to make and can not stay more than a half-hour. (This reassures people who want to get back to something else, and also gets them to ask their questions quicker.) Say what you think a block club can do for the block. Ask what they think about the needs, problems and opportunities on the block. Could they help? Do they have any special skills or contacts that might come in handy? Ask for their names, phone numbers and emails, if you don't already have that information, so that you can stay in touch. And give them your contact information.

Will they come the meeting? Don't twist their arms but do the gentle things that help people make up their minds. Ask them to check their calendar to see if they are free to come. If there is some reason they cannot come, and if you can help deal with it, do so. If an elderly person has trouble getting out, find someone to walk with them. If a single mom needs help with childcare, see if you can help arrange it.

Finally, it is hard to say everything in a half-hour. You may want to leave a copy of a few pages from this booklet. After a visit, folks may be ready to read it for themselves.

STEP 6: CORE TEAM MEETS AND COMPARES NOTES. *Takes 6-12 hours from you and each of your Core Team members.*

After the house-to-house visits and before the meeting, the Core Team needs to meet, review, and compare their findings. This is important to be ready for the meeting itself.

Do other people see the same needs, problems and opportunities that you see? How many are likely to come to the meeting? Were any touchy issues raised, issues that will be best avoided at the meeting? Who seems to be interested in doing what?

From all of this feedback, do the following:

1. Make a list of the projects that most people will want to undertake. For each item, make a list of those who were most interested. Which neighbors are likely to make the best committee facilitators? The club facilitator can use these lists to advantage when asking a specific person to become the temporary kick-off facilitator for a particular committee. It helps get the best possible person into each key job. Don't leave these kinds of things to chance.
2. Make a list of people who are the best prospects to help with each needed committee. (Newsletter, Meetings, Budget, and Projects)

Never stand up before a group of folks who don't know one another well and ask for volunteers to lead a job. Odds are that the best prospects will not raise their hands.

Most people like to be asked personally, one-on-one, to do an important job. Some even resent being asked in an open meeting, when they don't know exactly what is involved. And if you ask for help and no one responds, it really looks bad for the club. It is far better to find the right people privately, personally, and one-on-one.

At a later point in the club history, when everyone knows one another, shortcuts may sometimes make sense. But never at the outset!

3. Pinpoint any strong grievances and trouble spots that may arise at the meeting and take steps to avoid them. Talk with the aggrieved person(s) and get their promise to hold their concern to another time or place.

STEP #7: SET THE FINAL AGENDA AND ALLOW TIME FOR EACH ITEM. *Takes ?? hours from you and each of your Core Team members.*

Based on the feedback from the Core Team interviews, finalize the agenda. Keep it interesting and moving along. Set a specific time to consider each item. Laying out time limits helps folks keep their comments short and to the point. The facilitator must use good sense in sticking to these time limits, but overall, they will help keep the meeting interesting and productive.

In other sections of this handbook, we explain the ground rules for running a block club, and how best to conduct meetings, but for now, it's good to have a general picture of what that first meeting will look like. Your first meeting will probably go something like this:

1. The Core Team tells what it has done and why it thinks a block club will be worth the while of all on the block. They will explain how big they think

it should be, how best to set it up, and how best to run it. Discussion is then invited. (Allow 45 minutes.)

2. The facilitator asks for a vote on whether to form the recommended club:

- a. Who is strongly in support and ready to help?
- b. Who is in support but not sure they can help?
- c. Who is neutral, but willing to go along with the majority?
- d. Who has deep reservations, and if so, why?

3. The Core Team then expands on how it recommends that the club be run, and asks that a committee of all interested be set up to further review this matter, and report back at the next meeting. After some discussion, set a place and time for the committee to meet. The more folks you can get interested in this step, the better things will go in the long run. (Allow 15 minutes.)

4. Ask if it is OK to keep the same facilitator until the next meeting.

5. Set a time and place for the next meeting. Once every six to eight weeks is usually best. Once a month is usually too often. There is no point in holding meetings unless there is some important business to consider. It is also best to line-up the next meeting place before the meeting rather than during it. Remember that the most important work of the club will be done in committees and not in large meetings.

6. Set forth a list of the regular committees that need to be formed. These should include:

- a. A meetings and ground rules committee.
- b. A newsletter committee.
- c. A books and budget committee.
- d. Some specific project committees.

Mention the folks who have already indicated an interest in each. Ask the group to split up for a half-hour, one group for each of the recommended committees. The facilitator should ask that one person from each group facilitate its discussion and report back. Ask the groups if they have the makings of an effective committee? (Allow 30 minutes.)

7. Come back together, hear the reports, and see where you are. In most cases, you will be pleased with the results.

3. Committees

So far, we have considered what good a block club can do for your block and how to take the first steps in getting a good club going. Now the focus shifts to the most important working parts of a block club, its committees. Workable committees must have clear goals and enough members to get the job done.

PICTURE OF A COMMITTEE

Let's start by looking at a diagram of what an ideal committee looks like:

INSERT CONCENTRIC CIRCLE DIAGRAM HERE

Looking at a committee this way helps to show that it's the whole group that is important, not just who's the facilitator of it. Everyone in the group plays an important part.

There are four core committees that every good block club needs:

- Meetings Committee
- Newsletter Committee
- Books & Budget Committee
- Projects Committee

Each of these committees has its own special set of jobs.

MEETINGS COMMITTEE

This committee is usually facilitated by the current Club Facilitator. It finds the place to hold meetings. And it finds the people to donate coffee, tea, cookies and other help to lighten the load on the host or hostess of each meeting.

The Meetings Committee also makes up the agenda for meetings and sets the meeting date and time in coordination with the Newsletter Committee, the Books and Budget Committee, and each of the current Projects Committees. Once all the details are finalized, the Meetings Committee then gets a notice out to all the members about the meeting and its purpose at least a week in advance.

It is **not** the job of the Meetings Committee, however, to set up a program for each meeting and to find speakers. If there is some current burning issue that some members believe needs bringing in a speaker, then the Club Facilitator should ask them to form a special Projects Committee to look into the matter, develop some recommendations on what to do about it, and to find a relevant speaker. There is no need to meet unless there is something important to address. Too many clubs hold routine regular meetings at which little of importance happens. It is the job of the Newsletter Committee to get routine information out to everyone. Projects Committees

should rely upon the newsletter and upon one-on-one contact, and not upon routine meetings, to advise folks of their progress and needs.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

The first job of the newsletter committee is to keep an accurate record of all important happenings and decisions at club meetings and in the projects committees.

The newsletter committee writes and delivers the club newsletter by email on a regular basis. Going one-on-one, this committee sets up networks so that folks who have and use email agree to pass all information on to those of their neighbors who do not. This committee also makes special efforts to train people who have computers but who do not have email accounts about how to set up and use those accounts.

Members of the newsletter committee can encourage those who do not have computers to obtain a basic set-up. For about \$50, you can buy a second-hand computer with Windows XP with 2 GBs of memory and a 40 GB hard drive. That kind of computer is good enough for routine internet and email use, but it is not worth stealing. For another \$10 a month, you can get basic internet access, by which you can save more than that by shopping Craigslist for secondhand goods to meet some of your everyday buying needs. This is a small and very good investment for anyone who has limited income. And it a great thing for neighbors who have this knowhow to do for those neighbors who do not.

Keeping in touch with each of the Project Committees and their work teams is another core job of the newsletter committee. A friendly call from the newsletter committee often helps a project committee set concrete steps and target dates that mesh with the timing of the newsletter. While many people resist this kind of gentle pressure coming from a typical club president, they often respond well to it when it comes from a newsletter committee member. News must get out on a regular basis – most neighbors will respect that notion. Goal-setting and target date setting then become a cooperative meeting of the minds between the two groups. More things will get done and done on time. In this way, the Newsletter Committee becomes a key force in running a great club.

The Newsletter Committee also usually oversees the writing of letters, publicity, advertising, and other kinds of club communications. This committee also collects numbers for a club phone directory and an email network. See Attachment #4 on page 33 for tips on how best to do a newsletter.

BOOKS AND BUDGET COMMITTEE

The Books and Budget Committee collects club dues, pays club bills, keeps good records of all money collected and spent by the club, and keeps club funds safe (usually, by opening a bank account). Once a year, they should also meet with the Meetings Committee for an audit.

Working with input from all the other committees, the Books and Budget Committee also puts together an annual budget and helps other work teams with fundraising efforts.

PROJECTS COMMITTEE

The mission of the Projects Committee is to know what kinds of things a club can do and the benefits of doing them, along with knowing what is needed in time and money to do each.

The Projects Committee develops an initial list of possible projects, then talks these over with folks on the block, one at a time, or in small groups, so that everyone understands these things. This process will reveal which ideas are of most interest and who is interested in helping do them.

Based on the feedback they have collected, the Projects Committee then draws up a written plan of recommended projects to be undertaken over a 2-year period, with target dates to begin and finish each. Even after the club has approved the plan, it is not likely to get everything done. But it will get more done than if it had had no such plan.

Before taking the draft plan to the club, however, the Projects Committee can go back for a second round of discussions with small groups and individuals. This may seem like a lot of work, and it is. But it will get more folks to buy into the plan and get more things done.

Based upon the feedback that they get in the second round, the Projects Committee can then make whatever changes seem needed. (See Attachment #5 on page 35 for a sample plan.)

Then it is time to bring the plan to the whole club for a vote. Take the four kinds of vote that have been mentioned before:

- a. Those in strong support who will help get specific things done.
- b. Those in support, but not sure they can help.
- c. Those doubtful, but willing to go along with the group.
- d. Those who have serious doubts.

The Projects Committee brings together work teams to get things rolling, finds a good facilitator for each, keeps track of project progress, and helps work teams get over rough spots. Each year, the Projects Committee reviews the two-year plan and makes a revised 2-year plan. This committee makes on-going efforts to screen club members for new and improved ideas for the plan and puts together work teams to take a closer look at the more promising ideas. This committee sets concrete goals that are within the ability of the club and keeps in touch with nearby clubs, tying in some of its efforts with theirs.

4. Ground Rules

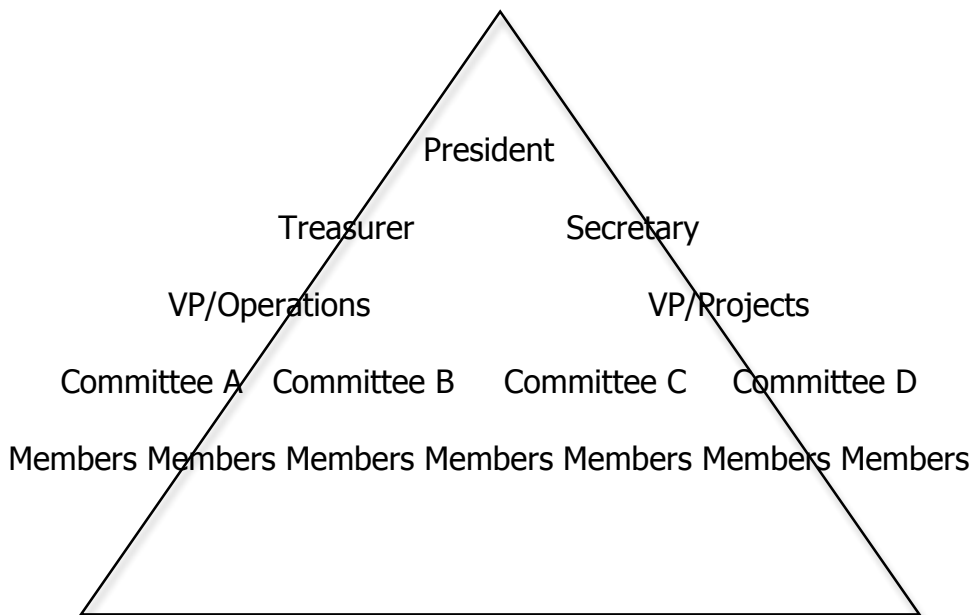
So far, we have covered three major concepts:

- what good a block club can do for your block;
- how to take the first steps in getting a good club going;
- how to set up functioning committees with clear goals

Making sure everyone shares the same “big picture” of the club and the same set of ground rules for operating the club is the next area to consider.

PICTURE OF A CLUB

A lot of neighbors make the mistake of picturing their club like the drawing below. This set-up is a “top-down” structure where officers are elected, with each one designated to “be in charge” of something.



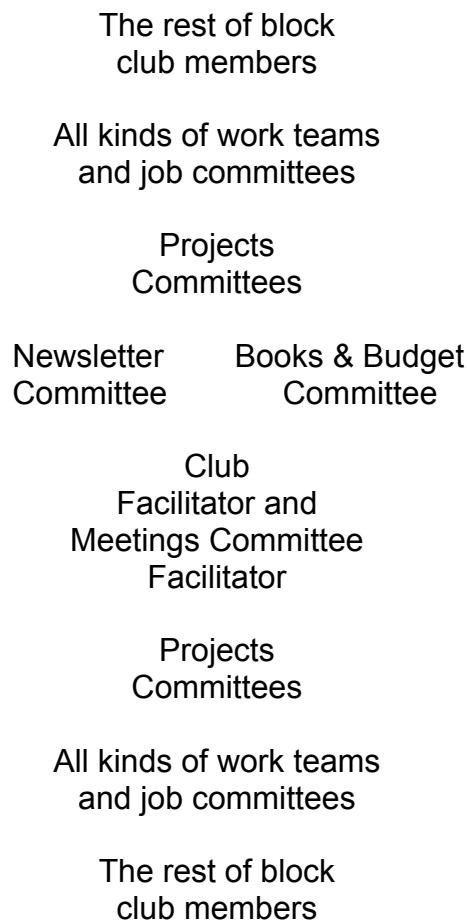
Unfortunately, in a voluntary group like a block club, this kind of power structure simply does not work. What most people do when power is used on them is quit.

There is a much better way to picture and set up your club. There are some jobs that have to be well done to make the club run well. For these positions, you pick facilitators, who have no power, but have taken on a duty for the benefit of us all. Think of these folks as being at the center of the club, rather than somehow “over” it. Ask every club member to understand three things:

1. Facilitators have agreed to do a job for the benefit of all of us.
2. We must each understand what that job is and be ready to help get it done.
3. When folks do a good job for us, we must remember to say so.

Just try to keep everything simple, personal, and direct. On paper, our club and each committee within it look like the picture below. The main job of those at the center of the circle is to pull us all more closely together.

PICTURE OF A HEALTHY BLOCK CLUB



THIS PICTURE SHOULD CONSIST OF CONCENTRIC CIRCLES, BUT I HAVE NOT YET SUCCEEDED IN IMPORTING THESE TO COMPLETE THE PICTURE.

GROUND RULES FOR RUNNING THE CLUB

In addition to having a healthy overall picture of your club, it's also important to make sure everyone agrees to basic ground rules for how the club will be run. Here are the

essential rules that every club should adopt. Some of these rules are pretty tough but they are all necessary to have a good, strong club.

Rule #1: When you commit to become a **member** of a committee, you may not quit or withdraw until you have found someone to replace you.

Comment: *Facilitators should list team workers either as **members** or **helpers**. **Members** are folks who have looked at the job to be done and know they have the time and willingness to do it. **Helpers** are folks who have not yet taken a good look, or who doubt they have the time to do it. They are willing to do what they can, but are not ready to make a firm commitment. When you are careful to take stock of whom and how much you can depend upon, you are less likely to bite off more than you can chew. So long as work teams know the risk of failing because of a shortage of help, they are usually content to live with a failure. But unexpected failures usually trigger a round of finger-pointing and bad feelings that undermine efforts to bring folks closer together.*

Rule #2: Committee work will be done in committee. If you object to what a committee is doing, then join the committee and hash it out there.

Comment: *Clubs can get a lot more done and avoid a lot of grief by sticking to this simple rule. Most committees have good reasons for what they do and recommend, but have no easy way to make sure that everyone knows those reasons. When folks take their concerns directly to the committee, they can usually come to an amicable agreement. But when they wait and challenge a recommendation at a club meeting, it usually has a detrimental effect on the unity of the club and on the morale of the committee.*

Differences should be worked out in the smallest possible groups, because very few people are skilled at debating touchy matters in a larger body. If these efforts fail to be worked out in the committee, the club is best advised to drop that project and turn to things on which everyone can agree. If there are folks who still want to do the project outside the sponsorship of the club, that's fine. That's their right. We do not all have to see eye-to-eye on everything in order to be good neighbors. But we do need to see that there are things on which we can all agree, and we need to focus the efforts of the club upon those things.

Rule #3: When votes are taken, they are tailored to reflect the differing degrees of support or objection for the idea proposed, such as:

1. Those strongly for it and who will actively work to help do it.
2. Those who are for it but not sure they want to or can help do it.
3. Those with doubts but are willing to go along with most folks.
4. Those with strong doubts who can't go along with the group.

Comment: When you take this approach to voting, you will find out where everyone in the groups really stands and whether there are enough in favor and committed to make a success of the idea. Let nothing become a 'win' for some and a 'loss' for others. Focus upon those things for which there is the most support. There are too many good things that a block club can do to become divided over any one matter.

Rule #4: Before forming a committee, there must be at least three members willing to join the committee. Committee members then choose a facilitator from among themselves. A person may not be the committee facilitator for longer than 2 years. Within 4 months of being chosen, the committee facilitator will train at least two other committee members to be the facilitator. [One duty of the club facilitator to make sure all committees follow this pattern. See Attachment #1 for facilitator duties.]

Comment: The aim of this rule is to make sure that more and more folks become more involved and more committed to the success of the club. Good clubs reap their success from the efforts of many people. Clubs that depend upon a few good leaders usually fall upon hard times. But it takes special rules and understanding to get more and more folks to step-up and carry a part of the work. It also helps to get good facilitators when they know that there is a limit to what is being asked of them. They are not volunteering for a task that has no end.

The only person elected by the whole membership is the club facilitator. And that job is limited to just 3 duties:

1. *To facilitate the meetings committee.*
2. *To facilitate any needed meetings of the club.*

3. *To see and help committee facilitators to train others to carry on.*

HOW BEST TO RUN MEETINGS

First of all, hide all copies of *Robert's Rules of Order*. Instead, find a facilitator who knows how to run an orderly and interesting meeting without those rules. *Robert's Rules* are fine for big groups that meet often and use them often, and that regularly have to deal with issues of conflict and division. But they are confusing to most people and can quickly mire down a block club.

The better block clubs stick to projects that help everyone and offend no one. If you have an issue on which all cannot agree, it is best to drop it and concentrate on those things on which everyone can agree. This means that the club is seldom concerned with the kind of hair-splitting and conflict that *Robert's Rules* were designed for.

Here is the best way to handle an issue at a meeting:

1. The issue is sent to a committee to dig into and to make a recommendation on what is best to do. Or a group of members have first formed their own committee that has checked into a matter and has a recommendation for the whole group. In a grassroots organization, anyone has the right to take the initiative, and to be respected for doing so.
2. The facilitator calls for questions and discussion.
3. The facilitator tries to read the will of the group and to put the matter into a form on which the club can vote.
4. The facilitator takes a vote that is framed to show where everyone in the club stand on the question, like this:
 - a. Those in favor who want to help do the thing proposed.
 - b. Those in favor but are not sure they can or want to help.
 - c. Those more or less opposed but willing to go along with the majority.
 - d. Those firmly against who can not go along with the majority.
5. If nearly everyone is strongly in agreement, a project committee is formed to move the matter forward. If support is only lukewarm, or if some are opposed, the committee is asked to do some more work to see if it can satisfy those concerns. The aim is to do committee work in committee and not at the larger meetings. The aim is to gather the widest possible support, and to keep meetings interesting and worth attending. Meetings then become the place where committees can feel out the support for their ideas, but they are not the place where the bare majority slugs it out with those in opposition.

6. Folks should always leave a meeting on friendly terms and with a feeling that progress is being made that respects everyone.

One of the biggest problems that a club can face is the person who is convinced that the majority should rule on every issue and that anyone who objects is undemocratic. That viewpoint has wrecked a lot of clubs, because those who disagree do not relent; they simply drop out.

This kind of person will ask: Well, what good is a block club if it cannot settle all of these important issues and concerns? The answer is this: Good block clubs build up ties and bonds among neighbors that bind the neighborhood together. It takes work to build that kind of unity and mutual helpfulness. It does not happen by accident. This unity becomes the ground upon which other organizations can build the means to solve those other burning issues.

You sometimes get the same question from outsiders who come around to exploit the unity of your block for their own particular purposes. These are folks, like political candidates who are not willing to go out and build their own groups, but want to cabbage on yours. All you can do is disown them, ignore them, and get on with your own best interests. You owe them no apology. By your hard work, you have already given them a set of networks within which it is easier for them to build their own group.

5. Are you the right person?

DO YOU HAVE THE TIME AND ENERGY TO DO THIS RIGHT?

After reading this far in this handbook, you may be wondering if you have the time and energy to do this right? Or even if all this time and effort is really required....isn't there a faster, easier way to establish a healthy block club?

There is no better way to start a blockbuster block club. It takes a lot of one-on-one contact and it takes a detailed roadmap. All of this detail is important. Good clubs do not just happen. They are made by hard-working people who know what they are doing, who know why they are doing each thing, and who are willing to live with the fact that most people will never know how much work it took to get their club off to a fast clip and on the right foot.

The main difference between starting a first-rate club, and a run-of-the-mill club is not the amount of work that you put into it, but is rather WHEN you do it. The heavy work has to come UP FRONT, well before the first meeting. When you judge the results based upon what people get back for their time and effort, the run-of-the-mill clubs actually get less back for each hour that their leaders put in.

So as you set out to start a club, pull out a calendar and plan out all of the steps needed. Chart some deadlines for doing each step, based upon the time needed. Here is an overview of those steps and time requirements:

	<u>Your time</u>	<u>Each core team member</u>
Step #1: Read manual; know what to do.	10 hours	-0-
Step #2: Find Core Team Members.	20 hours	10 hours
Step #3: Settle front-end questions.	30 hours	20 hours
Step #4: Make and pass-out flyers.	1 hour	4 hours
Step #5: Go home-to-home.	12 hours	12 hours
Step #6: Meet to see where you are.	10 hours	5 hours
Step #7: Set the agenda.	5 hours	5 hours
Step #8: Hold the first meeting.	<u>5 hours</u>	<u>5 hours</u>
TOTAL TIME NEEDED:	93 hours	61 hours

If you can spare two evenings per week, you will need 9 or 10 weeks to get to the first full meeting. You will need another 3 or 4 months to get the first set of projects under way. After that, if you have done a good job up front, you will find that others are willing to step up and carry a big part of the load, because most folks like to help with things that show a big and successful result. Success generates more success.

Attachment #1: How to be a Good Committee Facilitator

1. Always keep good notes. Use a notebook with a spiral wire binder. Make your notes on the right-hand page. But make a note of anything that needs follow-up on the left-hand page so that it stands out. And make notes about your follow-up there as well.
2. When something needs follow-up, set an exact time to get it done. Let others involved know when you expect to hear from them. Tell them when they can expect to hear from you, and if they don't, to call you. When you are dependable, it builds confidence in your committee members.
3. When someone has promised to do something before your next meeting, give him or her a call beforehand to jog his or her memory. People do forget; that's normal. But it hurts the club when a person has to confess at a meeting that they have failed to do something. It takes less time to make a reminder call than it does to undo the damage caused by someone who has failed to hold up his or her end.
4. Before you end a meeting, get everything that needs follow-up down on paper in concrete terms and with target dates. This will clear up a lot of details that were forgotten and let slip by during the talking. When everyone leaves with a solid understanding of what needs to be done next, they also have a deeper sense that things are really getting done.
5. Before you have a meeting, take time to think through exactly what you want to get done and how best to do it quickly. It is better to cancel a meeting if you are not really ready for it.
6. Call a meeting only if something important needs to get done. Generally this involves making a decision.
7. Rely as much as you can upon the telephone and emails, even though you may feel better seeing folks face-to-face.
8. Get reading material for a meeting out to folks well before the meeting. If you can't, allow time during the meeting for everyone to fully read the material. Most can read it twice as fast as you can try to explain it.
9. If you have team workers who often come to meetings without having read the materials beforehand, give them a call before the meeting and ask what they think about the readings. That will usually jog them into reading things ahead of time. And it will save time at the meeting and keep it rolling.

Attachment #2: A Suggested Kick-off Letter

Dear Neighbor:

For the last few weeks, we have been looking into the idea of starting a block club. The more we look and talk to others, the better the idea has looked. Good block clubs help everyone and harm no one. If you are like us, it is getting harder and harder to stretch our income to cover all that we need, like food, heat, a car, and our home. There is a lot that we could do together to cut some of these costs. But it takes something like a block club to pull all of this together.

We have found some good materials on how to do this. We want to tell you more about it. We have gone ahead and set up a meeting. We hope you can come. We also want to get around and talk with you about it before the meeting. That should give you a real chance to think about it before the meeting.

Everyone on the block from age 13 on up is invited to come and take part. We are also inviting all of our back-fence neighbors and folks on the corners of the next blocks. Teens are asked to come because there are so few ways these days for teenagers to feel a part of their neighborhoods.

We will meet on Tuesday, September 10th from 7:30 until 9:30 at the home of George and Betty Cook, 14667 Charwood.

Yours for a better block,

Pete Harwood

Merry Holiday

Alice Piper

Ray Jasper

Jack Beanstalk

Helen Farwell

Attachment #3: HOME VISIT CHECKLIST

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____ Email _____

Would you like to do or help with any of these kinds of things?

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> City Hall Action | <input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk Repair Co-op | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Car Pool | <input type="checkbox"/> Flower Co-op | <input type="checkbox"/> Projects Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Car-owner | <input type="checkbox"/> Street Garage Sale | <input type="checkbox"/> Meetings Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tool Pool | <input type="checkbox"/> Group Garden | <input type="checkbox"/> Rules Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traded Service Co-op | <input type="checkbox"/> Holiday Cookie Swap | <input type="checkbox"/> Block Phone Book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Buying Co-op | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Fix-up Co-op | <input type="checkbox"/> Build a Neighborhood Improvement Association |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fresh Food Circle | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Safety & Security | _____ |

What needs, opportunities, and problems do you see that a block club might tackle?

Have you ever been in a block club before? If so, was it a good one?

Can you help start this club? What special skills or contacts do you have that might be of a big help?

Will you come to our first meeting? Are there any problems in your coming that we can help with?

Name of Core Team Member who made this visit: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Attachment #4: THE NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE: HOW BEST TO DO IT WELL

Most clubs only see a newsletter as something nice, if you can find someone to do it. It is actually one of the most important assets a good club can have and should be done by people who are at the center of everything that goes on in the club. The members of the Newsletter Committee are the people who really keep the club on track.

A club runs better when everyone knows where they've been and where they are going, and when they know who is doing what for their benefit. A newsletter helps give workers a gentle prod and reminder of what they must do, and it gives them some credit for what they are doing.

A club runs better when there is someone who helps team workers set concrete goals and target dates and who follows-up on how things are going. In a strong president type of club, this is the President. But that is usually a touchy relationship in a voluntary set-up, and often results in more conflicts than harmony. Team workers see the newsletter committee members as equals in getting things done, and are more willing to set goals and target dates, so that the newsletter committee can get the word out.

Here are some tips on how best to get the word out:

- a. **Be regular.** Set a date to "go to press", and stick with it. When others can count on this, they are more likely to meet their target dates. In the long run, being regular will make the job easier, and will achieve more.
- b. Tell folks what they want and need to know, but **keep it short** and to the point. Always give the name and phone number of the person to call for more information; this helps keep the news item shorter.
- c. Date your newsletters, and **print a copy to keep in a binder** for future use. When new folks move onto the block, it helps when they can read up on what has happened in the past. It also coaches them on what neighbors on your block expect from one another.
- d. **Trade copies** of your newsletter with those of other block clubs in your area.
- e. Find **someone on each of the working committees** who can write fairly well and can tie that committee in with the Newsletter Committee.
- f. Most folks are willing to do more when they get credit for what they have done. There are many ways to do this without using a lot of space. Just **listing a person to call for more information** says that this person is a

mainstay of that committee. It is also good to pass this role around to different workers on a committee, so that more get recognized for their efforts.

- g. Put **articles in each newsletter** that remind everyone of some of the aims, past achievements, and ground rules of the club.
- h. Put a **calendar of events** on the last page, so that everyone can keep track of what's happening when.
- i. Put the **more important items at the beginning**.
- j. **Wish a happy birthday to each of the kids** on the block in the issue just before their birthday. For kids, birthdays are a big deal, and it helps cement ties between them and their neighbors when those neighbors take notice of them.
- k. **Don't ask for volunteer help** in Newsletter articles. Name a person whom those interested might call for more information on the item, but do not come right out and ask for help. Firstly, it seldom turns up any extra help. Secondly, it looks bad for one committee after another to be asking for help. The best way to get help is by personal one-on-one contact. Just use the Newsletter to prime folks for what you have in mind.
- l. **Keep people thinking a few months ahead** for plans that the club has for down the road. This will help committee members find more help when that time comes. It also helps assure those working on current projects that others will be doing their part in the near future.
- m. If at least one-third of the folks on your block have computers and use email, put out your newsletter that way. And ask each of them to print out copies and pass that word along to two of their neighbors who do not have a computer. The main purpose of this club is to build stronger self-help ties among neighbors, and this is another small but effective way of doing that.

Attachment #5: SAMPLE PROJECTS COMMITTEE TWO-YEAR PLAN

After checking with everyone on the block about the kinds of things that we can do together, and after sizing up how much help we may have, we have come up with a proposed plan on what to do over the next two years. We propose to begin with those things that have the greatest support and to build upon our successes in achieving these things.

Project #1: Make or buy T shirts with a block name and logos. Begin 7/1/14.

Project #2: Set up a block Tool Pool: Begin on 7/1/14 and finish by 9/1/14.
We will need 5 team workers, putting in about 8 hours each over 2 months to survey everyone, compile an index of those tools that each person can commit, print the index, and pass around copies to those taking part. To take part, each person must make available tools that have a new value of at least \$200. Each person taking part will sign an agreement to replace or repair any tool that they may damage. We will also make a list of tools that no one has now but that are needed. Other persons can then join the pool by buying and making available those needed tools.

Project #3: Hold a Street-Long Garage Sale: Begin on 7/1/14 and finish by 8/15/14.
We need 3 team workers putting in about 5 hours a week for three weeks to set a date, make up and pass out an "How Best to Do It" flyer, and make signs to place on the corners of our street and (a main traffic artery).

Project #4: Set Up a City Hall Action Committee: Begin 8/15/14 and be ongoing.
Three to five team workers are needed to learn the set up of city services and how to get faster action. Some need to be free during the day to attend hearings, make calls, and bird dog problems.

Project #5: Begin a Food-Buying Co-op: Begin 9/15/14, get Co-op going by 10/30/14.
We need 6 team workers to find out exactly how to run a co-op and to draft a set of ground rules. They will need to personally contact everyone who has shown an interest in joining, and workout who has a truck or van and can buy, find a place to bring and package the produce, and so forth. This will take 10 hours a week for the first 3 weeks and 5 hours a week for the next 6 weeks until things are moving smoothly, and the co-op takes over its own management.

- Project #6: Organize a Fall Block Party: Begin 8/1/14 and hold party on 9/25/14.
We need three team workers to get the word out and drum up interest in attending a block party. The first job is to take around a street-closing petition and getting it to the Police Department. The second job is to get a member who has a big yard to host the party, and to have those who have a grill to bring it out to the party. Everyone brings their own meat and a dish to share. The last job is to make sure that every committee that still needs workers be primed to attend and look for those workers.
- Project #7: Begin an effort to hold an annual Halloween Party for neighborhood kids in a local church social hall in concert with other nearby block clubs. Begin 9/1/14.
We need 5 workers for 10 hours each to go to other block clubs and get them involved, and to find a place for the party. Get them to make scary props and costumes. Ask the church to donate free space. Ask parents of the kids to make a donation to buy candy and cookies.
- Project #8: Start some Healthy Meals Circles: Begin 10/15/14.
We need 5 workers to first watch a movie called "Food, Inc." which is about what has happened to the American diet over the last 30 years, and why. Those who can should also read a book: *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, which expands upon the movie. This information will most likely make them realize that one of the most important things that they can ever do for their neighbors is to get them to change their eating habits for the better. And a Healthy Meals Circle is one of the best ways to both do that and to pull families and neighbors more closely together.
- Project #9: Begin a home safety and security program: Begin 2/1/15.
We need 10 workers, hopefully from the Tool Pool members, to go home-to-home and advise folks on how to make low cost changes that will make the home safer from fire, fall accidents, B & Es, etc. We hear about these kinds of things all the time, but most of us need some prodding to actually do something about them.
- Project #10: Begin a Traded Services Co-op: Begin 3/15/15.
We need six workers to become well informed on just how to run a Traded Services Co-op, and to line-up 25 households who would like to take part. They begin with a survey of just what each household needs and what each can contribute in return. They print this up, find a good match-maker, get everyone to agree to some key ground rules, find some tokens which are not easily counterfeited, and kick-off the exchanges.
- Project #11: Begin a flower co-op: Begin 4/30/15.
We need three workers who go to the homes of folks who have shown an interest in a flower co-op, and see exactly what they want and need, and

how much they are willing to pay. In May, they go to the Eastern Market Flower Day, purchase flowers in bulk, bring them back to the block and distribute and collect for them.

Project #12: Begin a large Community Garden on a nearby vacant lot. Begin 5/1/15.

We need 5 workers who can go home-to-home with folks who have shown an interest in a community garden. They need to line up permission to use a nearby vacant lot, hopefully right on the block, and lead efforts to test the soil for suitability and to clear and fence the land for a garden. A chicken-wire fence is usually needed to protect the garden from rabbits, raccoons, and other varmints. Most land also needs a lot of added hummus (such as grass clippings, sand and fertilizer) to build up the soil. And a large lot makes it economical to rent a tiller to loosen and prepare the soil for planting.

Project #13: Set-up a local 4-H Club: Begin 5/1/15:

The Michigan State University Agriculture Extension Service provides materials for organizing many different kinds of ways to engage young folks in urban gardening. We need at least two workers to check into this program and to adapt it to our block and our community garden project.

Project #14: Set-up some Car Pools. Begin 5/1/15.

We need 5 workers to set-up this effort. They begin with the feedback from the original round of interviews made by the founders of the club. They check with each person to see when and where they need to go to get to work, and then match-up folks who work close to one another, and have similar working hours.

Project #15: Repeat the Street Long Garage Sale.

Project #16: Expand the number of Healthy Meals Circles.

Project #17: Repeat the Block Party.

Project #18: Repeat the Halloween Party.

Project #19: Check into interest in buying some shared-ownership vehicles.

This should only be done between folks who have developed a good deal of trust in one another.