

How to Network Your Neighborhood



**Accomplish Neighborhood Goals
More Effectively**



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

Dear Neighborhood Organizer:

The "How to Network Your Neighborhood" guide came into being because of the growing number of inquiries which my office has received regarding how to organize a community project or bring a neighborhood together -- especially since 9/11. There has been a re-awakening to the importance of old fashioned "community" and that sometimes more can be accomplished with the help of others and block by block.

This guide may help answer some of the questions you might have as you try to organize. Its purpose is to provide a starting point for organizing and provides recommendations on sources that might be of assistance to you. Topics covered include how to identify goals, select the right team and sustain your project or initiative once you do pull it together. The differences and benefits of various types of organizations and projects are also discussed.

I wish you good fortune in your pursuit to enhance your neighborhood. Neighborhoods are what make the Big Apple an attractive and exciting place for people to live, shop and do business. Most importantly, know that your interest is appreciated and that you can make a difference.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Virginia Fields". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "V".

C. Virginia Fields
Manhattan Borough President

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How to Network Your Neighborhood

Preface

If neighborhoods are the fabric of our city, then local organization networks are the threads that hold it all together. The attack on 9/11 directly impacted many downtown neighborhoods including the Financial District, Tribeca, Greenwich Village, Lower East Side, Little Italy and Chinatown. But why is it that some areas seemed to bounce back quicker than others? Why is it that government aid and critical assistance made its way to the residents and businesses in some districts faster and more effectively? Aside from the example of 9/11, why are some areas able to garner more assistance than others and advocate for their needs more effectively? Why do people want to visit or live in some areas rather than others?

The answer is that more likely than not, there has been some form of a local network in place to advance communication, coordination, planning and action. Whether areas have developed a network for informal or formal, temporary or permanent, single purpose or multi-purpose goals is not relevant. The end result is that they are “connected.” Hopefully this guide will help those who wish to connect the dots in order to create an effective neighborhood network.

Neighborhood Organizing

What is a Neighborhood Network?

A Neighborhood Network is a group of neighbors -- residents or businesses -- who organize, formally or informally, to help improve the quality of life in their neighborhood. The type of network may be permanent or temporary, covering a large or small area, vertical (city blocks) or horizontal (apartment complex).

Whatever its form, a neighborhood network is a means to make a positive impact in your community.

Why Organize?

Networks give residents or businesses a framework in which to work together to build relationships with neighbors, better advocate for public services, strengthen communication within the neighborhood, and accomplish neighborhood goals more effectively.

Reasons to organize are plentiful and include promoting campaigns to address noise, parking, neighborhood appearance and safety. For instance, the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce in Chicago formed as a result of the urgent need to create a parking facility for customers. This project helped to galvanize the need for cooperative efforts between all stakeholders in the Chicago Chinatown community. Areas that are already strong and

vital may still benefit from some form of network organizing in order to maintain these very qualities.

Where to Begin?

Just as skilled carpenters believe in measuring twice and cutting once to assure accuracy, organizers should think twice before committing to organize. What do I want to accomplish by organizing my area? Is there a reason to organize? Do organizations already exist to accomplish my goals, or do I have to begin from scratch? What are my motivations for organizing? Who should be part of my new area organization? Where does my area start, and where does it end?

Though the answers to these questions may change during the organizing process, you should have a good idea as to the basic answers to these questions before asking others to join in or before promoting your concept. Others may get turned off, and your idea will fail right from the beginning if it is perceived as a waste of time, duplicative of existing organizations, or simply ill conceived.

Getting Organized

First find out if another organization already exists which provides the same function or has the same mission as the one you are thinking of creating. In any case, existing organizations should not be ignored and should be contacted initially to determine if there is some commonality to the work you wish to accomplish. These existing groups can offer the opportunity for a range of partnerships with existing leadership and resources.

It may be possible that the solutions you seek are best accomplished by joining an existing organization, community board or neighborhood council, rather than acting as an *organizer* of a new entity.

Creating an organization to only promote your individual needs, or to create an organization with the same goals and boundaries, as another group, will split the effectiveness of the entire community. If there are too many voices speaking from the community, it may blur and confuse the message when trying to influence decision-makers in government.

Sometimes the basis for a new entity may be that existing organizations have “single focuses” and may only come together for a defined purpose and at only a specific time of the year. If there are no existing neighborhood organizations, or if you choose to form a group more tailored to your neighborhood's needs, begin by identifying two or three community members who are willing to help you as part of an “organizing committee” and assign one person to be the point person or temporary president.

Most importantly, consult locally elected officials and community boards as well as the many public and private resources available to help you develop your concept.

How Will You Define Your “Neighborhood”?

One of the primary decisions that must be made is a definition of the area you seek to organize. There are many factors to consider when discussing boundaries including uses, industry, ethnicity, history of an area as well as its physical boundaries -- railroad tracks, overpasses, major thoroughfares -- which could make it impractical to include certain areas.

Because of the multicultural nature of most of our city's neighborhoods, organizers should be cognizant of language and cultural differences, as well as standards and expectations for interpersonal relationships. Providing information in different languages is only a part of what is necessary to create an inclusive group. Enlist volunteers from other cultures in your initial working group to fully understand area needs and to gain other perspectives. This will be especially beneficial both when seeking support and in getting the message out to the community.

The best advice is to start small and establish boundaries that are workable. As has been learned from the great empires in history, it is never wise to try and control beyond what you may reasonably manage. If you cannot count everyone in your district or see your area's boundary in either direction, chances are that the boundaries are too large. The larger a district or area, the greater the number of issues, players, and interests with which you must be concerned. Expansion can always be undertaken at a later time. People are far more open to inclusion and expansion of boundaries and goals once they see that a track record of success has been established.

What Are Your Goals?

What will this new group of people accomplish? What are the primary concerns in your neighborhood? Are there issues that residents in your neighborhood will be willing to rally behind? The vision statement should state your primary objective in forming the organization, and should be brief and broad -- "To make Black Acre shopping district more prosperous," for example. Your mission is an action statement

that clearly communicates your objective -- “to increase the number of shoppers and clients in the district and to increase the amount of sales.” Strategies that you develop to achieve your goals are the “stepping stones” to accomplishing your mission -- “sales and discount days, shopping guides, advertising campaigns that promote the district.”

Getting People Involved & Keeping Members

Who will you approach to be a part of the new organization? Actively soliciting help for activities will bring out committed volunteers. Be sure to provide a fair and accurate estimate of the time needed to complete the task. Be aware of new faces and welcome them enthusiastically. Strive for inclusion; new members who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return. Plan and organize meetings. Though initially there is a need for more meetings, reduce the number of meetings in the long term in order to avoid *burnout* or overtaxing the time constraints of volunteers (i.e. monthly to quarterly). Have a written agenda before each meeting and stick to it.

Volunteer Burnout

Causes for this condition include the possibility that the organization is lacking in clear goals and direction, or that there is too much work to be done and too few people involved. Avoid setting unrealistic objectives. Have well defined tasks so people know what they are getting themselves into, and recognize different abilities and tolerance levels in handing out work assignments. Don't let

one person take on everything, and continually seek to get new members involved. Be sure to thank people publicly at meetings or develop an awards system to ensure their continued participation.

Organizing Essentials

Generally speaking, the person or people who set out to organize any group are usually perceived as the *leaders* of the established organization. This is permissible in the early stages of the organization, but over time there must be an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of all the members of the group, and the establishment of a structure for long-term stability. Network organizers must be mindful of their personal motivations for organizing. Do not create an entity solely to provide yourself with a platform for furthering your own personal goals. Consider receiving counseling from informal advisors -- some of whom should have no direct stake in the community -- to help you thrash out your idea and provide objectivity regarding any conflicts that may arise.

When an organization revolves primarily around the personality of the founder or leader rather than the organization's mission, it has fallen victim to *Founder's Syndrome*. After using their individual talents to start up an organization, it is often difficult for heads of these organizations to let go. The organization is driven by its dependence on the founder, and his/her decisions -- good or bad -- dictate the course of the organization.

For the long-term survival of any organization it is essential to transform to a fully functional organization. Establish committees to handle individual programs. Foster a responsible board. Build in ways for the general community to

provide feedback to organizers, and establish other measures that will help to avoid falling victim to founder's syndrome.

Choosing the right officers is as critical as the selection of the head of an organization. Officers are ambassadors who will help sell or legitimize the organization's concept to others. Likewise, if your goals were aimed primarily at economic development, it would be wise to include business people as core organizers. If you are primarily a social service provider, you should include representatives from religious and charitable entities with expertise in this area.

As the organization grows, so will the need for *committees*. By delegating authority, responsibilities and even the most basic of tasks, you get more people involved, give individuals a sense of ownership in the organization, and get more accomplished in less time. Do not be afraid to eliminate committees which are not working properly, or which have completed their projects. These committee members may then apply their talents to other areas.

Methods of Communication

Think beyond e-mail, especially when trying to grow your network. Though the Internet, conference calling, and other technological means of communication have become incredible benefits to living in current times, it would be wise to continue to use other, more traditional methods as well. Even the best systems can malfunction, or be unavailable in an emergency (as discussed later under Emergency Response Teams).

In addition, sometimes the best way to connect is in person. Handing out flyers, posting announcements and other traditional methods of communication can promote team

building and interaction. Utilizing your local community papers, newsletters, and mailings will also enable you to reach many people who are not on-line.

Maintain Membership Records

Keep a file that lists members' names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, family members' names, occupation, special talents, concerns and areas of interest. This is equally as important as maintaining meeting minutes, a mission statement and other organizing documents. These records will be important over time and as members come and go.

Ways to Organize Your Area

Short Term or Interim Strategies

When people come together for a limited time for a narrow purpose, the need to organize is temporary. There are many ways that people can organize including some of the following:

Block Parties

A popular way for people to meet their neighbors, create neighborhood spirit and bring unity to an area. Activities are usually of a wide variety to involve children, young people and adults. Usually the establishment of an informal committee for each activity is sufficient. Funds are usually raised through contributions from neighbors and sometimes through area businesses.

Street Fairs

There is great variety in the size and magnitude of fairs. Though many fairs are small, informal, one-time functions, there are many in the city that have become permanent institutions.

More often than not, larger fairs are highly structured and require a full year of planning and involve fees for vendors, corporate sponsorships and publicity. It is also typical that there is an organization behind the fair that uses it as a major part of its fundraising.

Similar to street fairs in their temporary or long-term function are parades (an organized public procession on a festive or ceremonial occasion), shows (an event for entertainment or commercial purpose), and festivals (regularly recurring programs of cultural performances, exhibitions, or competitions).

Emergency Response Teams (ERTs)

This form of organization is more common in areas that are subject to natural disasters (i.e. flooding, landslides, and earthquakes), but there are many benefits in forming neighborhood response teams in other areas. Power outages, area-wide fires or other environmental disasters are unplanned events that may cause turmoil in an area. Even water main breaks can be devastating to neighborhoods. Organizing a complex and time-consuming structure to prepare for something that may never happen, is less effective than organizing a process by which to deal with these situations.

Throughout the country, there has been a resurgence of drills especially since 9/11. As we learned if a disaster were to strike, the emergency response systems may become

overwhelmed and emergency services may be unavailable for long periods of time. During those periods the community is dependent on its own ability to survive. Organizing processes by which to respond to emergencies can be very useful when the need arises.

ERTs usually divide their communities into smaller geographical groups consisting of adjacent or next-door families or businesses. One person is selected as Group Captain and others as Assistants. There is usually an emergency "staging area" where families or businesses should assemble during a time of disaster to organize rescue and first aid efforts. Create a map of each district, which includes resident information such as family or business name and telephone numbers (direct line and referral for emergencies). Special care should be given to populations such as fragile elderly people, children, or the disabled.

Existing resources within each area should also be identified since they may become useful in times of emergencies, for instance: medical, emergency service or law enforcement personnel, and equipment suppliers (i.e. heaters, water, shovels). ERTs should coordinate with government authorities and non-public emergency providers, most notably the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, to avoid overlap. The Federal Emergency Management Agency offers Community Emergency Response Team training for area organizers. This training is usually provided by appropriate local providers, police, fire or other designated trainers, and covers areas such as emergency preparedness, light search and rescue, suppression of small fires, disaster medical operations (triage and treatment), organization and layout and disaster psychology.

Task Force

Usually a temporary group of individuals and resources established for the accomplishment of a specific objective. By definition, once a specific task is accomplished, the group usually disbands. More often than not, the task force discovers additional tasks and pursues them once the initial task is completed; however, the central goals of the organization should not change. For instance, a task force to remove graffiti in a district should not logically evolve into a task force to evaluate the causes of juvenile delinquency in our society. Task force members may shy away from a longer-term commitment to a broader goal.

Longer Term Strategies

After the short term or interim neighborhood activity has grown to be successful and larger or more frequent, it may be necessary to investigate a more structured way to continue.

Associations

Associations are the most common form of organization and encompass everything from merchants and block associations to councils, "partnerships" and "alliances." There are two general varieties of associations -- incorporated and unincorporated. Generally, unincorporated associations are informal organizations where people come together as needed. They may come together or disband without any formal approval or formal dissolution. An "incorporated" association as a duly incorporated entity under the laws of the state, has a formal structure which includes officers, bylaws, a

defined mission, regulatory filing requirements and oversight by the state's corporations division.

However broad the category, be aware that there are special types of associations governed by their own regulations and unique purpose. For instance, the term "community association" has a specific meaning and is used to describe residential developments in which each owner is bound to a real estate organization by a set of governing documents that require adherence to a set of rules, as well as the payment of assessments. The money collected in assessments is used for the operation of the association. Membership is automatic when a unit is purchased.

District Management Association

The statutory term (in New York) for the managing entity of a Business Improvement District (BID). The board has four required classes: property owners, commercial tenants, residential and elected officials, and at least one required non-voting class composed of community board representatives and others with an interest in the community.

The process to establish a BID is lengthy and vigorous and includes community board, borough president, city council, mayoral, city planning, and state comptroller review of a proposed "District Plan" which outlines the boundaries, properties, services and method of assessment (to be levied upon each property within the district).

Substantial community support must be shown during the planning and approval of the district. Support must also be reaffirmed after establishment of the district to renew the city/district contract that allows the Association to receive city dollars.

Local Development Corporations (LDCs)

LDCs possess special authority, including the ability to acquire public land for rehabilitation, construction and development, and the ability to issue negotiable bonds and notes. Their legislatively defined purpose is to relieve and reduce employment problems, and to encourage the development or retention of industry in the area.

Chambers of Commerce

The central purpose of the chambers is to foster trade and commerce. It may promote the welfare and prosperity of its members, and may stimulate public sentiment to these ends. Chambers of commerce may make loans to members, officers or other corporations providing they are in accordance with their general purpose.

Always remember that these general organizational types are not set in stone, and that many change focus and status over time as they continue to redefine themselves or grow. For example, many development corporations have sponsored business improvement districts.

Sustaining and Growing Your Area

Financing the Concept

No matter what type of neighborhood organization you decide upon, there will come a time when decisions will have to be made on how to sustain the organization financially. Even though there is always at least one

community-minded benefactor who will provide initial seed money to ignite interest in community issues, it is usually awarded as a grant for a limited period of time. The following is a summary of the most commonly used methods of raising funds:

Membership Dues

A voluntary contribution. Some organizations have basic membership dues, which are a flat rate, or they leave it to the discretion of parties to donate as they see fit. Most "Partnership" organizations offer a more structured dues schedule for individuals and businesses (i.e. street level and upper level) with different dues amounts determined by need and commitment.

Different levels of dues usually earn different benefits. One of the most successful organizations using this model is the SOHO Partnership. Through in-kind contributions, membership dues, an on-line shopping store and special fundraisers, the Partnership has been able to provide vocational services for the homeless, launch unique marketing campaigns and a highly effective street maintenance program.

Great care should be taken when soliciting dues. It is always advantageous to have someone familiar with the area requesting donations. It is probably easier to get a commitment from a long-term resident or business owner, than from a perfect stranger. People will tend to give if they know that the person who is asking also has an equal stake in the community. It's wise to show that you believe in the mission and its purposes before asking others to do the same.

Fundraising Drives

Whether selling cookies, tee shirts, decals, mugs or other goods, fundraising drives which offer some small but tangible reward for contributors are an attractive way to promote an organization and raise revenue. In some districts, trash receptacles and street furniture are purchased with the promise that the donor's name will adorn the item. Hosting an annual fundraising event (i.e. street fairs, parades, and festivals) is also a popular vehicle for revenue generation.

Corporate Sponsorship/Grants

With a little bit of research, one may identify companies or foundations that can provide funding assistance through grants. Though some may choose to retain a grant writer to bring in additional money, you should consider exploring funding options yourself. Resources such as the Foundation Center may play an invaluable role in identifying appropriate sources of money, and many offer on-line access for a limited cost.

It is best to research each foundation's requirements before randomly canvassing everyone. You will save time and avoid rejection if you research your prospective funders carefully before soliciting funds. It is very important to adhere to the foundation's stated themes or central terms for corporate giving. You may be applying for money that the program cannot provide because your project or mission is not compatible with the foundation's purpose and policies.

Foundation web sites are fairly easy to navigate and provide: guidelines, application deadlines, required information (i.e. contacts, dates of determination, etc.) -- typically stated in one page or less.

Public Sources

Two primary sources for helping to finance your organization are mandated by acts of the U.S. Congress. In 1977, Congress enacted the **Community Reinvestment Act (CRA)** to encourage federally insured banks and thrifts to meet the credit needs of their entire community, including low- and moderate-income residents. Banks are periodically evaluated and rated as to their effectiveness in meeting CRA guidelines. The Banking Department publishes information on the process in order to solicit public review and comment. One of the ways banks can meet the credit needs of the community is through “qualified investments” (including grants primarily for community development) that benefit the community directly. CRA has been used nationwide to assist in the establishment and support of business and community organizations, micro-loan programs, community centers, and other initiatives.

In 1974, Congress enacted the Housing and Community Development Act to aid in the development of viable communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and greater economic opportunity for persons of low- and moderate-income. **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** funding is an essential tool for development, and is a primary avenue of funding support for Neighborhood Revitalization programs.

Annually, each state develops funding priorities and criteria for selecting projects. When developing their programs, states must formulate community development objectives and decide on how to distribute funds among entitlement and non-entitlement areas. These objectives must

benefit low- and moderate-income persons, prevent blight or eliminate slums, or assist with community development needs that have a particular urgency because existing conditions pose a serious and immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community.

CDBG has funded a range of activities, including but not limited to: acquisition of properties for public purposes, neighborhood centers, rehabilitation of public and private buildings, planning activities, as well as assistance to nonprofit entities for both community and economic development activities.

Dedicated Revenue Sources

Some communities have projects or programs that are fueled by individual or corporate *endowments*, *conservancies* or *trusts* that provide continuing support or maintenance. In New York City, most of these entities are involved with the preservation of parks. Usually a not-for-profit organization contracts to manage the fund and assure that the programs are carried out, and, if the level of fundraising is assured by the managing entity, the city will provide some measure of matching dollars.

Special Assessments

Another dedicated form of revenue that is derived through the levy of a mandatory assessment upon property owners within areas established as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Since the assessment is billed and collected by the city in the same manner as real estate-based taxes, it is a highly reliable source of income. Dedicated revenue sources provide for long-term projects and capital improvements,

especially since they can assure payback where debt financing is contemplated. Under BID legislation, all properties that benefit from services must contribute in proportion to their benefit. Assessment amounts for each individual property owner vary greatly depending upon the formula selected by the community during the BID's creation, the number of properties sharing the cost of programs, and the mix of uses of properties in the district. Property owners may choose to absorb the charge themselves or to pass the expense on to their lessees. Any BID, as other entities previously described, must evaluate its program and budget needs annually and may decrease, maintain or increase its budget.

Under any of the scenarios it would be most desirable for an organization to have Internal Revenue Service 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status since it will permit contributions to be tax deductible. If an organization does not have such status, it should consider partnering with an organization that does to make the group more attractive to potential donors. Remember that most donors have limited resources and that each dollar counts. A dollar a day per business can generate a lot of revenue over time, and sustain much-needed programs on an ongoing basis.

Additional Tools

Know your area and understand who may help

Solutions may already exist for some or all of your issues. In addition to understanding the roles of your elected city and government representatives -- from the Mayor to

your councilperson – there are other resources that may be of equal importance to you if you are organizing at the neighborhood level. Some of these resources are described below.

For a fuller review of city services and contact information you may consult the city's new "311" Citizen Service Center hotline or go on-line to the city's general web site at www.NYC.gov. Out-of-city non-emergency calls to the Center may be accessed by calling (212) NEW-YORK. The 311 hotline handles all non-emergency inquiries (911 is still for emergency calls), twenty-hours a day, seven days a week in multiple languages. Everything from reporting noise violations to how to apply for city employment may be handled through this service.

Your **Community Boards** are generally the most locally accessible public representatives. They are comprised of businesspeople and residents in the area who can best identify with your views and advocate for your interests. The Community Boards have an important advisory role in matters dealing with land use and zoning matters, the city budget, city facilities placements, municipal service delivery and many other matters relating to their communities' welfare. As such, they are invaluable players with whom you can coordinate any organizing efforts.

Members are not paid for their service and are selected through an application to the Community Affairs Unit of their respective Borough President (county executive). Members are selected after consultation with local council members. The Borough President chairs a meeting of all-council members and community board chairs in their

borough to discuss common issues and to exchange ideas.

The Mayor's **Community Assistance Unit (CAU)**, Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) issues street closure permits for street festivals, fairs and neighborhood block parties conducted on city streets in every borough. The issuance of a permit is subject to local community board review. An application may be obtained and filed at either the local community board office or with the SAPO. The CAU serves as the Mayor's connection to local communities and offers technical assistance and useful programs such as the Mayor's Paint Program, which allows community and volunteer groups to plan and execute their own cleanup projects with supplies and paint provided by the Mayor's Office.

The **NYC Department of Parks & Recreation** provides access to programs such as Adopt-a-Tree, which is administered in conjunction with The New York Tree Trust and Greenstreets, converts barren concrete triangles and traffic islands into beautiful and vibrant spaces by planting trees, shrubs and flowers. This department works with community groups, schools and other interested organizations.

The **NYC Department of Small Business Services (DSBS)** is the main city agency assigned to the task of helping those who seek to organize a mixed use or commercial district. DSBS provides a wide variety of services to organizations and individual businesses including technical assistance, procurement opportunities, and minority and women business enterprises. The Business Improvement District (BID) program and the Business Emergency Response Unit are also

administered by DSBS. The Commercial Revitalization Program of the agency administers grants from the city for such purposes, as well as federal Community Block Development Grant program dollars.

If your neighborhood is adjacent to, or located in, an industrial area you might also consult the **NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)**, a quasi-public agency of the city. EDC oversees industrial areas in the city and waterfront areas and financing. Financing vehicles include low interest and mini loans and venture funds and Industrial Development Agency (IDA) bonds. IDA bonds offer tax exempt bonds to eligible capital projects and are available to commercial, industrial and not for profit organizations. EDC work complements that of DSBS and includes specific industry assistance (i.e. high-tech, finance, real estate, and manufacturers), business relocation and retention programs and energy costs savings programs.

A new tool to understanding your neighborhood is **“My Neighborhood Statistics”** which is available on-line at the city’s web site, www.NYC.gov. This site informs New York City residents about city agencies and their performance by exhibiting locally mapped performance statistics. This site maps selected performance statistics by neighborhood, using a street address or intersection. The information is compiled through the **Mayor’s Office of Operations** and includes maps of your community, police and school districts, cleanliness, crime and environmental (i.e. noise, air, and asbestos) ratings.

The **NYC Department of Sanitation** provides several programs that may be able to assist you in your mission to beautify your neighborhood. Programs include services to remove abandoned cars, combat illegal dumping (i.e. Illegal Dumping Reward and Tip programs) and force compliance for maintained lots.

The **NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)** fields inquiries on a range of topics from running hydrants, industrial waste, backed-up sewage, pipe leaks, smoking chimneys, loud noise from bars, broken or leaky water meters, and much more.

The **NYC Police Department**. As the guardians of your safety and protection, consultation with your local law enforcement officials is a must. You should start with your local precinct by establishing a relationship with your community patrol officer. Specific programs to investigate include block watchers/drug busters (citizens trained by Community Affairs Officers to accurately and safely report suspected criminal activity), Precinct Civilian and Auxiliary Patrols (trained by Community Affairs Unit), Security Surveyors (done at your home, apartment or place of business), and Operation Hi-Rise (increased safety and security of your apartment building or complex).

The **US Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** agency was established in 1965 with a mission that includes promoting economic growth and assisting communities in meeting their needs. Community Block Development Grants (previously

described) and other helpful programs for locally based organizations are available through HUD.

Final Neighborhood Strengthening Concepts

Dream Bigger or Better

Grapple with questions like; “when our neighborhood grows up what does it want to become?” What would make your area’s quality of life more appealing? What uses would make your neighborhood more attractive and make you want to stay? An inventory of desired uses or a neighborhood wish list could be highly beneficial. The neighborhood may lobby for an additional facility if a public use is sought (i.e. expanded school or playground). Or, unite to contact a business enterprise that you believe will help meet the communities needs (i.e. contact major supermarket chains, bookstores, health chains).

“Brand” Your Neighborhood

Consumers and people in general are more drawn to the cereal with the recognizable name or brand rather than brand X. Creating an “identity” for your neighborhood helps greatly in marketing your area to prospective new residents, businesses or shoppers. The process of “branding a community” is often achieved through unified capital improvement designs or programs that highlight that special neighborhood character. For example, the marketing of DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) in Brooklyn has spurred in the influx of families, artists and others seeking to avail themselves of a waterfront views and

renovated warehouses. Sometimes there is already a historic theme -- jewelry, garment or flower district -- that simply needs to be promoted better.

There are also intangible benefits that flow from branding. After 9/11, some areas received greater attention because government and other donors were already aware that a *neighborhood* existed, and that there was a network to help communicate aid availability. The area above Chambers and below Canal Streets initially was not as much an area of focus for business assistance because it is bounded by higher visibility neighborhoods such as Tribeca, Chinatown and the Financial District. An established "ChamCan" network might have been advantageous.

Employ Pilot Programs

Pilot Programs of any kind on an experimental new service may be a great way to spark the interest of fellow neighbors. Usually a person or entity provides seed money for a limited term to show people what can be done if all band together to make something happen. You should consult others in the community and identify what program -- sample newsletter, clean team, fair -- will serve as the best unifying event and resonate best with the neighborhood. If a service serves only a limited population, it will probably fail. Additionally, sometimes a pilot may cause heightened expectations that cannot be fulfilled after the project's term has expired. Sometimes pilot programs fail because when the time comes for all to contribute to their continuation, "price tag shock" occurs. It is far more comfortable to enjoy a benefit than to pay for it.

Putting All of the Pieces Together

At the end of the day, if you feel bogged down with information on how to organize, just remember to establish a simple mantra on why you started the process in the first place. When in doubt, move slower to give yourself time to absorb the information obtained. Consult with organizations that manage residential or commercial areas similar to your own. Most times they are honored and willing to come speak to your working group, about their own experiences on getting started, pitfalls to avoid and helpful resources.

Following existing best practices can be useful, but in the end, these are just models or ideas for what might work in your community. Remember what you desire is what you design, and how well you plan and coordinate your resources will increase your chance of success.

Acknowledgments

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