

10 STEPS TO ELECTING A RESIDENT ASSOCIATION BOARD

1. **Confirm status of the association**

Idaho law does not appear to have a process by which legal recognition of a resident association is required in order for an association to exist and maintain the rights of a resident association.

2. **Define the Mission of the Resident Association**

The association should have a brief mission statement defining its purpose and values, so that it is clear to potential candidates what the association is about.

3. **Decide the Structure of the Board**

Size: The board should have an odd number of people. Generally 5 or 7 people is a good size. If the board is too small, your officers may get burned out from all the work. If the board is too big, meetings may become unmanageable and harder to coordinate.

Officers: Boards typically have a president, vice-president, secretary and a treasurer (if the association wants to do fundraising). The other members are "at large" but have the same voting privileges as officers.

4. **Identify potential conflict of interests**

It is critical that in a resident association, the issues affecting residents be the main concern of its officers. There are numerous ways in which a conflict of interest may arise, and the membership will have to decide whether or not someone can be on the board. For example:

- park managers, owners, landlords, maintenance or people otherwise employed by the park
- immediate relatives of the park owner or management
- people who own a home or homes in the park, but do not live in the park
- anyone else who doesn't live in the park
- anyone who benefits financially from the operations of the park or from closing the park due to a unique relationship with the park or developers

5. **Determine who can be on the board**

As a general rule, conflicts of interest are best avoided, but the membership should clarify before nominations who can and cannot be on the association board. Only members of the association can be members of the board.

6. Nominations

Only resident association members can nominate for the board. Members can also nominate themselves. Once a candidate has been nominated they should either decline or accept the nomination based on their interest.

7. Candidate speeches

Candidates should give a brief speech (2 minutes) on why they want to be on the association board, what they hope to accomplish, and why they are the best person for the position.

8. Voting

Elections should begin for the highest office (president) and proceed down so that people can run for multiple positions if not elected. They should be done through secret ballot and only one person per household is allowed to vote. To win the election a candidate must receive 51% of the vote, if no one receives 51% the first round of voting, the top two candidates will hold a run-off election.

Idaho law states, "The tenants in a mobile home park have the right to organize a tenant or homeowner's association to further their mutual interest and to conduct any other business and programs which the association shall determine. An association shall have the right to use the facilities of the park to conduct its business and programs. When an association is organized it shall notify the landlord." (Idaho Statutes: Title 55 Property in General; Chapter 20: Mobile Home Park Tenant-Landlord Act: 55-2013A. TENANT ASSOCIATIONS)

9. Vote counting

Votes should be counted by an objective party. Candidates for a particular position should not be involved in counting ballots for that position. Votes should be tallied and the results posted for all to see.

10. Acceptance Speech/ Pledge

Each newly elected board member should give a 1 minute acceptance speech and promise to uphold the mission of the resident association.

The difference between a Problem and an Issue

Every year APAC receives hundreds of hotline calls from park residents who have various problems. Door knock your community and you will likely find that there a lot of problems. Some of these problems have clear concrete solutions and other do not. Some problems are shared by many people in the community and others only pertain to one or two individuals. Your success in pushing forward positive changes in your park will rely on your ability to turn problems in issues.

Criteria for Picking Issues

A resident association as an organization often has limited resources. They are not capable of dealing with every problem that is of concern to someone in the neighborhood. A resident association should instead focus on issues and have specific criteria in determining how those issues prioritized.

The issue must be winnable

The issue must have clearly defined goals that can be achieved in a limited period of time. If the association goes after issues that are not winnable, then it will be wasting people's time and leave them feeling powerless and frustrated.

The issue must be consistent with the values of the association

Any issue the association addresses should be consistent with its mission and its values (justice, equality, etc).

The issue must be identified as a top concern of the members of the resident association.

The membership of the association should identify what issues they want to work on. If an issue is of little concern to people in the neighborhood, then even if the association wins the issue, it will do little to improve the neighborhood; people will simply not care.

The issue must attract active support sufficient to win the issue

Most of the time put into resident association is contributed by volunteers. The association board has little effect on the overall condition of the park. It is only with the active involvement of a significant number of park residents that the association can have a big impact.

The issue must help to unify the neighborhood

The resident association must work on those issues that will bring the diverse constituencies of the neighborhood together, not tear them apart. This will help create a true sense of community.

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One – on – Ones

A one on one is a face to face conversation between you and another person to determine their self interest. The conversation should motivate the person to talk about important aspects of their lives. If you know where someone's passions lie, you will better be able to understand their motivations.

In a one on one we want to get to know the other person: their history, their family, their ambitions, what inspires them and what makes them angry. It is important that a one-on-one be intentional. It is a strategy to recruit and develop new leaders and allies.

In conducting a grass roots organizing campaign, regular sit downs or "one on ones" with your leaders is an effective tool to move the campaign forward and keep people involved. The meeting should last no longer than an hour, and the other person should do most of the talking.

What to do in a one-on-one

- Recruit new leaders and allies
- Determine self interest
- Build trust
- Form a relationship
- Educate
- Create clarity
- Get information
- Proposition, Get commitments
- Agitate, Push leaders to the next level
- Strategize and Discuss Next Steps
- Hold people accountable and be accountable

Tactics

- Ask open ended questions
- Ask follow up questions
- Listen!
- Watch the time, stay on task

Who do we have one on ones with?

- Park leaders
- Members
- Community leaders
- Potential allies
- Elected officials
- Leaders of faith communities

Evaluating One-on-Ones

In order to get the most out of a one-on-one, evaluation and reflection is also necessary. A good starting point is to identify a skill, a feeling and an experience that this person has.

Public speaking, note taking, fundraising, and petitioning, are just a few examples of **skills** that people may have that can aid the work that you are doing. By identifying these skills it creates a potential means for them to become involved. People are more likely to participate if it creates an opportunity to do something they are already good at.

Anger, fear, burn-out, hope, excitement and apathy are all examples of **feelings**. We need to understand how people are feeling to successfully motivate them. Your proposition or "pitch" to get someone involved will differ if they are feeling apathetic vs. angry/ hopeful etc.

People's feelings are usually based on their **experience**. By experience we don't mean qualifications, but rather one's personal history. Has this person been involved in something like this before? How have they been treated in the past? How are they being treated now? How do they feel they are perceived by others? How do they perceive themselves in relation to others (park owners, public officials, developers, etc)?

Questions for Reflection

What does this person care most about? Why?
What motivates them?
What do they get excited talking about?
What talents and skills does this person have?
What relationships does this person have and value? Why?
What values does this person have?
What issues is this person concerned about?
What ideas do they have?
What is their story?

Questions for Self-Reflection

Did I establish a relationship?
Did I uncover their self-interest?
How courageous was I? What risks did I take?
Did I step out of my comfort zone?
What did I do well?
What should I have done better?

Running An Effective Meeting

Over the course of your work you will inevitably be involved in a number of meetings. These include resident association membership meetings, public meetings (city council, legislative committees, etc) and coalition meetings. Meetings are the lifeblood of an organizing campaign. It is at meetings that major decisions are made, crucial information revealed and should serve as main tactic for communicating directly with your base. Holding regular meetings is key to building momentum. Therefore knowing how to run an effective meeting with your base and your allies is necessary to be successful.

The problem with meetings

Think about all the meeting that you have attended in your life: school meetings, family meetings, work related meetings, church meetings, community involvement meetings, and more. That's a lot of meetings! Most people in your park have probably been to a similar number of meetings.

Think of some of the worst meetings you've been to in your life. What made them so bad? Were they unorganized? Boring? Did they seem to go on and on without anything specific accomplished? Maybe there were insurmountable differences between people at the meeting. Maybe there were people who monopolized the meeting and did all the talking. Maybe people got side tracked and talked endlessly about issues that weren't related to the meeting.

This isn't to depress you. These are some ideas of things to avoid when you are organizing meetings for your community. If your meetings are boring, unorganized, and a place where only a few people do all the talking, then people aren't going to come to your meetings.

Steps to pulling off an effective meeting

STEP 1: Personal reflection

You never want to have a meeting just for the sake of having a meeting. Before calling a meeting, take some time to think about what you want to accomplish at a the meeting. What should the meeting look like? Who should be there? What needs to happen for the meeting to be successful?

STEP 2: The Pre-Meeting

Planning the meeting ahead of time will greatly increase it's likelihood of success. It's well worth the time to have a "pre-meeting" with the leaders who are necessary to pulling the meeting off. At the pre-meeting, brainstorm goals for the meeting and think about the actions necessary to achieve them. At the pre-meeting you should also decide:

- The date, time and location of the meeting
- The agenda
- The ground rules

- Who's invited to the meeting
- Roles for the meeting:
 - Facilitator
 - Topic presenters
 - Timekeeper
 - Notetaker
 - Ground Rule Enforcer
 - Greeter/ Sign in Table person
 - Plants: people in the audience who are told to make a specific question or comment
- Who will play these roles?
- How the room will be set up (tables, chairs, etc)
- The Outreach strategy to get people to turnout

When discussing who should be invited, you should also consider the possibility of uninvited guests showing up at your meeting (ie, park owner, manager, political adversary, etc). Make sure you have in place for how to handle this. If an adversary shows up and you are not sure what to do, we recommend putting it to vote among the people in attendance. That way you are respecting the will of the majority to have the person stay or leave, and hopefully the person in question will respect that too.

STEP 3: The Meeting

Meetings are likely to be effective when they:

- Start and end on time
- Have a printed agenda
- Have ground rules
- Provide opportunities for everyone to participate
- Create tension
- Address a problem that people care about, and present a solution to the problem that requires everyone's participation

The **Agenda** is a tool to ensure the meeting stays focused, on schedule, and is run in an organized manner. It should include:

- The date and location of the meeting (for future record)
- Ground Rules
- The major points that will be discussed
- Time allotments for each agenda item

Ground Rules are a means of enforcing the will of the majority at a meeting. They are the basic code of conduct. Examples of ground rules are:

(1) Stay on Agenda. (2) One person at a time. (3) No interrupting. (4) Give everyone a chance to speak. (5) Respect each other (6) Turn off cell phones

After you've gone over the ground rules at the beginning of the meeting, ask everyone to approve the ground rules by a show of hands. That way if someone

gets out of line, it is easier to enforce the ground rules if everyone has agreed to them ahead of time.

Tension is an important element of a good meeting. Tension arises when people are confronted with an unjust situation and challenged to make commitments to do something about it. Unless you're organizing a meeting about a bake sale, there should be tension in the room. There is nothing warm and fuzzy about causing social change given the forces we are up against

It is only with continued involvement of your base that things will change. You want to give people hope, but not to put them at ease. If people leave your meeting feeling totally at ease, then the problem is resolved in their mind, and there will be no reason to stay involved. When the problem comes back again because nothing changed, they will blame you for giving them a false sense of security. Therefore, it is a mistake to try to avoid conflict in a meeting. Instead you should identify conflict that exists and use that conflict towards positive ends.

Look for ways to ensure that **everyone participates**. There are several ways of doing this.

- Introductions- have everyone say their name and how long they have lived in the park. Also try to think of one good question to have everyone answer. For example: What's one thing you like about living in the park? Why did you come to this meeting? What's one thing you would like to change about the park?
- Ask people how they feel. When discussing topics that bring new information to light to which the residents were previously unaware, it's important to get their reaction. Ask people in one word how they feel about what they just heard.
- Ask people "Why?" Once you know how people feel about a situation or problem, it's important to get their sense of why it is happening. This will get your audience heated up and ready to tackle solutions.
- Group Brainstorming is great way to generate ideas, foster participation, and identify new leaders. Brainstorm topics can include: What do you want to change in the park? How should the association respond? Write all of the ideas down on a wipe board, chalkboard or large sheet of paper that everyone can see.
- "Dotmocracy" is the perfect follow up to a brainstorm. Usually you will have a ton of ideas written down. Give people 3 to 5 small sticky dots (you can buy them at an office store, they're pretty cheap) and have them vote for their favorite ideas.

STEP 4: Evaluation

You must evaluate every meeting you do. In order for people to keep coming back you want to know how they felt about the meeting. Here are three different ways of evaluating a meeting. We recommend all of them:

- **BEFORE THE END OF THE MEETING** "In one word, how do you feel?" Even if after you did this at some point earlier in the meeting. A quick check in at the end of the meeting with everyone there will tell you a lot about how the meeting went. This will also help you plan the next steps.
- **AFTER THE MEETING ADJOURNS** pull together a group of people to do a more detailed evaluation right on the spot. This can include everyone at the Pre-meeting, people who spoke out during the meeting, and anyone else who wants to be a part of evaluating the meeting. Go around the circle and ask people one thing that they thought went well. Then ask them one thing that didn't go well or that could be better next time. Looking at both lists, brainstorm what the next steps are coming out of this meeting.
- **A COUPLE DAYS AFTER THE MEETING** schedule some one-on-ones with people who made an impression on you at the meeting that have leadership potential. In the one-on-one ask them how they felt about the meeting and identify ways that they can work on the next steps.

1. What Makes a Bad Meeting?

- lack of participation
- disorganized
- people going on tangents
- no actions
- facilitator not in control of the meeting
- intimidating atmosphere
- boring
- too long
- too structured
- meeting hijacked

2. What Are Some Roles at a Meeting?

- greeter
- facilitator/task master
- one-on-one team
- grounds rules enforcer
- "vibes" watch
- note taker
- plant
- topic presenter
- stack keeper

3. Ground Rules for a Meeting

- stick with agenda
- one person speaks at a time
- follow Robert's Rules
- give everyone a chance to speak
- get the ugliness out first
- respect each other & facilitator
- turn off cell phones
- stay on topic
- brainstorming = generating concepts, not evaluating ideas

4. Strategies to Deal with Uninvited Guests

- ask them to leave
- greeter can ask each persons affiliation upon arrival
- one-on-ones role people could talk to them
- facilitator or resident can identify them in front of everyone
- can pull person out of the room and ask to leave
- treat them with respect
- offer to put them on an agenda for a future meeting

Tips for Organizing Your Manufactured Home Community

Introduction

How to Begin: Meet Your Neighbors

Getting Down to Business: Prepare and Hold a Meeting

Building a Membership Base: Develop an Issue

Growing the Organization: Plan for the Future

Conclusion

Unlike most homeowners, manufactured home buyers face all the new responsibilities of home ownership, and yet also carry the additional burden of rent for a lot and community rules.

Apartment tenants can quickly find a new place to live if there are problems with the landlord, but a manufactured homeowner does not have the same mobility. Moving a manufactured house is a serious expense, and finding a new park can be difficult.

For some manufactured home owners, what seemed a dream house can become a nightmare of broken rules and broken promises. Management may not always address problems when they arise, even when problems threaten a family's health and safety.

While many manufactured homeowners object to their situation, far fewer have actively taken steps to fix their problems and improve their community. While park management may quietly ignore complaints brought by individuals, it will more likely listen when one individual speaks for 30 rent-paying families that are unhappy with a situation. A tenants' community association can give residents a stronger, voice in negotiation.

Even in communities that have not experienced problems, starting a homeowners' and tenants' association can help to avoid problems in the future. An organization that is recognized by management helps open the channels of communication and allows residents to work together for the benefit of the whole community.

Remember, **there is strength in numbers!** Consumers Union supports the expansion of effective tenant-based associations, and offers the following tips for those who want to form one.

How to Begin: Meet Your Neighbors

There is no one particular way to organize a community. Every community is made up of unique individuals with unique problems and concerns. In some communities there will be more immediate problems, which may make organizing easier. In other communities, residents may live in fear of retaliation from management. These residents could require additional time

to develop mutual trust.

- It is good, when starting out, to find out about any laws affecting manufactured homeowners and tenants. You should **know your rights** before you seek to organize your community. **Speak with your state representatives** to find out if there is an agency that regulates the manufactured home industry in your state. Ask them if they can provide any information to you.
- Your state may have a manufactured homeowners association (we have listed some at <http://www.consumersunion.org/other/mh/mhomelinks.htm#organizations>). If so, contact them to see if they can help you organize, or provide you with useful information. If there is no state organization, try contacting a national organization such as the Manufactured Home Owners Association of America.
- Get to know the people who live in your park. **Speak with your neighbors** when you meet them at the mailboxes. Invite them over to your house for coffee. Discuss problems or concerns you have experienced as a manufactured homeowner and ask them about any problems they've had.
- Often residents of a community will not be ready to start an organization. Sometimes a social event, or series of events, can help build the trust that is first necessary. **Arrange an event, such as a barbecue or fish fry**, to give neighbors an opportunity to meet and get to know each other. "National Night Out" is a great excuse to plan an event to meet your neighbors.
- Consider how to **advertise your event**. Can you create a flyer and distribute it house to house? Is there a central bulletin board? Maybe you would rather just speak with residents personally. One surefire way to get people to come is to advertise that you will provide refreshments.
- If you live in a multilingual community, and you speak only English, try to find someone in the local community who can translate your flyer and/or speak with non-English speaking residents.
- **Hold your event**. Maybe you will need to have a few social events before people loosen up and start talking. After your neighbors have become more comfortable with one another, you can take a moment during the event to speak about what you are trying to accomplish and why you believe it is needed in your community.

Getting Down to Business: Prepare and Hold a Meeting

Once you begin to know each other, you can arrange a meeting to formally discuss forming an organization. The key to a good meeting is preparation and more preparation. And maybe some fresh baked goods.

- **Invite local elected officials** to speak at the meeting. It is always good to have a guest speaker who interests you and your neighbors.
- **Create an agenda** for the meeting. It does not have to be too detailed, but should include everything you want to discuss. If possible, try to make the agenda available a

few days before the meeting to allow for comments and/or additions. It is important to have a ready agenda because it shows that you are serious about your cause and that you do not plan to waste anyone's time at your meeting.

- **Provide useful information.** Contact the state agency that oversees manufactured housing and request any publications they might have. Offer any information you have about state laws and the rights of manufactured homeowners and tenants. Consult the Consumers Union web site for related brochures and reports to distribute at the meeting.
- The night before your meeting, be sure to **remind everyone who said they would attend** by phoning or visiting them.
- **Prepare for the meeting.** Set up the meeting place for the number of people you expect to attend. Have a flip chart or erasable board and markers available. Be sure to have a sign up sheet and make sure that everyone who attends the meeting signs in. Have the agenda available, either as a handout or written where everyone can see it.
- Ask everyone who attends to **sign in** and give you contact information. Some people prefer to be reached by phone, others by email, and some by mail.
- **Keep your expectations reasonable.** Not every meeting will be well-attended. As long as there are three who are consistently interested in meeting and approaching your community's problems, you are in good shape.
- **Start on time.** You want your meeting participants to feel they are there for a reason. Late starts frustrate everyone who has made room in his or her schedule to attend.
- Make sure you have someone to **take meeting minutes**. If you have not have chosen a secretary, ask if anyone take notes at that particular meeting.
- **Begin each meeting with introductions.** Ask everyone to introduce him or herself and say why they have come to the meeting.
- **Review the agenda** and allow participants to comment or make additions.
- **Keep the meeting focused and open to participation.** It is likely the first time you all get together that people will want to gripe about their problems. It is important to allow everyone to explain their concerns, but be sure to always steer the meeting back to the agenda if an individual goes on for too long. It is okay to interrupt someone who is carrying on with his or her own personal problems and say, "this sounds like it might be a problem only you are having. Let's try to look at more general problems that we are all facing."
- **Involve everyone.** It is vital that meeting participants feel they are being heard and that your fledgling organization will truly represent them. Especially since many feel the opposite is true when it comes to speaking with park management.
- **Determine the time, date and location of a follow-up meeting.** This gives participants a feeling of continuity, and highlights the seriousness of your purpose.

- **Before closing the meeting, review any decisions that were reached or assignments made.** Try to make sure these are in the notes - this way, there is a record of what was decided and who would do what before the next meeting.
- **End on time.** This is common courtesy, and people are more inclined to attend the next meeting if they know that their time is respected.

Building a Membership Base: Develop an Issue

In the beginning, you may find that only a few people consistently come to your meetings. This isn't a problem. Not everyone wants to be an active participant. You only need a handful of dedicated individuals to make an organization work. After you've held a few meetings, and you know who the key players are, you can begin to look at ways to build your membership. One question to consider is "Why join?" That is, what does your organization offer that can persuade a member of your community to become involved? Often, the answer to this question lies in your ability to develop an issue that the organization can help resolve.

- What are some of the problems people have complained about? **Is there a problem that affects most everyone in the community?** How easily can the problem be resolved? These are questions you and your colleagues will want to consider. Sometimes what appear to be many different problems are really just the result of one singular problem.
- Look for low-hanging fruit. Some problems may easily be resolved. Sometimes it is just a matter of finding out who is responsible for the problem and requesting that they solve it. **A quick, easy "win" is the best advertisement for the value of your organization.**
- More often than not, there are a number of different problems that residents have complained about. Your organization's task is to **turn a person's specific problem into a community improvement that helps everyone.** Speeding cars may be a problem; getting management to install speed bumps is an improvement. Water collecting in a portion of the community is a problem; asking management to improve drainage is an improvement.
- **Determine a strategy for winning the issue and build a campaign.** Figure out who your allies are and how they can help you. Also determine who ultimately has the power to give you what you want. (For example, can the park manager take care of your drainage problem, or is it really a matter for the city utility service?) Then develop tactics that take your organization's strengths into account. Enlist the support of your neighbors.

Growing the Organization: Plan for the Future

When you first started your homeowners and tenants association, you were just a handful of concerned neighbors getting together for coffee and complaining about your situation. Now you have successfully fought to resolve a problem and have 20 community residents that you can count on to participate in the organization. Your next step is to formalize the organization and think toward the future.

- **Hold elections for the leadership positions** (usually these will be President, Vice-President, Secretary and, if necessary, Treasurer). Chances are you already know who the leaders are and everyone will agree.

- **Form a by-laws committee.** The members of this committee will write the formal by-laws of your association, which explain how elections will be held in the future, who can be members, how much an annual membership costs (if you should choose to charge for membership), and so on. The committee can meet separately at a future date and come back to the general meeting with draft by-laws and its recommendations. Having by-laws in place makes it possible to become a legal, non-profit entity and can allow you to register with your municipality, as well as apply for government and private foundation grants.
- Think to the future. **Consider the mission, goals and objectives of your organization.** The "mission" is the reason for the organization's existence. One element of your mission might be "to educate manufactured homeowners and tenants of their rights." The mission is your overall vision for the organization. "Goals" are specific accomplishments you seek to make. Think about what results you would like to see from activity by your organization. A goal might be "to have management evenly uphold the community rules." Finally, an "objective" is a specific circumstance for achieving a goal, such as "get management to install speed bumps to reduce speeding."
- Once you have formalized the organization and have a strategic plan, you can **begin to think beyond just your community.** Do any of the other manufactured home parks in your area have a homeowners and tenants association? Perhaps you could **coordinate with other communities to address issues of mutual concern.** Eventually you might even want to organize at the city level.

Organizing your manufactured home community is a commitment that will take time and energy. It also requires a sacrifice on the part of the organizers, who may be putting themselves at the risk of a retaliatory management. **Be sure you understand the laws in your state and the protections they afford you before you begin to organize.** State and local tenants assistance organizations may be able to help. For example, the Austin Tenants Council in Austin TX, provides a manual for Texas manufactured home residents that you can download from the internet. (You can find some online resources at <http://www.consumersunion.org/other/mh/mhomelinks.htm#landlord>) Try to work in an open, non-confrontational manner. Management is not always the enemy, and sometimes you will find that you can work together to resolve your community's problems.

Finally, keep at it. Building an organization is a slow business. As long as you and a few other concerned residents remain active, your group can grow. There may be slow times where no one in the community is feeling particularly concerned about an issue or cares to participate in the organization. Don't get discouraged. You should be prepared to rally the troops at short notice, in case a need for action should quickly arise. Keep your administrative documents in order, particularly the meeting sign-up sheets or membership lists.

With a homeowners and tenants association made up of good leadership and democratic participation, you will find that you have the power to determine what kind of community you live in.

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