



August 2017

Useful Community Development... quick notes

This Month: Five Steps to Productive Community Partnerships, More
Visit us and explore at www.useful-community-development.org.



It's farmer's market season. Make the best of it by reserving one or two tables for community organizations each week.

Five Steps to Satisfying Community Partnerships

Almost every organization involved in community work today must create and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships with other organizations or businesses. Specialization means that some organizations are perfectly positioned to help with tasks in which our own organizations have no experience.

Most community development experts acknowledge this, but recently we received a lot of positive feedback for explaining in a simple way what it takes to start and maintain a partnership. Especially at the level of a neighborhood association that has never entertained a formal partnership before, the idea can seem daunting. Here is a suggested sequence of steps.

1. Get acquainted. As soon as you have identified the possible need to work with another organization, representatives of the organizations should sit down and discover the history, mission, organization, activities, locations, legal structure, and financial situation of the other.

Usually the two or more executive directors have this conversation in private, but sometimes program managers or board chairs want or need to be involved also. If sizes of the organizations are asymmetrical, the executive director of the smaller organization might meet with a program manager of the larger one. Also if one of the organizations has its headquarters somewhere other than where the potential partnership would conduct projects, a local person may substitute for the national or regional head of the organization.

Even if your organizations have worked together informally, or served beside each other at community events, this systematic getting acquainted meeting is important. If germane to the prospective partnership, the getting acquainted phase may need to include a facilities or neighborhood tour.

2. Talk terms. If the two or more organizations continue to think a partnership is desirable and feasible after a getting acquainted phase, then it is time to talk about the nuts and bolts of the joint program or project. Relevant topics include number of people or organizations to be served, how program participants would be identified or recruited, aims and objectives of the program, and what existing resources and personnel each organization can contribute, even if no new resources are allocated or acquired. When would you start, what scheduling and facility obstacles would each organization face, and what board or community opposition would each organization be likely to encounter? Would new personnel have to be hired, and if so, which organization will employ the new people? What is the rough budget for the first program year, and what can each organization contribute? If there is a funding gap, how would the partners address that? What kinds of board and staff approval and buy-in are required for each organization?

3. Formalize the agreement. You may think that a hand shake is good enough, and in many situations it might be. However, you should have a written agreement, even if it only amounts to a half page statement of the most relevant facts from phase 2 above. This is essential, even when there is a high degree of trust, because both staff members and board members change. You can only assure succession if you have a written binding agreement. Your agreement needs to spell out what you have decided, but also specify the process for modifying the agreement going forward.

Another critical and sometimes overlooked element should be specifying exactly who the contact person or persons for each organization will be. Many misunderstandings occur because of lack of clarity or agreement on who is primarily responsible for communication in each organization. The length and formality of the agreement depends on the complexity of the organizations involved, their history together, and degree of trust already established.

4. Start off on the right foot. Many times we have seen that the seeds of a disintegrating partnership were sown in the early days after it was finalized. Sometimes so much effort is put into arriving at the agreement that both staffs fall behind on other work and right away are not able to devote the time and effort required to establish a good beginning for the project. There is a natural tendency toward let-down after finalizing the agreement, but it is very important to make sure the honeymoon period runs just as smoothly as possible. Disappointments early in the course of the project can mushroom later if disagreements, problems, and surprises are not handled promptly and fairly.

5. Meet and talk at an agreed-upon interval. Whether conflicts and problems arise or not, it is critical that the partners sit down together periodically to evaluate how the partnership and its projects are proceeding. Many times busy executive directors want to skip this step, thinking that the other director will surely call if there is a problem. Often that is true, but at other times, problems are ignored. In any case, the face-to-face meeting will encourage creativity in thinking of new ideas or new ways to advance the aims of the partnership. Create an unhurried space for this conversation.

Can You Help Some Other People? Probably So.

Frankly we have a bit of a problem on our website. We set up pages to enable our visitors to tell about their successes, or lessons learned, and we aren't getting enough submissions. Some of you have good stories to tell. You can be useful to the world, but also gently promote your town, city, CDC, neighborhood association, or consulting practice.

We promise to remind you once a year or less, but if you have something to share on the topics below, please follow the link and put it in. We'll publish the resulting web page if we think others can understand it. We bet you know about one or more of these:

[best city plan](#) (here's looking at you, planning commissioners, consultants or municipal planners)

a great [street party](#)

a wonderful [Main Street](#), whether or not it's literally Main Street

a great clean-up of a [stream](#), [park](#), [alley](#), or [messy property](#)

an [economic development success story](#)

good [community improvement project](#) of any other type

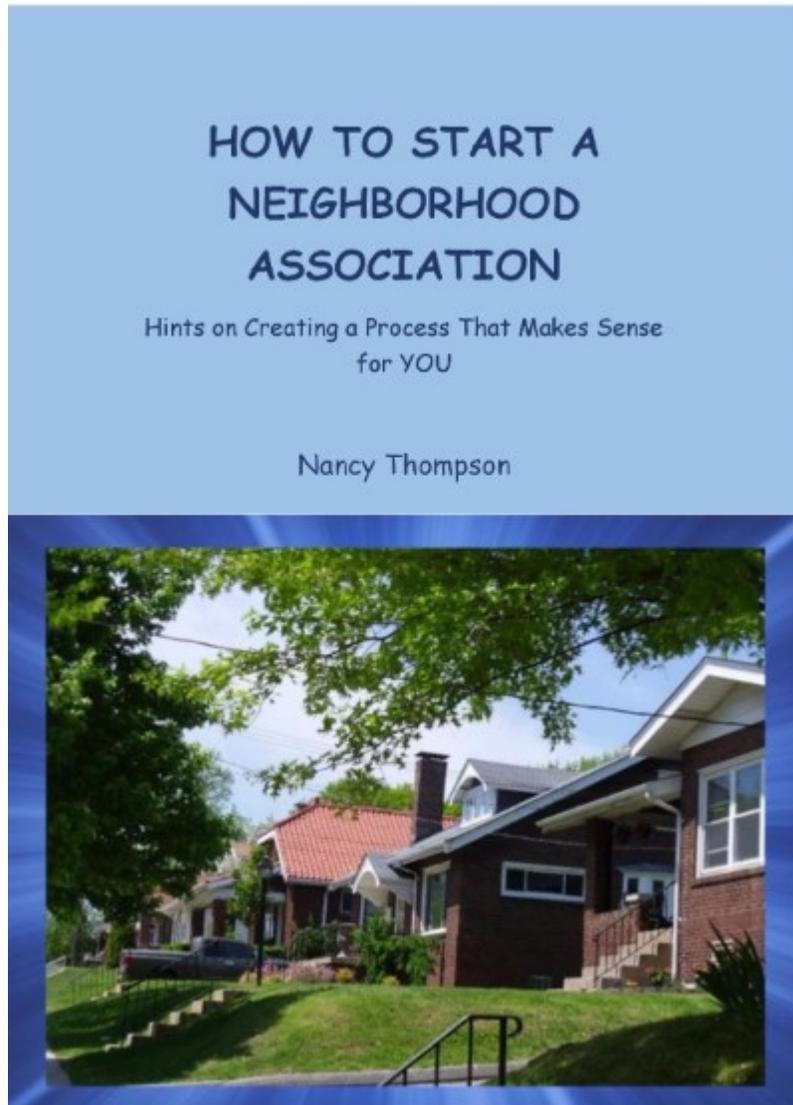
[fund-raising event](#) for your association, neighborhood, or town

[favorite piece of public art](#)

an [international development strategy](#) you can recommend

So don't be shy. Promote yourself or your organization a bit. (Just don't send us something already published on the web, OK?) Forward this newsletter to someone else who needs to self-promote a bit. If we can't make these pages work, we'll discontinue them, but we hate to do that because this section represents the voice of our readers.

We have no idea why, but our e-book on How to Start a Neighborhood Organization is generating sales and positive comments at quite a brisk pace this summer. For the rest of you folks out there, click on the photo below for a link to a description and \$2.99 USD download link.



New Website Content This Month: Pages on [how to build a parklet](#) (and what is that anyway) and the complex relationship between [transit systems and urban sprawl](#). We significantly beefed up the [transportation planning](#) page to more explicitly meet the needs of planning commissioners and citizens. We also published a visitor's submission [Correct Scale for Public Sculpture](#) about a piece in Berlin,

and answered a visitor question on the topic [Commercial Rezoning Violates Covenants](#).

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