



November 2016

## Useful Community Development... quick notes

What to Say When Politics Divides Community, Friends, and Family; New E-Book on Starting a Neighborhood Association; Community Holiday Events

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### Remember Our New E-Book, How to Start a Neighborhood Association: Hints on Creating a Process That Makes Sense for YOU

Here's your [link](#) to the description page with purchasing information on this \$2.99 USD e-book by one of our website's authors.



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### Featured: When It Feels Like Community Is Falling Apart

In light of a contentious British vote on exit from the European Union, a divisive American

### Holiday Events to Plan Now

Your community group may be planning a holiday party. Make it serve double duty by calling attention to your neighborhood, educating your own membership, or doing some good. Here are a few ideas:

1. Progressive dinner, moving from one home or business to another between courses of a meal.

presidential election likely to echo in Europe, police-community conflicts, and wars and civil wars across the globe, this month we offer some points to consider in helping people heal from the kinds of big societal disagreements that leave emotional wounds.

Back in July we [wrote about conflict at the neighborhood level](#), but this time let's focus on larger social divides that threaten friendships, family relationships, and working harmony at the local community development level.

With friends and family, your responsibility is to sink into the most positive faith tradition or rationalistic belief system you may have, and to say to that person, "Look, I love you, and my relationship with you is way more important than an election or a political issue. We may not agree on much, but one thing I always appreciate about you is ...." You get the picture.

It's hard to put your dominant hand behind your back and discipline yourself not to react to their hostility, fear, and lack of information. If you're in the U.S., it might be hard to go home for Thanksgiving. But it's the way forward.

Since we're fundamentally about community development, let's talk about when people in their local communities are divided, or when a homogeneous local community wants to understand another aspect of their country.

When we meet someone from the other side at the grocery store, we start the above dialogue with "We may not agree on much, but one thing I appreciate about you is...." Oh and this would not be the time to talk about failed Obamacare, racist Trump, or stupid Cameron. Resist the urge.

2. House tour or business open house, whether for your own members only or for the community at large. This might be a [fundraiser](#).

3. Adopt a Family could be freshened up by choosing a refugee family, multi-generational household, nursing home, or employee group having a rough time. A wrapping and delivery party makes it festive.

4. March for a cause, or plan an unusual parade. Boat parades are great in waterfront communities, or ask households to make and carry their own lanterns through otherwise dark streets, trails, or alleys. In snow country have the kids put together a "parade" of snowmen in a park.

5. Neighborhood exchange, in which your neighborhood travels to a different type of neighborhood, and they come to your area. You folks go to their pizza joint, and they visit yours so no one loses business and everyone sees different territory.

6. Find a potter to host an ornament making party, or a baker to host a doughnut decorating party, or a church basement for a family holiday card making party.

7. Do a neighborhood photo calendar, with inexpensive printing sourced on the Internet. Either give calendars away by going door to door in your own neighborhood, or sell the calendars as a fund-raiser.

8. Update the cookie exchange idea by having a veggie or side dish exchange. Each household brings two identical side dishes, one for sampling when everyone has gathered and one to trade. Then each household leaves with a different side dish, or maybe two halves.

9. Plan a holiday music concert, featuring different ethnic and faith groups found in your neighborhood. This could be a fundraiser also.

For a longer conversation, we suggest that you adapt this process to your situation:

Remember you can share your [fund-raising event](#) or [street party](#) with our website visitors. Helping another community is really gratifying and in the spirit of the holidays.

## Step 1: The Big Idea

Work on identifying the common ground and then inviting people to celebrate the discovery of that commonality through cooperating on projects.

This usually begins when two leaders sit down together with the specific goal of uncovering their areas of agreement. As an example, a pro-choice and a pro-life leader quickly saw that they both agreed on the needs for assistance to pregnant women who are addicts, prevention of unwanted pregnancies, and better prenatal care. ([Read more about this specific example.](#))

Note that one leader has to be a big person and issue the invitation to talk. **Is that one big person you?**

Certainly several people can meet, and even entire opposing groups can gather, but the more people who are involved, the trickier this becomes. We advise starting with one person from each "side." The courageous and inspirational de-escalation decision of the leaders in a Northern Ireland conflict, John Hume and David Trimble, is an example to ponder.

## Step 2: Convening

Devote an entire agenda of your regular neighborhood or community meeting to healing, or for larger settings, convene a small gathering of 20 to 40 additional key opinion leaders in the two or more factions.

If possible, find a neutral, popular leader for this discussion. This might be a faith community leader, unless that community is known or suspected to be aligned with one of the opposing sides. Other potential leaders include gregarious community members whose preferences are unknown, scholars, mediators, or trained facilitators.

A sample program might include:

1. Introduction: The leader should introduce the purpose of the meeting briefly, call for a moment of silence, quiet, or meditation at the beginning of the meeting, and present a calm, rational, reassuring demeanor.
2. Specific Activity 1: Brainstorm about the benefits of regaining a positive relationship, or at least an emotionally neutral one that allows continuing to work together.

3. Specific Activity 2: Ask each “side” to come up with three specific ways that they will dial down the toxic rhetoric and name-calling. While name-calling works as a form of propaganda, it also hardens opinions and hearts, making it much harder to work together on a common future.

4. Specific Activity 3: Identify some possible limited-scope, limited-time joint projects that build on the common ground.

5. Concluding Activity: Ask all participants whether they can commit to continuing the dialogue and broadening the base of agreement through identifying ever enlarging circles of common ground.

Word your invitation to such a meeting carefully. Build in the expectation the meeting aims at finding or renewing a positive relationship, and that accusations, trash talking, and inflammatory statements will be out of bounds.

### **Step 3: Further Down the Line**

Experienced neighborhood and community groups where raw feelings have surfaced recently may be able to move right back into their earlier projects without further discussion in the group as a whole.

Where the divisions are more fraught with suspicion, if your convening goes well, follow up with appointing or electing a committee to propose and plan subsequent follow-up activities, if needed. These activities might work toward:

1. Prioritizing a healing and reconciliation process in which both sides are transparent about their past roles in creating and escalating the animosity. (At a national level, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a partial model.) It’s tough for a political party or movement to “go first” in admitting that they demonized the other and oversold the catastrophe to come if their side didn’t win, all to the detriment of the greater good. But when people truly love their country or their community, at least one leader can find the inner strength. That brave gesture is likely to be reciprocated.

2. Making space for new conversations. For example, people who feel adversely impacted by immigration, culturally or economically, may not be in regular contact with immigrants themselves.

3. Skipping high-stakes and high-pressure tactics designed to artificially engineer reconciliation, and instead emphasizing positive but low-key interactions. For example, Shop with a Cop or Coffee with Cops programs are more likely to succeed than some hard-driving program aimed at forcing people into better police-minority community relations.

4. Working with leaders to figure out ways to disarm, figuratively or even literally. Ask each “side” to find consensus on disarmament first, and then share results with the other.

5. Rejecting projects, solutions, and perspectives that one side finds paternalistic or unacceptable.

Throughout history, victors want to lord it over the vanquished, but avoiding this temptation supports the

greater good. For example, many think community policing represents a positive step forward in mutual respect between police and the community, but community members might interpret more police presence in their neighborhoods as mere thinly disguised surveillance. If so, community policing is not a solution, and further discussion of it right now is counter-productive.

6. As the effort matures, pairing organizations across whatever ideological or political barrier separates you, such as an organization from the left with an organization from the right. The organizational pairings reduce the chance that one individual's attitudes or slips of the tongue torpedo the entire effort.

Newest additions to the website: [Commercial District Revitalization](#) (to become a series), [Significance of Strong Institutions in Governance](#) response to question from Sierra Leone, [What Is BRT](#), more

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