
How to Create a Neighborhood Newsletter

Battle Creek neighborhood groups are learning that a newsletter is a great way to connect with their neighborhoods. Publishing a newsletter can inform neighbors of local issues, announce meetings and events, summarize activities of the group, get neighbors involved and promote community pride.

A neighborhood newsletter can be as simple as one page typed on someone's typewriter and copied on a copy machine or as complicated as multiple pages made by someone using "desktop publishing" software and printed at a local printer. The important thing is not so much the look of the newsletter, but what information is covered and how clearly it's communicated. The goals of a newsletter can be to help readers understand what's going on in your neighborhood, get folks to join your neighborhood group or volunteer for an activity, recognize members to make folks feel good about their participation, or give out resources to neighbors to help them become more aware of neighborhood issues.

While most newsletters are created by existing neighborhood groups or associations, a newsletter is one tool that can help an informal group of neighbors transform itself into a more organized neighborhood association.

Step One: Determine roles

Developing a neighborhood newsletter takes time. It's important to share the work of creating a newsletter so that no one burns out and so that the newsletter lasts for more than a few issues. Form a newsletter committee made up of people from your

neighborhood group. Discuss who has an interest in being the editor, who will gather material for articles and write them, who has a computer to create the newsletter, and who can deliver it. Gathering material, writing articles and delivering the final newsletter are activities that can be done by at least two or three people. You may find that there is one person who loves to do this kind of work and wants to take it on alone. No matter how good that person might be at producing the newsletter, they will still need the support of other neighbors to get the newsletter delivered to the community.

Step Two: Know your purpose

Before deciding to publish the neighborhood newsletter, it's helpful for your group to look carefully at your purpose. What is it that you're hoping to accomplish? How will the newsletter benefit those who read it and those who create it?

Possible purposes

- Keep readers up to date about group activities, upcoming meetings, etc.
- Educate readers about issues and ideas that concern your group
- Build unity and a sense of pride among group members
- Recognize volunteers, local businesses and others who contribute to your group's success
- Share important resources with neighbors
- Spark new interest in and increase recognition of your organization
- Provide meeting summaries
- Motivate residents to join your group or association
- Let people know what the city, local companies and nonprofit organizations are doing
- Develop skills among your newsletter committee: communications, writing, computer, leading meetings, working with organizations on stories

Step Three: Know your audience

To help your group plan the contents of your newsletter, it will be helpful to know something about the people who will be receiving it. It's time for a little research. Ask neighbors questions like: What would you like to know about our neighborhood association? What topics would you like to learn more about? What types of stories would be most fun and interesting to read?

Step Four: Decide on a publishing schedule

Remember the old saying that "quality is better than quantity." You may want to start with a goal of producing two to three newsletters per year. As your newsletter committee grows and your process becomes established, you can develop newsletters more often.

Step Five: Decide what material to include

Be sure to balance information about your neighborhood group and activities with fun, helpful articles that will make life easier for your readers. More people will read your newsletter if it is helpful to them and enjoyable to read. Keep in mind that while your group's goals are important to you, neighbor readers who are not involved in the group may not share these goals and may need to get interested over time. Don't try to pack too much material into an issue. Save topics for the next issue. You may even want to focus on one topic—for example, education, health or beautification—per issue and include several articles that deal with that topic. The next issue would then focus on a different topic.

Content guidelines

Items should be *practical and useful*. Articles that tell people how to do something, give them tips and insights into issues of concern or provide resources to help them with daily tasks are those readers will find most useful. Items should also *emphasize the*

positive. Include fun items and recognize neighbor accomplishments. This will leave readers with a good feeling, increasing the likelihood that they'll want to read your next issue—or join your group or association.

For article ideas, *start with the knowledge and skills of your own neighbors* and local nonprofit organizations. Develop a list of topic ideas based on neighbors' jobs and interests. Ask neighbors who are teachers to write education articles, ask auto mechanics to provide car care tips and ask bookkeepers to give money management ideas. Talk to local business owners and community organization leaders for ideas and articles as well. Many organizations have articles that they will allow you to copy in your newsletter. Just list their name as the source.

You may also want to scan magazines, newspapers and books for ideas. If you use material, mention where you saw it. List the source, author, title and issue date.

Content ideas

Neighborhood News

- Notices of meetings and group events
- A report on the group's activities
- Issues that affect the neighborhood
- Recognition of volunteer efforts
- News from other neighborhood groups, the city, schools, etc.

Reader Interest Articles

- Education, money management, health and employment
- Home improvement, recipes, gardening and car repair
- Word puzzles, jokes and coloring for kids
- Community services and events
- Community history
- Neighbor accomplishments, marriages, anniversaries and births

Step Six: Writing and editing

Ask your writers to use a friendly, conversational tone. Think about how you would talk to a new neighbor. Use language that is easier to understand and avoid long sentences. Use lists and bullets to make articles easier to read. Try to finish all of the writing and editing before putting the articles into the design "layout"—how the articles are placed on each page. Putting complete or nearly complete articles into the layout will reduce the amount of time spent rearranging items on each page.

Step Seven: Design

Newsletter design is easy if someone in your group has a computer with word processing or design software such as Microsoft Word or Publisher. If no one in your group owns a computer, ask neighbors, schools, the Willard Public Library or local church for assistance.

Your first decision in designing the newsletter involves its format and length. The easiest format for design and production is a standard 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper—the standard size for most software programs. If your layout is more than two pages, your local copier or printer can place the pages onto an 11" x 17" sheet. If you have desktop publishing software, you can set up the format however you would like. Remember, quality of content is more important than quantity. Readers are more likely to pick up and read a two-page newsletter than a six-page newsletter. Shorter newsletters are also less expensive to produce.

For those of you with computer software knowledge, keep in mind these design tips when laying out your newsletter:

- Columns: use two to three columns per 8 1/2" x 11" page for easy reading.
- White space: Readers' eyes need places to rest. Keep quite a bit of space on the edges of the page, not the center.
- Type: Choose a simple type style or "font" (e.g., Times New Roman) in 10- or 11-point size. Use bold and italic type sparingly and avoid all caps entirely, as these styles are difficult to read.
- Type alignment or "justification": Left justified type is the easiest to read.
- Graphics: Select graphics that are simple and clear and that match the content and personality of your newsletter. Use clip art or photographs to break up the text and give your newsletter a more polished appearance but don't overwhelm the page with too many graphics.

Madison Neighborhood News

August 2003

Welcome to Our First Issue!


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Madison Neighborhood Association Kick-off

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Neighborhood Block Party on August 22

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Madison Neighborhood Association Calendar		
Event	Date	Location
After-school program planning	August 7	Madison Elementary
Neighborhood Block Party	August 22	Madison and Lincoln
Association meeting	August 26	Madison Community House

Call Jane Smith at 555-2198. If you have questions about these events.

Yes we can!

How to Create a Neighborhood Newsletter

- **Boxes:** Sidebars and other short articles may be set off in boxes. Limit boxes to one per page.
- **Title:** Choose a title that is short and contains your neighborhood name or some way to show who should read the newsletter.

Consider using a regular layout that will make your newsletter more familiar to readers – and easier to design each time. Having regular features like “Volunteer of the Month” or “From Our Kids” gives readers something to look forward to each time. Put meeting and event information in the same place on each newsletter, ideally on the first page and in a box. Limit each page to no more than three or four articles. Each article should have a title or “headline.” Organize the articles on each page so that you have a good balance of news about your neighborhood group and fun articles about a variety of topics.

Be sure to take time to *edit and proofread* your newsletter. You may want to involve a few people in editing, each assigned a specific task: one to watch for “insider” language that might only be clear to a few people, another to read for spelling and grammar, a third to make sure all the articles make sense, and someone to look over the layout.

Step Eight: Copying/printing

Now you're ready to create a final copy of the newsletter! If you've used a computer software program such as Microsoft Word or Publisher, be sure to print your final copy on a laser printer or inkjet printer before having copies made. Check with your local copier/printing company about printing it for

you from a diskette. The clearer and crisper the original, the clearer your printed copies will be.

Step Nine: Distribution

Hand delivering your newsletter has several benefits. Hand delivery means personal contact and that's always the best way to get folks involved and interested. Involve kids and pay them a small amount for their work. Obviously, it also costs less than mailing the newsletters.

Distribution tips

- The more routes and the more distributors the better.
- Keep the routes consistent. Have the same person deliver to the same area each time. Besides making it easier to organize, this helps the distributor get to know her or his route... and creates community.
- **Be sure to educate distributors on where NOT to put newsletters. It's illegal to put newsletters inside mailboxes!**
- Also, be sure to deliver to everyone.

Step Ten: Get feedback

Feedback from neighbors is the best way to make your newsletter more effective and more likely to be read.

How do you know if your newsletter is effective?

- Neighbors you've asked say so
- Neighborhood leaders get positive phone calls
- People tell leaders that the newsletters are getting read

It's important to remember that the number of neighbors at a general meeting is not a reflection of the number of neighbors reading your newsletter. For many neighbors, reading the newsletter is a way to participate in the neighborhood. Be patient; some of these neighbors may see the good work being done and join later.

Cost saving tips

- Consider selling advertising to help cover the costs. Ask local restaurants, convenience stores, lawn care businesses, etc. to include an ad or simply photocopy their business card.
- Decide how often you really need the newsletter to go out.
- Ask your printer or other newsletter editors how your newsletter can be created for less money.

Local Resources

See “Printers” and “Copying & Duplicating Service” in the Battle Creek Yellow Pages for a list of local resources that can help you with the design and production of newsletters as well as posters, flyers and other communication tools.

Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.

Sources: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development, University of Kansas; Vancouver, WA March 2002 Leadership In-service

Yes we can! is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. *Yes we can!* is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For general questions about *Yes we can!*, call 269-969-2228 or visit www.wkkf.org/yeswecan. To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.

Yes we can!