



Neighborhood Newsletters

Beyond face-to-face and telephone communication with your neighbors, a neighborhood newsletter is hard to beat.

An effective neighborhood newsletter:

- Reports news unique to the neighborhood.
- Encourages a strong sense of community (welcome new neighbors, report milestones like graduations and new jobs, etc.).
- Recognizes volunteers.
- Instills pride in the neighborhood by recognizing the “yard of the month”, winners of the holiday lights contest, etc.
- Keeps everyone informed of issues and concerns.
- Advertises upcoming meetings and events.
- Asks for volunteers (for tasks that anyone can do).
- Creates transparent and inclusive governance by reporting on upcoming elections, election results, and decisions made by the board and membership.
- Makes leaders available by listing names and contact information. Accessible leaders are in touch with neighbor concerns.
- Serves as a key form of communication that everyone receives, including those who do not have email/Internet access or who cannot be reached by phone.
- Helps brand the neighborhood and the neighborhood organization with a logo, consistent messaging and inclusion of the mission statement in every issue.
- Functions as the most tangible (you can hold it in your hands) representation of the neighborhood organization — and keeps its purpose, usefulness and importance in the minds of the neighbors.
- Serves as a recruiting tool for the organization.

Newsletter Committee

- ✓ Ideally, a neighborhood president should not be expected to also serve as the newsletter editor and chief cook and bottle washer. If you cannot find a committee of people to take on the task, you probably cannot sustain a newsletter over a long period of time.
- ✓ This committee would be responsible for newsletter editing & production, printing, distribution and financing. Some neighborhoods include these functions in a larger “communications committee” that oversees other forms of communication such as neighborhood email listserv and Facebook.
- ✓ Usually, team effort works best when writing and editing newsletters. However, a single editor should take responsibility for coordinating the reporters and editing the newsletter. Not everyone who writes for the newsletter has to be skilled in writing and grammar, but the editor should be.

Size and Scope

How many newsletters can you produce each year? How many pages? Photographs included? Black and white printing or color? Printed on 11x17 and folded or on 8-1/2x11 and stapled?

These questions depend primarily on three factors – your budget, your printing costs, and your distribution network.

Printing

Printing costs can be a significant factor in what type of newsletter you produce. Check with and get bids from print shops and copying services. Your best bet likely will be a copying service rather than an “offset” printer. You may be able to negotiate a discount in return for running an advertisement for the printer.

Recognize that 8.5x11, all-white, 20-lb bond paper will be the most cost-effective choice. Color printing is very expensive and likely will be cost prohibitive. If you use photographs, make sure in advance that they will reproduce well in black and white.

Editorial Output

- ✓ If you are blessed with functioning committees (e.g. beautification or zoning), someone on each committee could write reports as needed. You can also enlist reporters for specific tasks, such as compiling a “Neighbor News” column.
- ✓ Depending on your budget and your distribution network, decide how many issues you can produce each year, and stick to a schedule. Have clear deadlines for submitting articles, editing, printing, and distributing each issue.
- ✓ Your publication schedule will depend in part on your organization’s calendar and bylaws. For example, if you can afford just one newsletter each year, schedule it

in advance of the annual meeting so that everyone knows how to become a member and how they can participate in the nomination and election of officers and board members.

- ✓ Examples of articles and features you might include:
 - Committee Reports
 - Organization meeting places and times
 - Want-ads
 - Letter from the President
 - Neighborhood News including news about individual neighbors
 - Job Listings
 - Upcoming events
 - Editorials
 - Children's Column
 - Updates on local issues
 - Volunteer Acknowledgement
 - Holiday Activities
 - Neighborhood Watch Report and crime-fighting tips
 - Advice to neighbors on city building & lot maintenance codes, parking regulations, etc.

Lay-out and Design

Most neighborhoods can find a neighbor who has a computer and who could take the articles and illustrations and put them into your selected format. The Microsoft Word program is effective for producing credible and attractive newsletters.

The cost for a graphic designer will be prohibitive for most organizations. However, if no neighbor is available, approach local businesses or large nonprofits to see if they would donate an employee's time until you can find or train someone to take over.

Make sure your designer's end product will reproduce well. Take a sample to your printer and try it out well before your deadline.

Distribution

- Postage is usually prohibitively expensive, and frankly it can be a hassle to obtain a second-class postage permit and to abide by all the regulations when you prepare each mailing. For every large neighborhood where door-to-door distribution is just too much to take on, the cost of mailing the newsletter to your whole neighborhood could surpass your printing costs.
- You can visit the post office or the post office web site to obtain a copy of the second class permit instructions and application. Also, talk to someone who handles second class mailings for a nonprofit organization to understand all of the pros and cons for using the postal service.

- Door-to-door distribution costs nothing but requires willing volunteers. You can hold down your printing costs by emailing the newsletter to those with email and hand-delivering to everyone else, but this very likely requires a block captain system where each block captain knows who needs the hard copy.
- A block captain system for newsletters could evolve into a block captain system for other neighborhood needs. Distributing the newsletter by hand door to door not only is an excellent way to involve neighbors, but it almost guarantees that neighbors will be talking to neighbors --- which is a good thing!

Funding

- ❖ Paying for the newsletter is perhaps the biggest challenge, after finding a reliable editor and distribution manager. You need money...but you've got something businesses want --- access to potential customers and credibility.
- ❖ Contact local businesses to see if they will sponsor the newsletter in return for some form of recognition, including an advertisement. Of course, more ads mean more paper which means more printing, so your ad revenue has to pay for the ad space as well as the editorial space.
- ❖ Explore having your newsletter printed free or at a reduced cost. Possible sources of free copying are churches, schools, community boards, and workplaces of group members. A local printer might donate the job or offer a special rate in exchange for a credit line in the newsletter that urges members to use his or her company. Another possibility is the local merchants association.
- ❖ When talking to businesses, stress the interdependence of commercial and residential areas in a neighborhood – how the health of one depends on the health of the other.
- ❖ Encourage readers to patronize your advertisers whose ad you saw in the newsletter.
- ❖ The City of Knoxville's Neighborhood Small Grants program and City Council 202 funds are other possible sources of revenue. Check with the Office of Neighborhoods.