

Guidelines for Successful Watch Meetings

To: Neighborhood Block Captains
From: NW Coordinator
Re: Meeting and Agenda Information

The key to having a successful first meeting is to involve everyone. It is important to motivate and encourage those in attendance to become active participants and express their views to help residents overcome that sense of powerlessness. The organizer must be able to recognize and appreciate different viewpoints. To ensure a successful meeting, below are some suggestions to follow:

- Give your neighbors an opportunity to socialize before the meeting begins.
- Prepare an agenda, which should represent a collaborative effort of a core group of dedicated residents.
- Establish guidelines to encourage honesty, confidentiality and responsibility to the group.
- Have those in attendance introduce themselves. Prepare and distribute to the group an attendance sheet with each participant's address and phone number.
- Early in the meeting, allow everyone to talk about themselves, their values, experiences, their stake in the community and their ideas. Identify basic safety issues in and around your neighborhood. Brainstorm about their underlying causes.
- Establish priorities and goals and formulate a mission statement for the watch. While there will be a diversity of opinions, build on the ideas that are agreed upon.
- Develop an action or strategic plan identifying specific community changes. The plan should be precise, specifying who will perform each task and the timetable. The planning process should be inclusive, involving people who have influence in the community (e.g. elected officials, clergy) as well as others.
- Identify key people and resources to help you solve problems and lend support (e.g. police, District Attorney, local elected officials, clergy, youth & business leaders).
- Elect a coordinator or chairperson, secretary to maintain records of meetings and important events, and a treasurer to collect record and disburse funds. The group can collect membership dues, donations from elected officials, businesses and foundations. Establish committees, if possible, which will involve other residents and stakeholders. These units can invite guest speakers, distribute flyers and brochures, work on communications and publications and plan events and projects. If a patrol is established, choose a patrol coordinator who will interface with law enforcement and match surveillance activities and hours with volunteers' schedules.
- Provide refreshments which will present another opportunity for socialization.

Basic Leadership:

The coordinator or chairperson is critical to the success of the watch group. Therefore, the group should look for someone who has good communication, listening and negotiating skills. Someone who is well respected in the community and would see the position as a civic duty would be a good candidate. His/her duties may include:

- Maintaining membership rolls
- Acting as a liaison between the group and law enforcement, civic groups, business leaders and elected officials
- Arranging and convening meetings and trainings
- Obtaining crime prevention materials
- Developing strategies to sustain and expand the program

The watch group should also consist of block captains who are directly involved with their immediate neighbors. Their duties may include:

- Acting as a liaison between residents and the coordinator
- Contacting neighbors about meetings and other events
- Relaying and distributing information and resource material to members
- Visiting and inviting new residents to join the watch
- Surveying issues and identifying block problems
- Checking on shut-in residents

Leaders should not serve permanently. New leadership should be cultivated and encouraged to build participation and motivate residents and others.

Follow-up:

Now that you have formed the neighborhood watch and gained the initial enthusiasm, it will require effort to sustain the initiative. Expect that as you build your group, there will be setbacks and disagreements. That is part of the process, and you should not be discouraged. Remember it is the health and welfare of our children, families and neighbors that encourage us to take on these challenges that can feel overwhelming at times. Try to minimize the divisions and problems and focus on what has been accomplished. Then proceed to the next goal. Soon after forming a neighborhood watch, consider the following:

Distribute an organizational list of members with addresses and phone numbers, block maps and telephone tree assignments. If a patrol was established, finalize a tour schedule and distribute to volunteers.

You should consider contacting local businesses, print shops, banks and newspapers in an effort to secure design, production and financial assistance in creating and distributing these materials. Aluminum signs are preferable. Don't forget to contact the public works or highway department as well as the police to secure permission to affix the signs on street lights and other poles. Assistance from a local official may also expedite this project. When the signs are ready, arrange a community/block party to celebrate neighborhood pride and unity. Don't forget to invite the media to mark the occasion.

It is important to try to attract new members. Harness the talents and energies of watch volunteers to recruit new blood. Engage those families in your neighborhood who are not participants in order to maintain a solid organizational foundation. New residents in your neighborhood should be welcomed. The best way to recruit participants is through one-on-one contact and visits. Although frequent meetings require some energy, they present an opportunity for your neighbors to socialize and become better acquainted.

In addition to reviewing quality of life issues and tracking neighborhood conditions, the meetings could be educational. There are many resources on which your watch group can draw to help you develop meeting topics. Federal, state and local law enforcement and judicial agencies feature public affairs offices. In addition, municipal or county agencies including consumer affairs and public works departments as well as hospitals and public utilities can provide information/speakers for a meeting. Consider these meeting topics:

- Personal safety
- Self defense & observation skills
- Child security
- Home security & surveys
- Property identification
- First Aid & C P R
- Fire safety and prevention
- Victim rights and services
- Court monitoring
- Consumer frauds & scams
- Traffic safety & drunk driving
- Internet access & security
- Safety strategies for seniors
- Graffiti and vandalism prevention
- Home & garden beautification
- Renters' rights
- Eliminating drug dealing and gangs
- Conflict resolution/mediation
- Schools/gangs/truancy

Conduct an informal survey among your members to decide what topics are of interest. Establish priorities for which subjects will be featured at meetings. This should be a collaborative effort. Create a committee to develop the theme of each meeting and arrange for speakers and/or videotapes.

After setting a meeting date, create an agenda and draft a notice for distribution. The clerk should prepare the minutes from the prior meeting to be distributed with the agenda for the next meeting. Use a telephone tree to remind participants of the meeting two days before the event. Consider using e-mail as well.

Keep records documenting changes brought about by the watch along with any feedback. Maintaining this history can be an invaluable guide for the group. Reviewing regularly the watch group's achievements, can spur the group onto even greater heights.