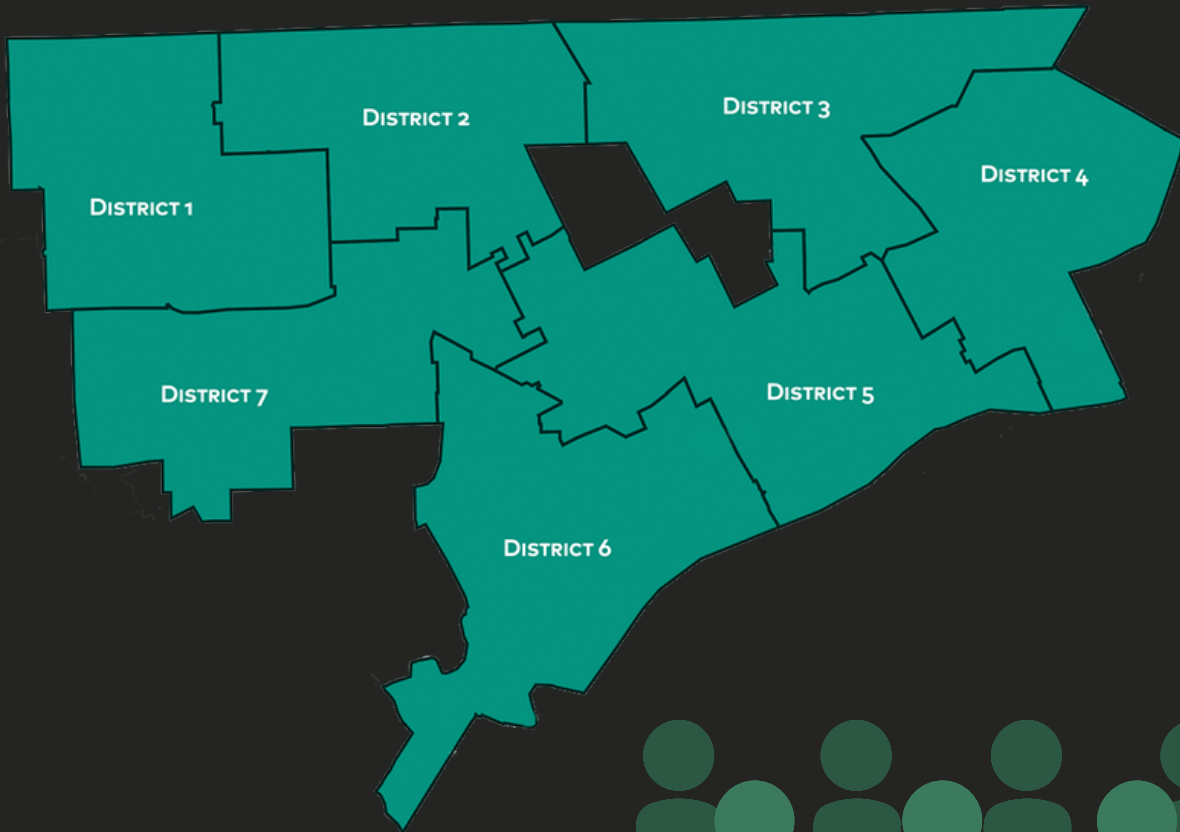
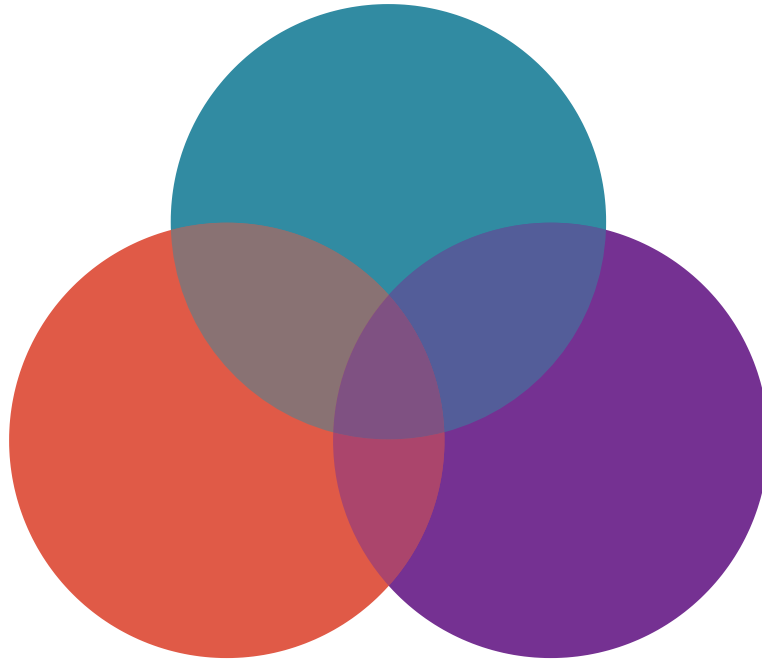


# BLOCK CLUB STARTER KIT

*Created by The Department of Neighborhoods*



DEPARTMENT OF  
**Neighborhoods**



## What is a Block Club?

In the City of Detroit, all community groups, such as neighborhood associations and other coalitions, are registered in the **block club program**.

Voluntary participation and creative citizen leadership is key to the development of strong communities. These efforts can be best channeled through **block clubs**. Everyone who participates becomes a better neighbor, better citizen, and contributes to a more robust democracy where people are civically-engaged.

A typical **block club** is a group whose members come from the same street, neighborhood or surrounding area. Because everyone lives in a shared space, there is a common interest in improving the community.

A **block club's** goals and purpose often center on solving problems of the community and meeting residents' needs. A group of individuals can much more effectively advocate for their neighborhood and leverage City resources. The key to organizing a **block club** is recruiting a core group of members who will develop and carry out the group's goals. **Block clubs** require working together as a team so that everyone feels empowered to participate.

## Forming the leadership team

To begin, you only need a few dedicated people to get your block club off the ground. Though you may hope for 100% participation eventually, make decisions on where to start. Leverage the skills of your neighbors. Does someone have a particular talent for budgeting? Maybe they would be a good fit for the treasurer role. Think about who has shown interest in community building or who has the time and/or energy to step up as a leader.

## Deciding on boundaries

The actual boundaries of the organization could be only half of a block, one side of the block, both sides of the street facing each other, both sides facing the alley, or even a single apartment building. The boundaries will depend on factors like geographic size, the population density,

available meeting places, and the nature of the problems in the neighborhood. For example, if your problems center on alley up-keep, you might want to organize residents on both sides of the alley.

The group should be large enough to tackle your problems with some assurance of success, but not so large that there is little chance for people to get to know one another and trade ideas.

## Engaging with others

Once you decide the boundaries, you should proceed to connect with everyone who lives within those boundaries including owners, young adults, renters, newcomers, and seniors. Your group should be inclusive to everyone in the area, as everyone is impacted by quality-of-life issues in that area.

The first contact you make should be in-person, so that you can introduce yourself and the purpose of forming your group.

# STEP 1: Introductions

Plan on going door-to-door. First, introduce yourself as a neighbor and explain the purpose of the visit. Secondly, inform the individual that you have been speaking with other neighbors who are interested in starting a block club, and explain that their attendance is needed at the first meeting. In advance, prepare a small flyer or post-it note with the date, time, and location of the first meeting to hand out. Emphasize the benefits of having each neighbor know one another and working together to solve problems. Some individuals will want to socialize, others will only be interested in problem-solving. In fact, most successful block clubs include both kinds of programs.

It is important to stress from the beginning the value of setting up a block club. The presence of a block club gives everyone a sense of being a part of a community and of sharing goals and ideas with neighbors. It empowers people and provides the machinery for working out immediate and long-term problems that arise.

# STEP 2: The first meeting

After the leadership team has reached out to all the neighbors who may become block club members, there should be a decision on who will be the temporary president for the first meeting. An agenda should also be created. It can simply be a list of things to discuss or do. Since you have already talked to many neighbors, you should have a good idea of what their concerns are. You should plan to explain why your neighborhood should have a block club and lead a discussion of the problems that need group attention and action.

Consider inviting a speaker from an already established and successful neighborhood organization to describe how their group got started and some of the possibilities for your group. If you don't know of any other groups in your area, call your Department of Neighborhood District Managers to get in touch with one.

## STEP 3: Setting block standards

At the first meeting, you should open up a conversation about block standards. These should be expectations that all neighbors should follow. All the residents will depend on each other for the enforcement of these standards. Even those who don't comply with such things as cutting their grass, putting trash in the proper storage containers or keeping up the exterior of their property should be contacted to participate in this conversation. Only by getting everyone to cooperate can others be influenced and persuaded to conform to the wishes of the rest of the neighbors. Remember, though, that such people should never be invited to the meeting to be lectured about their undesirable behavior. It is only by including everyone in the decision-making on the block's best interest that will ensure a better standard of living for all. Everyone will need to come to an agreement about what is reasonable and important for the community.

## STEP 4: Vote on the future of the group

Hold a vote on whether or not the group should continue to exist from this point forward.

Elect officers (usually a president, VP, secretary, and treasurer) for a temporary period such as three months,

Consider creating committees such as a Constitution, Member Outreach, or Event Planning committees.

Settle on a time and place for the next meeting. Ensure that everyone shares an agreed-upon form of communication, whether that be email, phone numbers, etc. Be sure that members are notified and reminded about subsequent meetings (typically, this is the responsibility of the Secretary).

## STEP 5: Submit application form

Be sure to complete the application form on the City of Detroit website. This will register you officially with the City and enable your group to receive its certificate. It is at the following link:

## STEP 6: Move past the first three months

### 1) Create goals and objectives:

You now have a permanent organization that meets on a regular basis. There are still many unanswered questions. How are meetings conducted? How does your group determine and reach its goals? Where can you go for assistance? The answers to these questions will determine how well your organization works.

The difference between the purpose of a block club and its goals is not always spelled out clearly. This can lead to conflict between members since they might not be able to agree on specific actions for the group. Determine what the overall purpose of the organization is to be: Should it be political, social, or deal only with neighbor problems? This is often articulated a mission statement.

Based on the purpose, goals should then be developed. The general objective of most neighborhood organizations should be to improve the living conditions for all neighbors in a given area, and this could be accomplished by many actions. For example, living conditions could be improved by hosting a block-wide clean-up day per year or by holding summer potlucks. Develop your goals using the S.M.A.R.T. model. Read more about S.M.A.R.T. goals here:

<https://www.youngsurvival.org/uploads/audio-visual-library/ReadySetGo.pdf>

## **2) Write a constitution**

The Constitution and By-laws Committee should prepare a Constitution and by-laws for presentation at a general meeting. The Constitution and by-laws is a document informing the purpose and goals of the organization, membership requirements, rules by which the organization will be governed, and the duties of the offices and committees. At the meeting, the proposed Constitution and by-laws are read in order to make changes or revisions. The members vote on its adoption and, once adopted, the Constitution and by-laws can only be changed according to the methods written into it.

Since a Constitution and by-laws are not an easy document to write, a sample is available on the City of Detroit website. Accessible at this link:

## **3) Elect permanent officers**

Now that the Constitution and by-laws are adopted, it sets the rules for electing permanent officers, defines their duties, and outlines the period of time they may serve. Hold another election for permanent officers. Those in the temporary, three month positions can choose to seek re-election.

Make sure to send an update to your District Manager whenever leadership positions in your group changes that way they are up-to-date and know who to contact, if needed, at any point.

**Congratulations on starting a block club! Thank you for helping make your community stronger.**