

# Revitalize Our Communities Committee



*Citizens Helping Communities Help Themselves*

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# Community Revitalization Toolkit

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose	3
Community Organizing 101	3
Getting Started – Community Organizing	4
Effective Meetings	8
Community Events, Fundraising, and Volunteers	11
Communications	14
Working with Local Government	17

## PURPOSE

The Community Revitalization Toolkit is a resource for community groups wishing to organize for the first time or to reactivate or improve existing community organizations. This guide is a compilation of information derived from various community organization sources and applies to many types of community organizations. Community organizations and neighborhoods throughout the United States follow similar organizational guidelines.

The Community Revitalization Toolkit offers suggestions for planning a first meeting, starting community projects and activities, keeping residents informed through newsletters, working with local government, and much more. It also provides valuable resources, such as contact information for Chesterfield County Government programs and services.

Please give us your comments! We are always open to suggestions for improvement. Also, let us know if you like the Guide and find it useful. Your comments will help us continue to provide valuable and beneficial materials to the communities of Chesterfield County.

If you have questions or comments, please send them to [Revitalization@chesterfield.gov](mailto:Revitalization@chesterfield.gov) or visit [www.chesterfieldcommunities.com](http://www.chesterfieldcommunities.com).

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## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING 101

**What is a community organization?** A community organization is a group of neighbors working together for the good of all, with a common vision, goals and objectives. A community organization makes decisions on common problems within a community by sharing ideas and solutions. These organizations are the vehicles for residents and business leaders to revitalize and improve their communities.



**Why is community organizing important?** We all live in a community; as such we share a unique collection of problems and prospects in common with our neighbors. Participation in community affairs builds on the recognition of here-we-are-together, and a desire to recapture something of the tight-knit communities of the past.

Community groups can act as vehicles for making connections between people, forums for resolving local differences, and a means of looking after one another. Communities that are well organized can take action to solve small problems and prevent major problems from occurring. Most importantly, neighborhood organizations create a positive social environment that can become a community's best feature.

**What are the various types of community organizations?** A Voluntary Community Organization is a voluntary association of homeowners, renters, and sometimes businesses formed within a specific geographic area. The issues of a voluntary organization are broad based, and address residential and business concerns which impact the community's quality of life. While voluntary organizations do not enforce architectural controls or charge mandatory dues, they can be effective in enforcing covenants by writing letters and working with the local government to correct problems.

A mandatory homeowners association is a corporation of homeowners responsible for the operation of a community in which the membership is mandatory. This type of association has the power to impose assessments or dues, which if unpaid, may become a lien on the property. This association has the authority to enforce covenants through civil action. In Virginia, the governing authority of such organizations can be found in the Virginia State Statutes.

**Where can I obtain a list of mandatory homeowners associations?** Every mandatory homeowners association within the State of Virginia must register with the State Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR). The DPOR has a comprehensive website ([www.dpor.virginia.gov](http://www.dpor.virginia.gov)) where you can obtain copies of annual reports for every homeowners association in Virginia. You can search by the name of the homeowners association and obtain names of Board members.

If your home is located in Chesterfield County, you can obtain a copy of you homeowners association documents from the Chesterfield County Clerks Office.

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## GETTING STARTED – COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

**How to be a community leader?** A community leader is a good communicator and listener. They act as the organizer of community meetings, events, and actions. They encourage others to become involved, seek the ideas and opinions of others and coordinate these frequently diverse interests into actions and programs that benefit the community.

**How is a community organization established?** To start a community organization, first talk with other neighbors to seek their interest. Once you have a group of four or five interested persons contact the Chesterfield County [Revitalization Office](#) to express interest in organizing an effective neighborhood association. Many organizations function effectively with as little as 10% of the neighborhood participating.

**Important guidelines to keep in mind as you begin to organize.** Building an organization is a process. It cannot be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build them step-by-step. Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational structure grows, start setting your goals higher.

**How can an organization recruit new members?** Getting new people involved in an organization is exciting. New people have enthusiasm and energy, which can be infectious, serving to motivate others in the group. Following are some volunteer recruitment strategies to bring life into your organization:

- Door to door personal contacts such as surveys and interviews.
- Adopt-a-Neighborhood (each member brings a neighbor to the meeting).
- Media involvement to promote a special meeting or event.
- Post fliers announcing your meeting at neighborhood markets, laundromats, businesses, schools, etc.
- Keep your group diversified. Healthy groups have a mix of age, gender, ethnic background, businesses, schools, etc.
- Develop a recruitment brochure explaining your neighborhood organization
- Involve other groups in the community with goals or activities similar to your groups.
- Never recruit for specific jobs until you know how you will use each volunteer.
- Place recruitment ads in newsletters of other groups, community newspapers, etc.
- Contact local volunteer resource agencies for referrals.
- Place exhibits in stores, malls, volunteer fairs, etc.
- Work with Neighborhood Watch block coordinators to identify people who care about the neighborhood.
- Use your newsletter to promote and recruit. Instead of reporting on an issue, showcase how your group has made a difference.
- Be honest about time demands. Be specific about the job and how the person could help.
- Assure new volunteers that they do not have to be experts; training and support will be provided.
- Try different approaches to advertising, such as T-shirts, bumper stickers, buttons, calendars, open houses, neighborhood tours, etc.

**How to identify your community issues.** Every community has strengths and weaknesses. Community organizations need to conduct an honest appraisal of their community's assets and liabilities. Start with gathering facts. The Chesterfield County [Communities Report](#), which can be obtained from the County's Planning Department, is a good first source of information on your community. Second, conduct a survey or hold a community meeting where participants can identify what they consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the community.

**How to address your community issues.** Once you have identified your community strengths and weaknesses, your community organization should propose improvement projects that build on your assets. Set priorities for projects by understanding the skills and talents of your organization and seek the help of government agencies or outside organizations. The first priority should be a "doable" project that can be accomplished in a short period of time before a complicated lengthy project is undertaken. The Chesterfield County [Revitalization Office](#) can assist in this and other tasks.



**What are some ideas for setting goals?** Your community organization needs clear direction. In order to chart that direction, it is important to determine the assets and needs of your community and identify goals accordingly.

A **Goal** is simply a statement describing the future desired state or condition of your community. It is a statement of what you want to achieve or maintain for your community. For example, one of your goals could be "An attractive, well landscaped community".

An **Action** is a statement that explains how your organization will reach your goals. Actions need to be clear and concise. They should be measurable and achievable within a set timeframe. For example, "10 new street trees shall be planted along Maple Street by October 2010."

**What are some advantages of goal setting?**

Become aware of community needs. By setting goals for your organization, the needs of your community will come into focus. These needs give your organization a purpose and meaning.

Accomplish projects. By setting time limits for project completion, your organization can anticipate how much work is ahead and schedule it accordingly.

Strive towards a mark. Goal setting keeps your members involved and motivated. If your organization has set a target date to complete a project, then the energy level of members will increase as the target dates draw near.

Keep members active. If your community organization has set goals, there will be plenty of projects to work on. If members are not busy, then it is time to get them working to accomplish existing goals.

**What are organization bylaws?** Bylaws are the governing documents of any organization and are central to establishing a successful organization. Bylaws specify how an organization operates. It is not necessary for bylaws to detail every aspect of the organization. However, bylaws must provide enough guidance for officers and members to perform necessary tasks. When bylaws are too vague, the organization will not have adequate structure. Also, frequent amendments often cause the organization to stray too far from its original purpose. Much literature, including Roberts Rules of Order, has been written for the purpose of assisting residents in writing bylaws. These books are available at your local library.

**What is the role of a community organization executive board?** The officers of the community organization make up what is often called the Executive Board. The organization's bylaws outline the duties of the officers. Sometimes, the Executive Board also includes committee chairs. General duties are listed below:

#### **President**

- Chief executive officer of the organization
- Presides over all meetings
- Prepares meeting agendas with the Secretary
- Acts as an ex-officio member of all committees
- Delegates responsibilities fairly
- Ensures effective and productive meetings
- Is an impartial and fair bystander
- Promotes and interprets the organization's goals

#### **Vice President**

- Performs duties of the President in his or her absence
- Supports the President as requested
- Organizes special committees and projects as needed

#### **Treasurer**

- Custodian of organization's funds and financial records
- Responsible for periodic status reports to the executive board

#### **Secretary**

- Maintains organization's records
- Prepares meeting notices
- Takes and prepares all meeting minutes
- Maintains membership list

**What is the role of community organization committees?** Most community organizations organize their work and accomplish their actions through the dedicated work of committees. Many times, committees will be established for the purpose of accomplishing an organization's goal or implementing proposed actions. For example, if an organization's goal is "Neighborhood Beautification", the executive board will establish a "Beautification Committee" to ensure that the goal is realized. Following are various types of committees:

- Beautification
- Code Enforcement
- Fundraising/Finance
- Publicity
- Safety/Neighborhood Watch
- Social Activities
- Social Concerns
- Traffic

**What are some tips to maintaining active and productive committees?** As with any situation involving volunteers, committees need specific direction and clear objectives to accomplish their tasks effectively and efficiently. Following are some general tips to ensure committee productivity:



- Clearly define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Publicly recognize members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the community organization.
- Ensure meeting time and committee work is as productive as possible. No one wants to feel they are wasting time.
- Ensure the work of the committee is accepted and makes a valuable contribution to the organization.
- Consider using subcommittees to increase individual responsibilities and focus on goals.
- Conduct yearly committee evaluations where committee members evaluate each other.

## EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

**How do I plan for an effective meeting?** The success of any event is directly related to the planning and detail that was involved. As such, planning for your community organization’s meetings is just as important as hosting them. Here are some meeting planning tips to keep in mind:

**Meeting Location** – Find a meeting place that can accommodate the meeting. If you are expecting a small group, you may want to have your first meeting in someone’s home. For a group of larger than ten people, check the availability of your local community center, church or school. Schools and some County owned community centers might waive fees for community organization meetings.

**Speakers** – You may want to invite someone to speak to issues, concerns, and interests expressed by your neighbors. You may invite speakers from various County Divisions such as Planning, Roads and Drainage, Traffic Engineering, Code Enforcement or the Sheriff’s Office. If you have a concern that you want addressed, contact us at [Revitalization@chesterfield.gov](mailto:Revitalization@chesterfield.gov) for potential speaker ideas.

**Meeting Announcement** – Good promotion and advance notification of the meeting are important. Give neighbors at least two weeks notice of the dates and times of meetings.

**Sign-In** – Provide a sign-in sheet for neighbors and guests. This allows you to keep track of attendance and to develop a mailing list for future notifications.

**Name Tags** – Provide name tags to identify the officers/directors and neighbors. Often neighbors may recognize faces, but may not know names. The nametags help to promote friendliness.

**Agenda** – Provide an agenda to keep the meeting flowing and in order. Keep it simple and follow the agenda at all times.

**What are some tips to running an effective meeting?** The ability to host effective meetings can oftentimes be the pass-fail mark for community organizations. The success of your organization is a result of the energy, productivity and efficiency of your monthly membership meetings, executive board meetings and even annual election meetings. Following are some tried and true tips for hosting an effective meeting:

- Always start meetings on time.
- Open the meeting location at least 15 minutes early for residents to arrive, socialize, and prepare.
- Begin meetings with an icebreaker to lighten the mood.
- Introduce public officials at the beginning of each meeting.
- Recognize newcomers and ask them to state what street they live on.
- State the purpose of the meeting and proposed discussion items.
- Be brief and keep comments relevant to each discussion. Monitor the pacing so the meeting is not too long (consider using Roberts Rules of Order).
- Use visual aids. Residents will relate to something they can see.
- Allow everyone to contribute. After a concern or project is presented, open the discussion. However, set a time limit.
- Prepare any needed research ahead of time.
- Make frequent summaries during the discussion so that everyone clearly understands what is being stated.
- Promote cooperation not conflict. If conflict occurs, appoint a committee to research the concern and report findings at next meeting. Encourage those individuals who are voicing their concerns to be on the committee.
- Assign tasks and delegate responsibility as the meeting proceeds. This give neighbors a feeling of belonging instead of just listening.
- Guide the meeting from concerns to solutions. Always ask your neighbors how they would solve or approach a concern. Keep in mind that some solutions may take time.
- Towards the end of the meeting, go over the agenda, giving an overview of each concern discussed or raised.

- Before adjourning, state the next meeting date, time and place, and thank everyone for attending.

### **How do I take effective meeting minutes?**

What are minutes? – Effective meeting minutes provide a history of the organization’s progress as well as informing absent members of meeting discussions and outcomes.

#### Why keep minutes?

- To record decisions.
- To document who participated in decisions.
- To know how many people agreed and disagreed.
- To understand some of the reasons leading to the decisions.
- To register minority opinions.
- To document citizen participation in government.

#### Helpful tips for the Minutes taker.

- Obtain previous meeting agendas, minutes and discussion items.
- Focus on recording actions taken by the group.
- Maintain a consistent format with all minutes.
- Publish and distribute draft of meeting minutes no more than 7 days after meeting

#### What should minutes contain?

- Organization’s name and type of meeting.
- Date, time, and location of meeting.
- Name of members present.
- Name of presiding Officer and Secretary.
- Quorum details.
- Approval of previous minutes.
- Officer and Committee reports. Attach, if written.
- Business of the meeting in order of agenda.
- Brief description of matter and outcome.
- Types of motions and resolutions and names of people who made them.
- Record of motion and resolution outcomes.
- Record of vote process and outcome.
- Adjournment time.
- Secretary’s signature.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS, FUNDRAISING, AND VOLUNTEERS

**How do I organize a successful community event?** Whether you are holding a summer block party, a holiday social or any other community event, it is crucial the event is well organized. Remember to follow these simple steps when organizing a successful neighborhood event:

- Gather people's contact information and interests
- Be sure to select activities to help everyone meet and greet each other
- Get the word out - give advance notice
- Find a well known, accessible neighborhood location
- Become familiar with Chesterfield County regulations regarding block parties or outdoor public assemblies
- Obtain the appropriate county permits
- Seek neighborhood sponsors and partners
- Follow up - evaluate your event and determine what did or did not work about the event



**How do I plan a community block party?** There is no better way of getting together and meeting your neighbors than having a block party. Neighborhoods are better and safer places to live when there is a sense of caring and friendliness in the area. Block parties can vary from a simple gathering of a few folks in a front yard, to a highly organized event involving dozens of streets in the community. Start with a block party committee. Assign responsibilities for the party's components. Meet as often as needed before the party and build your volunteer support.

Publicize, Publicize, and Publicize!

If you are thinking of closing a local street for a block party, contact the Chesterfield County Police Department.

### Traditional Community Events

- **National Night Out.** The National Association of Town Watch (NATW) is a nonprofit, crime prevention organization which works in cooperation with thousands of crime watch groups and law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Since 1981, NATW has been dedicated to the development, growth and maintenance of organized crime and drug prevention programs nationwide. National Night Out, 'America's Night Out Against Crime,' was introduced by the Association in 1984.

While the traditional 'lights on' and front porch vigils remain a part of the celebration, activities have expanded considerably over the years to include block parties, cookouts, parades, visits from police, festivals, neighborhood walks, safety fairs, contests, rallies and meetings.

[www.nationalnightout.org](http://www.nationalnightout.org)

- **National Neighborhood Day.** National Neighborhood Day was established as an annual day to recognize and reinforce the relationships that are the fabric of our communities. It is a day of simple gatherings of neighbors to re-ignite friendships; welcome new neighbors; catch up on each others' families, interests and needs; and share food, fellowship and fun.

Third Sunday in September every year  
[www.neighborhoodday.org](http://www.neighborhoodday.org)

**What are some tips for successful fundraising?** You do not need to raise funds to begin organizing your community. However, you will need money to organize large numbers of people, or to launch a large action program. If you decide to fundraise, be careful. You can lose money, and divert time and resources away from your objectives. If you decide to raise money, here are some suggestions:

**Individual contributions** – Asking for contributions from local people turns fundraising into community building. People become more attached to groups, projects, and places they feel they own. Money can come from memberships, voluntary subscriptions to newsletters, collections at meetings, door-to-door canvassing, planned giving, memorial giving, and direct mail. Some groups make donations tax deductible by registering as a charity with the federal government.

**In-kind donations** – Seek in-kind or non-monetary contributions. Examples include donations of printing, equipment, furniture, space, services, food, and time. Local businesses respond well to requests for in-kind donations.

**Auctions** – Consider an auction. Neighbors can donate babysitting on a Friday night, chocolate cake for eight, or three hours of house repairs. At a community party, your auctioneer sells every treasure to the highest bidder.

**Grants from governments & foundations** – With so many potential sources of assistance, half the challenge is figuring out who supports what. After identifying a possible grant, find out about application procedures. Receiving a grant usually requires writing a good proposal. Look for matching grants. In many cases governments will contribute a dollar for every dollar raised by citizens.

**Bake sales** – Bake sales can be a very effective method for raising funds for your community. Food provides a good crowd-gathering event. Bake sales can also present an opportunity for displaying culinary aptitudes for children and adults alike. Children can help with the baking and selling of the goods.

**Garage/Yard sales** – Consider an annual weekend community-wide garage or yard sale. The proceeds from your community-wide sale go to your organization’s treasury. Chesterfield County Code allows two consecutive days for garage sales every six months.

**Community Cookbook** – Everyone needs a cookbook! Gather together many different recipes from neighbors and add stories about what the recipe means to the cook, where the recipe came from, and so forth. The cookbook doesn't need to be fancy, just print it up on the computer and have it bound at a local copy shop. The first couple of pages can be dedicated to talking about your organization.

**T-shirt Sales** – Many community organizations have their own t-shirts. T-shirt sales can be quite profitable as well as a great way to promote your group. They can be sold through a variety of ways: at every fundraising event that you hold or maybe you have friends/family who work in offices that can distribute the t-shirts.

**What is the best way to work with volunteers?** Neighbors and volunteers remain active in their organization when they feel they are contributing positively to the community and when they are recognized for the effort they make within the organization. People join community groups to meet people, to have fun, to learn new skills, to pursue an interest, and to link their lives to some higher purpose. They leave if they don't find what they are looking for. Citizens groups need to ask themselves more often: What benefits do we provide? At what cost to members? How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs? Here are some items to keep in mind when working with volunteers:



**Most people volunteer if:**

- They have information about the organization and its purpose.
- They identify with the objectives of the organization.
- They know what is expected of them in time and effort.
- They know that their interests and abilities will be effectively utilized.

**How can I prevent volunteer burnout?** Volunteer burnout can be devastating to the productivity of a neighborhood organization. In order

to keep your volunteers energetic, creative and enthusiastic, keep the following volunteer burnout tips in mind:

- Develop coherent operating plans.
- Set realistic objectives.
- Prepare job descriptions or task outlines so people know what is expected of them.
- Recognize different abilities and tolerance levels in handing out work assignments. Do not let one person take on everything.

- Remind people that the quality of their work is important, not the quantity.
- Organize fun events. This will create a social network of friends and neighbors and give people an opportunity to have a good time.

**What are some innovative ways to reward volunteers?**

- Certificates of appreciation.
- Informal celebrations or gift presentations at meetings.
- Thank-you notes. Send a copy to the individual's employer or family to let them know about that person's achievements.
- Take pictures of events / achievements. Framed copies of pictures make terrific awards.
- Recognize individual special needs. If someone in your group is ill, a get-well card affirms the volunteer is valuable and missed.
- Use media sources to announce achievements. Invite media photographers to recognition events.
- Consider gift certificates or a scholarship to a conference or workshop.
- Prepare personal profiles or articles in your newsletter or other media sources.
- Plan a formal recognition party for members and families to celebrate the group's success and acknowledge individual volunteers.
- Do not forget the value of very simple thank you gestures.



## COMMUNICATIONS

**What are some helpful hints for a community newsletter?** Newsletters can be simple or complex. No matter what format you choose, newsletters help keep everyone informed of concerns, meetings, activities, and other important issues. Here are a few things to think through before you publish:

**P**roduction cost can be a significant factor in what type of newsletter you produce. Check with a local print shop for ideas for less costly newsletters. You may want to contact local businesses to help sponsor the newsletter or charge a fee for advertising in the newsletter. Email newsletters are easy and inexpensive to distribute if all your intended readers have computers connected to the internet.

**U**sually, a team effort works best when producing newsletters. However, someone should coordinate the efforts of the group and edit the newsletter. Your organization should appoint a committee and chairperson to be responsible for producing the newsletter.

**B**y enlisting the participation of as many members as possible, you can appoint members of different committees to write articles and assign reporters to collect information from authors or research topics for the different newsletter articles.

**L**ike many other community groups, neighborhood organizations find newsletters to be great tools to communicate with neighbors about current activities of the organization.

**I**dentify someone who has a personal computer. You may save money by producing the layout yourselves.

**S**elect committee members who are skilled in writing and editing.

**S**ave clear deadlines for submitting all articles, editing, printing, and distributing each issue of the newsletter.

**What is the ideal length for a newsletter?** The length of your newsletter depends on both your budget and the topics your group considers important. A good newsletter can be as short as one page. After settling on a length, structure your newsletter by organizing it into regular features or columns. Some regular newsletter items may include:

Children's Column

Committee Reports

Editorials

Holiday Activities

Job listings

Letter from the President

Neighborhood News

Neighborhood Watch Report

Organization meeting places/ times

Personal announcements

Upcoming events

Updates on local issues

Volunteer Acknowledgements

**Cutting costs on Newsletter Production.** 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; try offering free ad space. You may also want to sell ads in the newsletter itself to defray your costs. Here are some possible revenue sources:

- Talk to local merchants; they are often happy to reach out to members of the community through community newsletters.
- Stress the interdependence of commercial and residential areas in a neighborhood -- how the health of one depends on the health of the other.
- You may want to offer special rates for larger ads – e.g., \$10.00 for a quarter-page ad, \$17.50 for half a page.
- Encourage readers to patronize your advertisers and to tell merchants they saw their ad in your newsletter.

- Electronic newsletter distributed by e-mail may work for your organization.

**Successful Newsletter Distribution.** Before you reproduce your newsletter, make a list of all the people who need to get it. This could include all members of your group, other members of the community, elected officials, local institutions (such as county/city agencies, schools, community board members, local development organizations), and local press. This will tell you how many copies to print. Once printed, newsletters can be distributed door-to-door, mailed, or electronically by e-mail. Here are some successful distribution tips:

- Be consistent. If your newsletter comes at the same time each month, people will begin to expect and anticipate it. Some groups issue newsletters quarterly.
- Call a meeting of building and/or block captains. Ask them to distribute the newsletters and to make sure everyone gets a copy.
- Rather than leave newsletters in lobbies of large apartment building, try to get residents to slip a copy under each door.
- Some community groups hire neighborhood youth to distribute the papers on the block.
- Ask local merchants, if you can leave newsletters on the counter for people to pick up. This is a good way of reaching out to potential new members.
- If you mail your newsletter, be sure to figure postage expenses into your budget.
- If your mailing list is large and speedy delivery is not a concern, you may want to save money by sorting your labels into strict zip code order and mailing bulk rate; call the Post Office for full details.

**What are some tips for preparing Flyers, Posters and Meeting Notices?** Below are some guidelines to maximize your promotional and communication efforts via flyers, meeting notices, and correspondence for your neighborhood:

- When producing your printed information flyers and materials, be sure to answer the basics **Who, What, When** and **How** in all printed materials.
- Choose your words carefully – less is better when designing flyers and notices. Be sure your printed materials are easy to read and draw the reader’s attention.
- Talk with other neighborhood organizations for examples.
- Be sure materials are proofread by someone with good grammar skills.
- Mandatory associations have a legal responsibility to keep residents informed and must produce notices in a timely fashion. Check your articles of incorporation and bylaws for more information

**Why survey your community?** There are infinite reasons to conduct survey research in your community. You may need to know what issues are impacting your neighbors the most. Is it traffic, noise, or lack of recreational facilities? Survey research is one method for documenting what the concerns and needs of the neighborhood are. It is also used as a method of public outreach and involvement. Survey research is a major part of neighborhood planning since it is a grassroots form of obtaining public participation and input.

**How many kinds of surveys are there?** There are three different types of survey questionnaires:

- The mail survey also known as the self-administered questionnaire.
- The interview survey that requires face to face reading and recording of answers.
- The telephone survey that is administered via telephone.

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## WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**How can your group work effectively with local government?** A successful community organization is one, which understands the “ins and outs” of local government. Effective partnerships between community organizations and local government are essential both to the success of the organization and the responsiveness of local government to the needs of its communities. Following are some tips for working with local government:

- Set your goals. What is most important for your community organization to accomplish in order to maintain livability?
- Know your issues and do your homework. Find out who is affected and whom the appropriate people are that can help. Become familiar with the structure and purpose of your local government.
- Become acquainted with procedure. Attend meetings of your public officials; understand how they operate and the pressures they are under.
- Allow your officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is through meetings, phone calls, letters or emails.
- Keep you public officials informed and do not surprise them with unexpected actions. Give your officials written copies of your concerns and follow up with letters.
- Work on all levels. First, contact the person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials.
- Make it clear that you represent a group. Identify the name of your group and its purpose and ensure that you have the group’s authorization before acting.
- Get solid answers. Don’t be satisfied with vague responses. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on.
- Be open to suggestions. Take them seriously and follow up. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in the same direction.
- Follow up a discussion with a memo summarizing the items discussed and outcome. Check periodically on the status of the action to see if decisions are being made.
- Keep the neighborhood informed about proceedings with local officials.

**How can I start a Neighborhood Watch group?** The best crime prevention device ever invented is a good neighbor. The security steps you and your neighbors take, as a group is just as important as the things you would do individually.

This joint effort is called Neighborhood Watch. It is easy to organize a Neighborhood Watch in your area. Coordinate a date, time, and location for your neighborhood's initial meeting with a Crime Prevention Officer from the Chesterfield County Police Department. During this initial meeting, the Officer will offer tips on home security, crime awareness, and how to report suspicious activities. Find the Crime Prevention Officer assigned to your area by calling Crime Prevention at (804) 318-8699.



**Does Chesterfield County regulate homeowners associations?** Chesterfield County, as with almost all other local governments, has no power to enforce or regulate the restrictive covenants or proceedings of mandatory homeowners associations. Restrictive covenants, also known as homeowner's covenants, or deed restrictions are private land use controls included as part of the property title when you purchase your home. A covenant restricts the use of the property and is enforceable usually by other property owners in the same subdivision who are part of the homeowners association Executive

Board. In many instances, a management company may run your homeowners association.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your homeowners association, you should first familiarize yourself with the documents of your association, including Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation and Covenants, Deeds and Restrictions. A copy of these documents can be obtained from the Chesterfield County Clerks Office. If research does not answer your question or address your concern, you should contact a real estate attorney or a title company to request a search of the public records for all recorded documents for your community. If the associations' articles of incorporation or bylaws have not been recorded in the public records, a copy of the articles of incorporation can be obtained from the Virginia State Corporation Commission.