

Toolkit Goals and Objectives

This toolkit has been prepared to assist individuals who wish to ensure both they and their neighbors are prepared to respond to emergencies of varying degrees. The tools provided here are meant as a guide to simplify the process and maximize your results.

The focus of the first phase of the emergency preparedness process is on preparing individual households. However, it is important to come together as neighbors at this point to help one another prepare and in the process build and strengthen the relationships that can be so crucial in the throes of even the most localized emergency.

Please keep in touch and forward feedback to Local 20/20. As you move forward, keep in mind that we too are moving forward with toolkits focusing on Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness and Neighborhood Sustainability Projects. Your feedback along the way will make this effort all the more successful for you, your neighbors and this wonderful community we all share.

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Best Practices for Successful Neighborhood Meetings

The suggestions presented here are a compilation of feedback from those who have experience in neighborhood organization efforts. Use what works for you and improvise as you see fit to best meet the needs of your unique neighborhood. This is likely to be the most dynamic portion of this toolkit in that it should evolve with ideas and suggestions received through your feedback.

Meeting location: Establish a place in or near your neighborhood where you can meet consistently for at least the first six sessions. This place should be cost free and accessible by all. Consider schools, churches, community halls, businesses or a willing participant's living room.

Consistent meeting day and time: Once you have established the desired frequency of your meetings, work with your initial group to find a day and time that works for the majority of participants; e.g. 2nd Tues at 7:00 PM or 3rd Saturday at 10:00 AM. This will greatly minimize the need for communications regarding scheduling, as well as encourage people to save the time on their calendars and to know they can attend the following month if they need to miss a meeting.

Physical room setup: Organize the chairs so that people face each other. This will help equalize the energy of all the participants and makes it easier to establish the familiarity and relationship. At each meeting, especially for large neighborhoods where or groups where neighbors do not know each other well, have people introduce themselves at each meeting. This introduction should include where they live and who else is part of their household.

Establish neighborhood identity: It may take a few meetings before you have a good sense for the actual boundaries of your neighborhood. Once that is established, let the group determine a name that best reflects the community they represent.

Track your membership and participation: Have a sign-in list available at each meeting. Collect contact information when people join the group and have returning participants sign-in so everyone will know who was present to hear information or make decisions.

Establish and communicate meeting focus or agenda: How this is done will depend on the process you've decided to use. For instance, if you are using the Get Emergency Prepared DVD's or website, you can simply agree to follow the class schedule. If you prefer to use other tools as needed, you will need to agree on the topics and communicate that plan to better ensure expectations are met. Each meeting should include time to follow up on items carried over from previous meetings.

Provide a safe place to express concerns: To further motivate future participation, set aside time at each meeting to allow people to express their concerns and interests. It is best not to belabor issues as everyone will have different priorities. It is critical to allow for differences of opinion, needs and priorities. If you seek to reach consensus, people will feel pressured and alienated if they differ from the prevailing attitude. Seek to normalize the differences and allow space for it in your neighborhood. The people who support each other's concerns will naturally seek out each other. It is prudent to not politicize any issues you face as a neighborhood as people who disagree may not choose to speak up....they may just not return.

Share leadership: Not only for the facilitation of the meetings, but also in terms of any work or tasks that need to be accomplished between meetings. Clearly delineated and decentralized leadership for tasks and follow-through fosters the likelihood that people will feel important and useful to the group. This also enhances the group's ability to survive in the absence of its original organizer. Actively seek involvement from anyone willing to become a leader.

Communication: Actively plan a system of communication, whether via phone, email, door-to-door or newsletters. Consider running a short ad in the local newspaper. You may wish to designate someone to accumulate a running contact list of attendees. Getting people to the initial meetings is the first, and perhaps greatest, hurdle in neighborhood organizing efforts. Communication is the key. Consider recruiting a number of people to notify a set number of their immediate neighbors. Posting signs at the natural entrance/exit to your neighborhood is another option utilizing shared responsibility.

Expect some resistance: Be prepared for people to feel resistance to attending, meeting new folks, sharing personal information or getting involved. Don't get discouraged. A continued presence and commitment on the part of a small core group will evoke the curiosity and interest of more folks over time. Be true to your own desire and commitment to establish stronger neighborhood connection and others will be inspired. Find ways to reach out to potential new members before meetings. It may be a good idea to introduce a sense of fun through a neighborhood picnic, potluck or party.

Step by Step Guidelines

Step One – Identify your neighborhood boundaries

- Determine the optimal boundaries for your neighborhood
 - Ideal size for any one group is 8-10 households
 - Start bigger if you can and sub-divide as new organizers are identified
 - Use available map

Step Two – Establish a meeting time and place

- Locate possible meeting place(s)
 - No cost
 - Consistently available for future meetings
 - Preferably within your neighborhood boundaries
 - Possible venues: school, church, library, willing neighbor's home, etc.

Step Three – Survey your neighbors

- Introduce the organization concept and invite neighbors to kick-off meeting
 - Example 3A provides a letter of introduction template
- Determine who is interested in participating
 - Example 3B provides a survey template

Step Four – Conduct your first meeting

- Provide a sign-in sheet at this and all meetings
 - Use the Neighborhood Sign In Sheet
- Arrange seating in circle
 - Easier to establish familiarity and relationships
- Have everyone introduce themselves
 - Where they live and who else lives in their household
- Revisit the reason(s) for organizing
 - As addressed in your letter of introduction
 - Solicit feedback from others on their goals and vision for the group
- Explore options to get each household emergency prepared (see Resource section)
 - Work through the Jefferson County Handbook as a group
 - Attend the Get Emergency Prepared class
 - As a group
 - Representatives who bring the sessions back to the group
 - Using the DVD's from the first (2006) session
 - Using the www.getemergencyprepared.com website as a guide
- Determine future meeting frequency
 - At least monthly to maintain momentum
- Determine a consistent meeting day and time
 - Helps minimize need for communication and drives greater participation
 - Dovetail with the Dept. Of Emergency Management Neighborhood bi-monthly meetings and/or the Get Emergency Prepared monthly class

Step 5 – Get Emergency Prepared!

- Conduct regularly scheduled meetings
 - Use the format and timing determined in the first meeting
 - Refer to 'Best Practices' in the Resource Section
- Utilize your community resources for support
 - Let us know if/when you run into speed-bumps or road-blocks
- Send representative to the bi-monthly Department of Emergency Management neighborhood meetings
- Consider advancing to full Neighborhood Emergency Preparation once your households are prepared
 - Contact Jefferson Department of Emergency Management for details