



Partnering with Communities  
to create a better  
Prince William County

## Establishing Partnerships with Neighborhood Businesses To Maximize Neighborhood Improvement

The business community can be a valuable partner to your neighborhood group or association. Finding ways to involve local businesses requires a bit of creativity and the ability to “sell” your ideas to businesses. Even those who are timid about approaching a potential business partner can be heartened by the fact that a partnership proposal to a business is an offer to improve their business; you’re not just asking for a handout. This article presents some suggestions of how to involve a business in your community efforts. Know that the rewards of your efforts will be greater than results produced by either your organization or the business alone.

### **Identify specific ways that you want the business involved in your community**

Before visiting the business, develop long- and short-term plans for your community. Many people are versed in strategic planning and can assist your organization or committee. Once you know the needs and assets within your community, you’ll be able to determine partnership opportunities for local businesses.

Some ways that a business may partner with your neighborhood group or association are:

- Assist the group with the creation of a strategic plan, if one does not exist
- Host community meetings at the place of business
- Serve on association committees or as neighborhood group leadership
- Sponsor events or provide door prizes or coupons
- Assist with a web site or sponsor a printed newsletter
- Provide supplies, volunteers, refreshments or donations for project days
- Take an active role with the residents’ Neighborhood Watch
- Finance individual initiatives of the community group
- Participate in planning and evaluation efforts with the group or association

### **Find the right person within the business to contact**

Some businesses are large enough to have a community liaison, but many do not. Within your neighborhood group or association, ask if anyone knows employees in the organization, or knows someone who knows someone. Using the personal connection, explain the partnership opportunity and ask who would be in the best position to make the decision on the involvement of the business. See if the person would approach the decision-maker to set up a meeting. If no connections exist, you have found an additional motivation for the business to establish long-term relationships within the community.

### **Present the idea to the business**

As part of a community, a local business thrives or deteriorates along with the surrounding neighborhood. Keep this in mind as you prepare presentation materials that represent your vision of the community. Offer short-and long-term opportunities for the business to be a part of the neighborhood improvement. List other businesses or note the numbers of members and any achievements. People cannot resist joining a success story. Be able to communicate personal commitment and enthusiasm while being professional.

### **Appeal to the business with benefits to be gained**

Include the benefits to the business in your presentation and written materials. Some benefits you may want to mention are:

- Customers for the business come from the community
- Residents are potential employees
- A pleasing neighborhood appearance attracts customers
- Crime prevention efforts of Neighborhood Watch can protect the assets of the business
- Local schools provide the education and training for the workforce
- Employees of businesses involved in community improvement feel increased pride in their employer, impacting productivity and retention
- Recognition and publicity from neighborhood improvement partnerships advertise the business

### **Closing the “deal”**

Like any business deal, you'll want to leave contact information for the decision-makers. Ask when a decision may be made. Don't hesitate to make a follow-up call a few days after the decision date, on a slow business day. If the business is not interested, indicate your willingness to maintain a relationship anyway. Good relations will pay off in the long run.

### **Recognize your business partners**

Be aware of why your business partners with your community and respond to that need. Involve the business in your community group's decision-making. Because recognition is one of the major benefits to the business, you'll want to make it a priority to give your business partners publicity for their contributions to your community improvement initiatives. Note the business' contributions in press releases, create and frame a certificate of appreciation which can be displayed in the business, place appropriate signage at project sites, encourage neighbors to patronize the business or nominate the business for a community involvement award – the ideas are endless.

A partnership is a strategic alliance based on mutual understanding and obligations, trust and equality. Treat your business partners accordingly and enjoy the rewards to your community.



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