

Creating a Neighborhood Newsletter

The Office of Neighborhood Services for the City of Iowa City has funds available to neighborhood associations to print and mail newsletter and meeting notices. Establishing an active well-informed neighborhood association depends largely upon the ability of the neighbors to communicate, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this program.

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Content and Communication Style Issues

Why should a neighborhood association produce a newsletter?

Communication within the neighborhood is necessary to:

1. Gain support for and participation in a new neighborhood association
2. Keep neighbors informed about meeting, activities, and issues
3. Provide assurance that the neighborhood association is still active and who the primary contacts are
4. Recruit and obtain new participants in the organization

What specific things can a newsletter do?

To a certain extent this depends on the goals and objectives of your neighborhood group. Some neighborhood groups focus on helping resolve problems that threaten or disrupt their neighborhood—traffic issues, crime, and development issues—while other neighborhood groups may be more involved in building community or getting neighbors to know each other.

Whatever the case, a newsletter should:

- Inform and educate neighbors about neighborhood issues or City issues that impact the neighborhood.
- Build support and awareness of the neighborhood and what it has to offer.
- Notify neighbors of important issues or events and meetings.
- Encourage neighbors to become involved and participate in neighborhood events and/or get to know one another.
- Spread the word about important accomplishments of the neighborhood organization or good work done by individual members of the neighborhood.
- Acknowledge the work of neighborhood volunteers.
- Introduce neighbors to each other and to the board of your organization.
- Report on neighborhood meetings.
- Increase neighborhood pride and awareness of the collective values of the neighborhood.
- Provide a forum for neighbors to communicate their concerns or suggestions for improving the neighborhood.

What makes a good newsletter?

A neighborhood newsletter should be *efficient, informative, and friendly*.

Every day people are inundated with so much information and direct mail and e-mail. If you are lucky, most folks will have just enough time to scan the newsletter quickly. With this in mind you should write and design the newsletter so that readers can find out the who, what, where, when and why of newsletter articles without a lot of effort.

Communication “basics”

- Aim for a simple, clear style.
- Avoid long sentences and paragraphs.
- Keep the vocabulary conversational and relatively jargon or slang free. No one should have to ask what something means, who they can call, or where they should go for more information.
- Avoid slang terms or abbreviations or, if you do use them, explain what they mean.
- Always use complete names (first and last) of people reported on in the newsletter.
- Whenever possible provide contact information or other source of more information on a topic.

Neighborhood Newsletter Content Guidelines ***Neighborhood Newsletter Content Guidelines***

Because the neighborhood newsletter is paid for with public funds, there are some limitations on what can be printed in the newsletter. The guidelines established for newsletters state:

Because public funds pay for the printing and mailing of the newsletters, certain restrictions apply to the content of the newsletter. Iowa State Code (56.12A) restricts the use of public funds for “political purposes.” Political purposes are defined to include campaigning for public office, support of ballot issues, and lobbying for/against a particular issue that is before the City Council or may reasonably be expected to come before the City Council or other board or commission.

The City provides financial assistance for the neighborhood newsletters when the content is primarily informational, factual, neutral and not intended to sway opinion regarding political issues. The newsletters may report a position taken by the Neighborhood Association Board or even report the Board’s urging of concurrence with that position, but cannot advocate a particular position. Opinions may be expressed on non-political issues.

The City cannot provide funding for newsletters that contain commercial advertising (private ads) or political advertising. Newsletters may include ads for non-profit, charitable organizations and also letters to the editor that are not of a political nature. Neighborhood associations that would like to include political information or commercial advertising are encouraged to develop fundraising techniques that will allow them to print and distribute their own neighborhood newsletters so that the above restrictions will not apply.

The content of neighborhood newsletters and the application of these Newsletter Guidelines will be determined by the City Attorney’s Office.

It is important to keep in mind that, for some people, the newsletter may be their first introduction to your neighborhood organization or their only contact with it. If

information is incomplete or unclear, or everything is reported in a joking or sarcastic manner, a new neighbor may be turned off or feel excluded. Whenever you mention an event, special service, or neighborhood opportunity always include dates (including the day of the week), locations, times, and contact info. Don't assume that neighbors will recognize or recall this news from a previous notice, newsletter, or other source.

Finally, even if your neighborhood is facing the worst of times, try to include something positive in the newsletter. You need to give people a reason to feel committed and supportive of the neighborhood.

Some Examples

BAD: Our fearless leader Nicholson is rallying the troops for another park clean-up. The event is scheduled for 9:00 am on August 2 at Greentree Park. Be there or be square. Dress appropriately.

[What's wrong? While the above paragraph is friendly and informal, it is also incomplete and ambiguous. Who is Nicholson? What does the cleanup involve or require? What is appropriate dress?]

BETTER: Neighborhood President Jeff Nicholson (our fearless leader) is rounding up volunteers for the annual clean-up in Greentree Park. Come help weed, pick up trash, or clear brush from 9 am to noon on Saturday, August 2. Meet at the gazebo. We recommend wearing gloves, long sleeves, and pants. Trash bags and tools will be provided. Be there or be square. If you have questions, call Jeff at 333-3333.

BAD: Crime Spree in Clifton Neighborhood

A rash of burglaries has occurred this month in our neighborhood. There have been 6 burglaries and more than \$7,000 worth of stolen property. There is no telling where these criminals will strike next so everyone should be on alert. Lock your doors and call the police if you see anything suspicious.

[What's wrong? The title and the tenor of the article makes it sound like people are in danger without providing much helpful information.]

BETTER: Burglaries Reported in Neighborhood

The Police Department is investigating six burglaries in the 800 and 900 blocks of S. Main Street. All took place during the past month. In each case burglars entered through unlocked garage doors. More than \$7000 worth of bikes, tools, and fishing equipment was stolen. Police believe that all of these thefts happened during daylight hours, probably during the business day. Keep your property safe and secure. Always lock your doors—even when you are at home. If you hear or see anything suspicious, call 911. If you would like additional information, call Neighborhood Watch chairwoman Eileen Smith at 222-3333.

Who should write a newsletter?

It helps to have someone experienced with written communication. This does not mean you need a journalist to do the work, just someone comfortable communicating in writing. It can be very effective to have your newsletter editor solicit articles from other members. If Joe Smith is organizing a garden walk, perhaps he can write a 2 or 3 paragraph description of the event for you. If Betty Brown is in charge of your neighborhood watch, she could write up some safety tips for an article. If the folks involved in the event are relaying the details, it makes it easier for the editor, and more people get to participate in the newsletter process!

If you have enough willing volunteers it helps to have a newsletter committee. This can be just 2 or three people who divide up the various responsibilities from writing the newsletter to designing it, to proofing, copying, labeling, and getting it in the mail. It is always a good idea to have a second or third person read through a newsletter for typos and overall clarity.

Getting the Word Out (Distributing the Newsletter)

Are you getting your newsletter to all the people who might benefit from it? The mailing list generated through the Office of Neighborhood Services is based on the City's water billing database. Properties that are occupied by residents that are not responsible for paying their water bills will not be on that list. Many older multi-unit apartment buildings and rooming houses fall in this category. The mailing list would not include most absentee landlords. Any additions to the mailing list are welcome. If you would like a copy of the list to see who is on it, you can be provided one easily. Most businesses, churches, schools are included on the list.

Anyone who cares about your neighborhood or who can influence the future of your neighborhood may also be included on the mailing list. Check with local businesses to see if you can leave a supply of newsletters on their counter for people to pick up

Copies of your newsletter are also be sent to the City Council members, City Department Head and other appropriate staff and most press (newspaper, TV, radio, etc.) by the Office of Neighborhood Services.

It is important to get your newsletter out at regular intervals. If your newsletter comes every other month or each season, people will begin to expect it and look forward to it. People will also begin to think of the newsletter as an outlet for information and may contribute articles or announcements for you to include.

Solicit Feedback

One of the best ways to see if your newsletter is having an impact is to solicit feedback. Always include a message in your newsletter inviting people to ask questions or make suggestions and provide the contact information for your newsletter editor.

It is always a good idea to remind people how to participate in the neighborhood association or how they can contribute their time or talent to the neighborhood.

How do you know if your newsletter is effective?

- The information gets out.
- Participation at key events goes up.
- Neighborhood leaders and other contacts get phone calls.
- You hear people say, "I read about it in the newsletter."

Remember that the number of neighbors at a general meeting does not reflect the number of neighbors reading the newsletter. For *many* neighbors, reading the newsletter is their only form of participation.

Design and Layout Issues

Layout of the Newsletter

Unless you have an experienced graphic designer to lay out your newsletter, keep it simple. The cleaner and clearer your layout the easier it is to get the information across.

Your main concern should be where to place all the information. Here are a few tips:

1. Create a standard format that allows you to display information in a consistent manner from one newsletter to the next. This will also allow you to transfer layout responsibilities from one person to the next without dramatically changing the look of your newsletter.
2. Put the most newsworthy or important articles or information on the front page.
3. Meeting or event announcements or brief reminders of important dates can also go on the mailing panel or outside page so that readers see this info without even opening the newsletter.
4. Always include the names of your board members and their contact information in one consistent location in your newsletter. If board members have particular responsibilities, list these as well.
5. Contact information for the newsletter editor and how to contribute to the newsletter should also have a regular location.
6. Short listings or announcements of meetings can be set off in boxes or with graphics.
7. If the City is paying to print or mail your newsletter you must always include the following disclaimer statement in your newsletter: "Your neighborhood newsletter is produced by your neighborhood association. The Office of Neighborhood Services of the City of Iowa City prints and mails the newsletters but is not responsible for the quality or the content, although newsletters must meet the approved neighborhood newsletter guidelines." A good place for this is at the bottom of your front page.

A few notes about the type . . .

1. Keep your type styles/font consistent. Two or three typefaces or fonts are all you need.
2. Keep the size of the text type and the spacing and alignment consistent throughout the newsletter unless you are trying to call special attention to one particular item or article.
3. Use fanciful or unusual typefaces or fonts sparingly and be sure they are readable. A simple, albeit bold, typeface is always best when you are trying to convey important information that you absolutely want/need people to read. Save script and other non-standard or funky fonts for text that is non-essential.
4. Unless you have an experienced designer who is committed for laying out your newsletter for some years, keep the fonts and the overall

design of the newsletter simple so that the newsletter design can be transferred to a new volunteer when the time comes.

Printing and Mailing

Process and Schedule for Printing and Mailing

The City uses PIP Printing for its printing services. PIP can produce just about any type of document within a few days—although unusual orders might require a little extra time.

You may provide your newsletter for PIP as hard copy (printed page) or, for clearer printing, in electronic form (on disk). PDF's are the best, but PIP can work with all major software—Word, PageMaker, InDesign, Quark, etc. If you are NOT sending the electronic file for your newsletter as a PDF you will need to include files for all the fonts you use, as well as files for illustrations, photographs, etc. Please note that photo's are best if they are NOT saved as low resolution JPEGs.

The following schedule should help you plan for your next newsletter:

Deliver a master copy (hard copy) of your newsletter to Marcia Klingaman at the Office of Neighborhood Services. The newsletter will be reviewed to comply with the Newsletter Guidelines (see above). Once it is approved the newsletter will be sent to the printer.

Under most circumstances, the printer needs 48 hours to produce a newsletter once an order is placed. The printer will accept hard copies or electronic versions of your newsletter layout. If you are providing you newsletter electronically, please check with the Office of Neighborhood Services for specifications on how to prepare your files.

Be sure to specify the paper color you wish to use. It is best to be consistent with your color choice so that people learn to recognize your newsletter.

The Office of Neighborhood Services will develop a mailing list for you and print mailing labels for the newsletters. Please note that your neighborhood association will be responsible for applying mailing labels and delivering the mailing to the Post Office.

If the newsletter mailing is more than 200 pieces, it will be sent through the Presorted Rate Mailing process. Directions for organizing a presorted mailing are provided below. This process allows newsletters to be sent out at a substantially lower cost than standard postage. Your neighborhood association will be asked to

organize the presorted mailing and deliver the completed newsletter mailing to the Iowa City Post Office located at 400 South Clinton Street. Most often, these mailings go out the same day they are delivered to the Post office and are typically delivered the next day. *Please keep in mind that Presorted mailings may not go out on the day they are brought to the Post Office. The Post Office is only required to send them out within 4 business days.*

PIP Printing can fold your newsletter in a variety of ways. Most of the folding is done by machine although some multi page versions may require handwork and therefore, additional time. If your newsletter requires some extensive handwork, other options might be pursued to keep the costs down. Newsletters that are several pages in length can be folded and stapled in center to produce a booklet format. An 11 x 17 paper can also be folded down to 8 ½ x 5 ½ for a modified tabloid (newspaper) look.

NEWSLETTER FORMAT

If the newsletter is to be mailed, it is important that the return address and space for mailing labels and the Presorted stamp be included in a specific area of the newsletter. The presorted stamp must be similar to the following examples:

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
IOWA CITY, IOWA
PERMIT NO. 155

PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
IOWA CITY, IOWA
PERMIT NO. 155

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
IOWA CITY, IOWA
PERMIT NO. 155

PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
IOWA CITY, IOWA
PERMIT NO. 155

If your newsletter is to be printed on 8 1/2 x 11 (folded down to 8½ x 5½) or 11 x 17 (folded in quarters to 8½ x 5½), please design the outside page to resemble the following:

(open edge goes at the top)

Neighborhood Assn.
Return Address
Goes Here

Rate Stamp
Goes Here

Mailing Label Goes Here

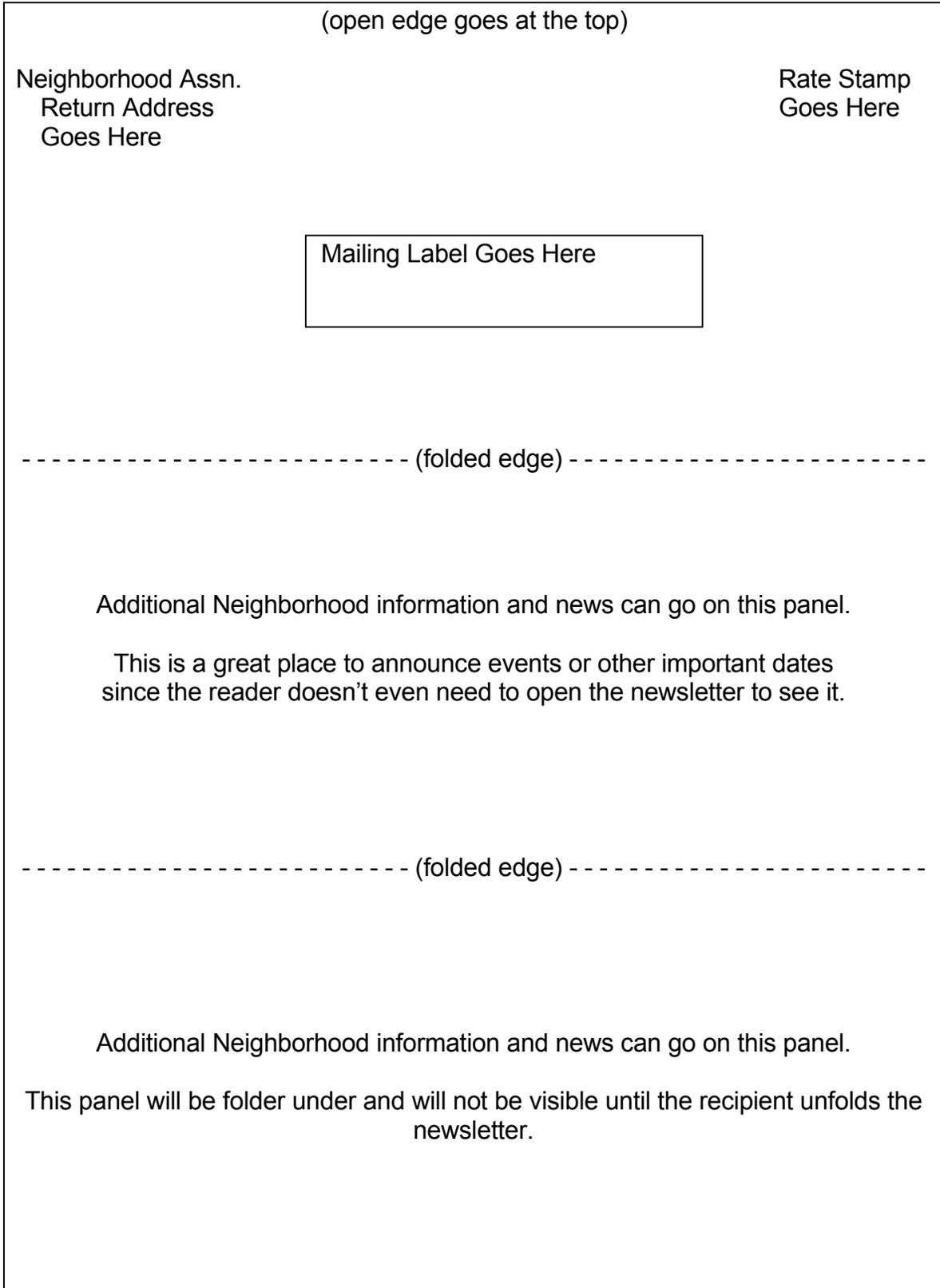
----- (folded edge) -----

Additional Neighborhood information and news can go on this panel.

This is a great place to announce events or other important dates since the reader doesn't even need to open the newsletter to see it.

An 8 ½ x 11 mailer may be folded in half to 8 ½ x 5 ½ to meet letter-size requirements.

An 8½ x 14 mailer will need to be folder into thirds (8 ½ x 4 2/3) to be mailed at the letter rate. Design your outside page to resemble the following:



What should you use as a return address?

It is best to use an address of a Neighborhood Association member: the President or Newsletter Editor, etc. Some Neighborhood Associations have also developed a logo or letterhead, which can be incorporated into their newsletter/return address design.

You may use the Office of Neighborhood Services for your return address if you wish:

Office of Neighborhood Services
City of Iowa City
410 E. Washington Street
Iowa City, IA 52240

How to Prepare Presorted Mail

Preparing a neighborhood newsletter mailing is really very simple as long as the zip codes all start with "522". If there are only a few pieces that are outside the "522" area, they can be sent out regular mail and presort the rest:

- Count the labels *before* you label the newsletters – note the number on a piece of paper.
- After labeling newsletters, band them up with rubber bands in piles no deeper than 4" – *long ways first then short ways*
- Put D stickers on the lower left corner of each pile.
- Fill out * boxes on *both* copies of the Post Office form that has been provided to you.
- Deliver to PO – Bulk Rate Office (back loading dock area) by 4:00 PM - *they are closed between 12:00 and 1:30 PM and not open on Saturday.*

If you have any questions about the neighborhood newsletter process, please feel free to contact Marcia Klingaman at 356-5237 or Marcia-Klingaman@iowa-city.org.