



Because life is better when we belong



COMMUNITY CONNECTOR KIT

Ready to start your own neighbourhood group? This kit contains all the information you need to get started.

www.neighbourhoodconnect.org.au
hello@neighbourhoodconnect.org.au

Find us on:





© Neighbourhood Connect Inc 2019. ABN: 61477565710 ARBN: 629 671 389

Authors: Irene Opper and Maureen Maher

Desktop publishing by Sonya Murphy – Graphic Designer. For all design enquiries Sonya can be contacted at info@adala.com.au or www.adalagroup.com.au.

This kit can be freely shared for community and educational (not for profit) purposes.

Disclaimer: The ideas and suggestions in this kit and on our website are examples only. Individuals are responsible for taking adequate safety precautions, obtaining relevant permissions and observing any relevant laws or regulations related to their activities. Neighbourhood Connect takes no responsibility for the activities of neighbour groups.



The Neighbourhood Connect Project

Neighbourhood Connect is a national project to foster local neighbourhood community building. Our vision is that every Australian has the opportunity to be connected in a neighbourhood group and enjoy feeling part of a community. We want to create a connected neighbourhoods movement across Australia so that people feel happier, safer and more supported.

We make it easy for you to kick off a gathering of neighbours, by providing free resources—ideas, examples, tools—plus encouragement and support along the way. Groups are informal, fun and can connect over a range of activities: chats over coffee, or a meal, sharing stories and music, organising clean ups and gardening, lending a hand when needed...just about anything that suits the group!

The Community Connector's Role

Community Connectors are the most important people in this project – without you, there wouldn't be a neighbour group in your area. Connectors are women and men of action, who organise things and make everyone feel welcome.

Your role is, firstly, to bring your neighbours together for an initial gathering. We'll step you through the process and provide a sample invitation, contact forms and ideas for what your neighbours can do together. You will be providing the leadership that guides the group as it comes together and begins to make plans for how to build neighbourhood connections. You will probably be facilitating the initial gatherings.

In a nutshell, the role of the Community Connector is to inspire involvement. It's a matter of listening to people, drawing out their strengths, and helping to translate ideas into action. You won't be alone in doing this but as a Community Connector you will be keeping a watchful eye on ensuring that positive relationships are forming – what one wise person called 'weaving the social fabric.'

Ideally, you help your group reflect on progress from time to time, solve any problems, plan ahead and participate in evaluation. Some Connectors are also on our Project Team, helping to grow the national project – we'd welcome your contribution.

Sharing the Connecting role

You might be starting this role solo but we believe it's far better, and more enjoyable, to find two or three others (or more) to share the role with you. You can ask the neighbours you meet in the early gatherings if anyone would like to join you as an organiser or you can invite the keenest people directly.





Starting a Neighbourhood Connect Neighbour Group

1. Have a chat with us on the phone.
2. Have a look at our invitation template – it prompts you to consider where and when to have a gathering with your neighbours.
3. Choose a time for the first gathering: are your neighbours more likely to be free during the day or the evening? Weekdays or weekend? Daytime during the weekend can be a good place to start as those in and out of the workforce can usually make it.
4. Choose a suitable place for the first gathering. This could be in a local coffee shop, a community space within your neighbourhood (a library meeting room, for example, or school hall), a park or a home. Refreshments are always good and we recommend making it easy – everyone buying their own at a café, or everyone bringing a plate to a park or home. Check that the venue is accessible and will allow people to hear one another. If there are likely to be children attending, you might come prepared with some textas and paper for them to play with.
5. Decide on an area in your neighbourhood that you would like to include. You can look at Google maps or look at a street directory and see what area around you seems logical. This might be just the houses in your street, the apartments in your building or complex, or a wider area of up to 400- 800 households. Experience has shown us that only a minority of neighbours will participate so we recommend giving an invitation to a few hundred households – don't worry, most won't turn up! Make a guess of the number of invitations you'll need, or take a walk and count the households.
6. Once you've set the time and place, prepare an invitation to place in the letterbox of all the households in your chosen area. Make sure there is a way for those who are interested but can't make the first meeting to register their interest so they can be involved in future gatherings. You can email a draft to us, as sometimes we can spot something missing, and so we know you are going ahead.
7. Local services may be willing to help with photocopying, a venue or in other ways. The Resource Kit on our website includes more information on how to involve them.
8. Copy your invitations and letter-drop them to your neighbours. You may want to knock on doors and introduce yourself and invite people personally, leaving the invitation with them. Either way is fine.
9. Take RSVPs so you know how many to expect and collect email addresses from those who express interest but can't make the first gathering, so you can invite them to future get-togethers.

Date set... venue chosen... invitations out...you are ready to meet!



Your first gatherings

Set a friendly, informal tone. You can ask everyone to share a bit about themselves, such as which street they live in, how long they've been in the area, what they like about it, what appealed to them about meeting their neighbours and any ideas they have of what they'd like to do together. Do those present want to keep getting to know one another and have more get-togethers? If yes, you've just started a neighbour group. Congratulations! It's a good idea to decide on your second event while you are together.

Check out our Resource Kit at the [website](#) for ideas on how you might break the ice or get a discussion going.

Don't forget to print off the Neighbourhood Connect Contact Sheet to take along to record your neighbours contact details for follow up!

Photos

It's great to take photos and share the best of them with your neighbour group and with us for our website, Facebook page and/or other means of promoting neighbour groups. To respect privacy, please ask people if they are comfortable with photos being taken for this purpose and ask anyone who isn't to please step aside before photos are taken.

Follow up after your get-together

After you have met for the first time, you should have a better understanding of the types of people interested and how keen they are to keep meeting.

A follow up email after the first meeting is a good idea, including those who attended and those who expressed interest but couldn't make it. Thanking people for coming, giving a quick review of the success of the event and sharing photographs will help keep up the momentum up. Ideally, this email can include an invitation to the second gathering. It's a good idea to ask for ideas for a name for the group; as people are not drawn from an entire suburb, using the suburb as the name might result in people from further afield wanting to join. We suggest people outside your area contact us for support to start a group in their area.

Having everyone contribute shares the workload and can help nurture a stronger commitment from group members who have a bigger stake in the group's success. More leaders / organisers make more activities possible. Anyone can host an event, not just the Connectors.





Communicating between gatherings: How will we stay in touch?

The easiest way to communicate within a group is via email and phones, some people use What's App or start their own Facebook closed group. Some create a separate Gmail account for the neighbour group and share the password with the team of Connectors – this allows the Calendar to be used to send out invitations. We can share with you tools that enable you to survey your group or allow everyone to write on the one document.

What will our neighbour group do?

Each group will be different. We encourage you to experiment. Depending on what your group decides there could be a set time each week/fortnight/month when some members will be at a nominated coffee shop or park? Or, if people are too busy to gather very regularly, a designated few people in the group might set some dates for four or five different gatherings over the year.

For more ideas of ways to bring your group together, see the ideas for connecting with neighbours at the [website](#).

Safety issues

While the vast majority of the neighbours you will meet will be great people, there is no guarantee that you will feel comfortable with everyone. So while it's great to extend the invitation to join the Group to everyone, you must make your own decision and take full responsibility for who you decide to trust – who you will allow to enter your home. If your instinct tells you to be wary of someone, be wary of them. Community Connectors and the Street by Street Project take no responsibility for the actions of people in your neighbourhood.

If anyone acts in a disrespectful or dangerous way, the Community Connectors should be told so the implications for the group can be considered. Serious matters should be reported to the authorities.

Respecting privacy

Our Contact Sheet template explains that sharing of at least email addresses will enable neighbours to communicate with each other. If anyone is not comfortable with this, they can ask someone pass on the information to them. Sharing of further details is at the choice of participants. It is important to only share information that you have been given permission to share. Obviously, neighbours can ask to be taken off the list should they wish.





There is a trade-off between community and privacy. We believe the gains are worth it, but there is the risk of people gossiping about others. Discussing another's situation can be out of interest or concern and can lead to offers of help, or it can be idle gossiping, and can upset the person being talked about. Idle gossiping is breaching a neighbour's privacy.

You can discuss the issue with the group and ask for a group agreement (or ground rule) to not gossip about others. Each person can be responsible for ending a conversation if it is purely gossip, reminding the speaker that the group has agreed not to gossip.

Having the right amount of contact with your neighbours can be challenging, with some loving it when others drop in regularly and others wishing their neighbour wouldn't start a conversation with them every time they went into their garden.

What you can do is:

- discuss this at a meeting and decide how you will handle it
- try to pick up on your neighbour's non-verbal communication about whether they want the contact
- be direct, but polite, when necessary (eg. Sorry, I'm pretty busy with the family so I won't invite you in now, but I'll see you at our gathering next Wednesday).

As with many issues-good communication is the key!

More help

A [Resources Kit](#) is available to support Community Connectors in running a neighbourhood group. It includes more information on connecting with community partners, planning and running a more formalised gathering, dealing with challenges and creating a safe and comfortable neighbourhood group. You can talk to us or email us to discuss your neighbour group. [Contact us.](#)

The national team of Community Connectors

You and your co-Connectors are part of a team of people who are building community across Australia. We provide a forum for you to share what is happening in your neighbour group, discuss issues and ideas and ask questions, so please ensure we have the details of all Connectors for your group.

Thanks for being part of Neighbourhood Connect!