



How to Organize a Neighborhood Block Party

Neighborhood block parties are fun! A well-planned event brings people together and creates a lasting sense of community.

A block party involves closing your street to traffic for the day. Successful events benefit from cooperative planning and good communication with all of the neighbors on a block. So start the planning early (ideally 2-3 months in advance), to ensure that your event goes smoothly, produces lots of smiles, and is inclusive and safe for all. We suggest sharing this tip sheet with everyone on your planning team to aid communication.

See example “Schedule for Event Planning” on page 4.

Let's get started!

Building the Team

- For more planning help, email activetransportation@austintexas.gov or call (512) 974-7853.
- Identify specific neighbors to help with each set of tasks.
- Keep meetings informal and focused.
- Be inclusive and communicate in ways that work for people of different abilities in language and digital literacy.
- If any neighbors share concerns, listen, show respect, and address their concerns early on.



Meet-Ups

- Invite everyone from the neighborhood to planning meetings by putting up fliers or going door to door.
- Put up a “Block Party Meeting here” sign up in advance with date and time at the first meeting location. You’ll most likely need 3-4 meetings after this ([Sample schedule on pages 2 & 3 with a suggested timeline on page 4](#)).
- Hold meetings outside if possible to make them more welcoming and to allow passersby to drop in.
- Make the meeting a potluck or offer simple snacks. These meet-ups can be fun socials in themselves!

Meet-Up #1

What's our vision?

The event can be as simple or elaborate as you like. Putting in a good amount of effort for the first event – without overburdening anyone – will pay off and make it more likely that block parties become a beloved tradition.

What's the best date?

- Weekends are usually best. Saturdays are most popular.
- Consider holidays or special occasions, and National Night Out (www.austintexas.gov/nno on the first Tuesday in October)

Who can serve as The Planning Committee?

To spread the work and include everyone, engage a different person to fill each of these “team captain” roles.

- ☐ **Meeting planning and meeting facilitator** – helps put together agendas, keeps discussions focused, ensures everyone feels comfortable speaking, ends meetings on time
- ☐ **Note taker/sharer** – takes notes at meetings, shares with larger group after meetings
- ☐ **Permit applicant** – for the City of Austin neighborhood block party permit
- ☐ **Treasurer** – In charge of budget, fundraising, and reimbursement
- ☐ **Promoter** – facilitates outreach such as emails, fliers, posters, etc.
- ☐ **Activities coordinator** – plans activities that can be led by neighbors with unique skills
- ☐ **Food and beverage coordinator** – coordinates who will provide food and beverages
- ☐ **Equipment coordinator** – gathers equipment (includes rentals)



Meet-Up #2

What's required by the City of Austin?

- ☐ A **block party permit**. Permits cost \$50. They must be applied for at least 10 days before an event. Inquire about reserving a free set of barricades ASAP, supplies are limited.
- ☐ The whole block must be closed and there must be **Type II barricades** at both ends. Only blocks on residential streets, no bus routes, and no traffic lights at either end of the block will be approved.

The \$50 permit fee is waived for events with programming from Austin Transportation.

Austin Transportation Department has info and cool stuff about biking and traffic safety to share!

For full info and requirements, see the City's [online Block Party Permit Application at bit.ly/atxblockpartypermit](https://bit.ly/atxblockpartypermit)

What's the budget?

At the first meeting, people should agree to a budget and funding plan. A treasurer should keep the event on budget, track agreed-upon expenses, and make sure people get reimbursed. Individual households can donate smaller items (e.g. potluck dishes, drinks). Several may want to go in together to pay for larger items (e.g. bouncy house rental). Local businesses in the neighborhood (or business owners near your block) may make donations. Consider a donations jar (labeled with a suggested donation) at the event or use of a crowdfunding platform to raise the funds needed in advance.

Meet-Up #3

Event Volunteer assignments

- ☐ Identify one individual, or a couple of people, to fill each of these roles:
- ☐ Street team – responsible for barricading, cleaning the street, and having the block party permit on hand
- ☐ Equipment layout and set up – people to set up the tables, chairs, barbecue, activities, etc.
- ☐ Event photographer – will share their own and others' photos after the event
- ☐ Master of Ceremonies – in charge of announcements, organizing activities, etc.
- ☐ Greeter(s) for new arrivals
- ☐ Fundraising team – will pass a donations jar around or run a fundraising campaign online
- ☐ Barbecuing – people to cook food
- ☐ Clean up crew – pick up any trash, properly dispose of trash bags
- ☐ Removing barricades; returning barricades
- ☐ Lost and found volunteer – store and return lost and found items
- ☐ Communications after the event – shares summary of the event

Equipment and setup

- ☐ Chairs
- ☐ Food table
- ☐ Grills
- ☐ Coolers
- ☐ Recycling/compost/trash bins
- ☐ Children's activities
- ☐ Barricades
- ☐ Umbrellas
- ☐ Canopy over the food table
- ☐ Name tags
- ☐ Sign-in sheet
- ☐ Event schedule display

Tips:

- Place trash and recycle bins along the block, place near food tables.
- Cluster equipment/activities in one part of the block to maximize impact.
- Consider creating a cozy "outdoor living room" as a central social area using, for instance, lawn furniture arranged in a circle with some old carpet and an umbrella. Low-key music helps attract people to the area.
- Prominently display an event schedule, if there will be performances, group activities, and food cooked at set times.





Food and beverages

Make it a potluck! Everybody brings food and drink to share. People could bring whatever they like, courses could be assigned by last names (e.g. A through J brings entrees, etc.), or folks could sign up for certain courses using a free online tool. Some people may want to buy all the bulk items, such as burgers and buns, and be reimbursed. Make sure there's enough food for people with special dietary needs and remember **alcohol cannot be provided/served in the public space of the street**. Go zero waste by inviting people to bring their own plates, cups, and utensils from home (then take back to wash up later).

Activities

Ask your neighbors if they have unique skills or assets to share. Provide plenty of activities for kids. Invite tweens and teens to plan and run some games. Performances by children, such as a dance routine or magic show, can be especially memorable. Organize one group activity to unite everybody, such as a balloon toss, just after lunch when most people are present. That's also a great time for a group photo. Consider "mixers" to help neighbors get to know each other and the story of their neighborhood.

Special guests

Consider inviting neighborhood association representatives, a community police officer or constable, your local fire station (and fire truck!), your Council Member, State Representative, local experts/celebrities, local business owners, or people to table from non-profit organizations.



Rain date / Adverse weather plan

If light, occasional rain is expected, use canopies to shield areas such as the food table, and designate a space, such as a neighbor's garage, to move items that need to stay dry. Have a backup venue, such as a neighbor's house or a local community hall, in case there's heavy, constant rain. Or, set a rain date.



Notes:



Suggested timeline for planning a block party

2 to 3 months in advance

Neighbor meet-up #1

- Invite everyone on your block to a block party meeting. Knock on doors to introduce yourself; leave a flier at every house; and/or reach out to every house on the block digitally or by phone.

6 to 10 weeks in advance

Neighbor meet-up #2

- Brainstorm event ideas in more detail. Work through any issues or concerns that arise.

1 month in advance

Neighbor meet-up #3

- Share planning updates, begin promoting the events, submit rental orders (if any).

1-2 weeks in advance

Neighbor meet-up #4

- Finalize planning details. Fill any gaps. Add any last-minute strokes of brilliance!

2 days before event

- Remind neighbors to remove parked cars on the day of the event.

BLOCK PARTY DAY!

- Set up barricades at both ends of the street.
- Set up chairs, tables, activities, etc. 1 hour before party starts.

Within 2 weeks

- Meet or use your group communication tool to review the event: What went well? What could be improved next time? Any financial loose ends to close?
- Decide if/when people might want to hold the next block party.



Keep the neighborliness going! Talk about other ways that neighbors can stay active and in touch. For example, now that you have a group communications list, could you use it to volunteer together to clean up a neighborhood park or empty lot? Organize a walking group, or a group bike ride to a festival? Assist a senior on your block? Host a group playdate for kids? Organize a safety event on National Night Out?

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