



# BLOCK PARTY KIT



**AN EASY  
"HOW TO" GUIDE  
TO ORGANIZE A  
  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
BLOCK PARTY**





### WHY HAVE A BLOCK PARTY?

For many generations, block parties have served as a way for neighbors to meet each other. Some block parties are organized around holidays such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July or Labor Day. Others may start because of an issue affecting the neighborhood.

Whatever the motive, block parties often lead to further gatherings of neighbors, and may lead to neighborhood improvements or a neighborhood clean-up campaign.

Block parties can happen in townhouse complexes, in apartment buildings or even in a park near a condominium. A block party is simply a group of neighbors who work together to organize an event for their neighborhood.

## 10 REASONS TO HAVE A BLOCK PARTY

1. To have fun - no excuse or reason to celebrate!
2. To meet your neighbors. The more you know who belongs to the neighborhood, the more likely you are to identify strangers or suspicious people.
3. To increase the sense of belonging in your neighborhood.
4. To organize a block under a group such as Neighborhood Watch or MPC Ready. (Both start with fostering social connections with neighbors.)
5. To make connections within the community. When you know people, you can exchange skills or resources and perhaps organize a book club, baby-sitting co-op, share walking to school duties, or find new friends for your children.
6. To plan a campaign for traffic slowdown, get better lighting, or address other issues of neighborhood concern.
7. To "use" the street for one day, for example to roller blade, set up a kids jump house or to practice bike safety skills.
8. To meet some of the longer-term residents in the neighborhood and learn about its history.
9. To have a neighborhood clean-up day, play some good music and barbecue once all the work is done.
10. To start a tradition of getting together at least once a year.



### HOW BIG SHOULD WE MAKE IT?






1. Start off with a smaller event rather than a large one. It can always grow, but it is hard to shrink it. We suggest that you invite between 15-20 households.
2. Use natural neighborhood boundaries when deciding who to invite, such as one street block. If you are planning a street or cul-de-sac party, you need to invite everyone from that area.
3. We suggest that your initial block party include neighbors only. This will better ensure safety and getting to know people.

### WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZERS?

1. Make decisions about the set up.
2. Act as a greeter at the event.
3. Introduce new neighbors and help them make connections.
4. Make sure the clean-up is done. (You may wish to inspire clean up by rewarding the children with a prize.)
5. TIP: Include some kids as part of your planning committee. Kids will have GREAT ideas as to what will appeal to other kids.

## WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF BLOCK PARTIES?

Which type of block party will work best in your neighborhood? Try not to go overboard. Keep it Simple! Some ideas are below. You can also apply for a Belle Haven mini grant to pay for your party!

	<p><b>Barbecues</b> - organizers purchase the basic BBQ and neighbors provide side dishes. All food could also be catered.</p>
	<p><b>Picnics</b> -- everyone brings their own meal.</p>
 <p><b>Potluck Dinner</b></p>	<p><b>Pot luck</b> - everyone brings one dish;</p>
	<p><b>Catered</b> -- everyone shares the cost and the food is purchased.</p>
	<p><b>Ice cream sundaes</b> - set out an assortment of flavors, toppings, and syrups.</p>



## PLANNING YOUR BLOCK PARTY

Ask 2-3 neighbors to help you with the event.

1. Decide on a possible theme, activities, food, etc.
2. Decide on the "block" boundaries of who to invite.
3. Decide the location: front yard, garage (rainout), street or park. Parks and street locations may require permits.
4. Pick a date and time (mid-afternoon to evening works best). Think of an alternate plan in case of bad weather.
  - a. A weekend date or holiday is often best. Summer vacations from schools also work well.
  - b. Have an alternate rainout day planned, just in case.
  - c. Keep in mind who lives in the neighborhood when setting the hours for the party. Plan to finish before dark.



## SET UP

1. Set up a **sign-in book or form to help you develop** a contact list for the neighborhood.
2. **Put out Nametags** and a sharpie or big pen.
3. Decide what you want neighbors to write on their name tags (e.g. - first and last names, house numbers).
4. Line up **tables** for the food and have a few **garbage cans** available.
5. Decide whether you will coordinate or everyone will bring their own **Tables and chairs Plates, cutlery and cups, Beverages**. If using **barbecues**, who will bring them?
6. Include a sign with a "bathroom policy" where everyone uses their own, to maintain security and cleanliness.
7. Decide if **pets** are allowed.
8. Be ready to oversee the **clean up** after the event.

## Fun Family Activities for Block Parties

- Invite a clown, balloon artist or magical
- Water balloon or egg toss
- Rent a "jump house"
- Hide and seek
- Face painting (remember to use non-toxic paint)
- Organize a kids talent show or parade
- Sidewalk chalk (make it a game for the kids and give out prizes)
- Pictionary or charades
- "Name that baby" (have everyone bring a childhood photo and see who can guess who's who)
- Play musical chairs
- Rent a popcorn or snow cone machine





## ACTIVITIES DURING THE EVENT

1. Visit and eat.
2. Games for kids (some organized, some they can plan themselves).
3. Take time to introduce one another and point to one's house. This can be done in a game format
4. Encourage the talent in your neighborhood to come forward such as musicians, magicians.
5. Verify that neighbors want to be listed on neighborhood contact list.

## FINAL REMINDERS

- Neighbors should observe security precautions by keeping back doors locked and equipment in sight.
- Remember when setting up tables and chairs that emergency vehicles may need access.
- You may wish to post signs the day before the event to remind everyone to remove cars for events involving street closure.

### OTHER WAYS TO GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

- Holiday cookie exchange
- Neighborhood Action Days
- Morning coffees in a local park
- Neighborhood garage sale
- When in doubt, ask your neighbors for ideas.

## GETTING NEIGHBORS TO ATTEND

1. Go door to door and hand out invitations. Recruit volunteers to help.
  - You may need to explain what a Block Party is, encourage attendance, share benefits, get opinions on how to handle the food, and possible dates and times to have the event.
  - Flyers can be used with a request to drop back their suggestions for the event under your doormat.
  - Information can be gathered from your neighbors by going door-to-door. This adds a personal touch and people often offer to help.
2. A casual approach can be used to inform neighbors as you see them out working in their yards.
3. Neighbors can be called on the phone. (If you don't know your neighbors, a reverse directory telephone book can be used. They are available at libraries.)
5. Make an extra effort to get your new neighbors out to the event.
6. To reach neighbors in Townhouses, apartments and condos, approach the manager who can let you know what works best.
7. Take every opportunity to talk it up in the neighborhood as often as possible prior to the event.





## GOOD IDEAS

- Invite MPC Ready and a member of the Menlo Park Police Department to attend. During part of your block party, both can give a brief update on the importance of getting household and neighborhood emergency/disaster prepared. They can also bring handouts and giveaways.
- Invite your city council member and member of the Menlo Park Community Services Department. You can also invite a local teacher or school official.
- Plan lots of activities for children.
- Include an Identify special talents your neighbors might have - you may be living next to a magician, singer, dancer, artist, radio host or prize-winning cook. Include a time for everyone to briefly introduce themselves and share one of their talents!
- Have an environmentally friendly party. You could ask everyone to bring their own reusable plates, cups and cutlery to limit paper garbage.
- Include activities that encourage people to meet each other. Use nametags and include children by asking them to create the tags.
- Make sure that people with disabilities can participate in the activities and include their attendants (those with seeing eye dogs or in wheelchairs).

- Institute a bathroom policy “Everyone to use their own” so that home security is maintained.
- Make sure you have a record of everyone who attends. Ideally, set out a contact list for people to fill out as they arrive. Indicate on the form that attendees are willing (or not) to share contact information. After all, the idea of a block party is to connect neighbors.
- Inspire clean up after every party by rewarding children with a prize for packing up garbage.
- Have a block/street clean up as part of the party. Neighbors may want to contribute towards the cost of a truckload to the dump and use this to clean out gardens, garbage, or alleys. Or, your mini grant application can include the idea of a dump being present at your party!
- Distribute an evaluation form to participants (to get a good response, number the forms and have door prizes for returned entries).





## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR GETTING TO KNOW NEIGHBORS

### 4<sup>th</sup> of July

- Ask what people like most about the holiday.
- Celebrate the latest to arrive in America.
- Play charades using 4<sup>th</sup> of July people and/or themes.
- Include a cake decorated with the American Flag AND the flag of another country where the neighbors used to live.
- Play celebratory music.

### Neighborhood History Discussions

- Talk with long-standing residents about their history projects.
- Identify any special people that lived in your area such as the longest resident, politician, artist, eccentric, hero, etc. Have partygoers guess who, what, where through charades and other games.
- Ask how neighbors came to live in the neighborhood, and what they like most about living in their neighborhood and/or Menlo Park.

## **Neighborhood Clubs and Co-Ops**

1. Book clubs
2. Walking clubs
3. Babysitting Co-Ops

## **Neighborhood Action**

1. Discuss what issues/concerns people may have (keep this to a predetermined time: remember, a block party should be fun).
2. Find out who wants to help resolve the concerns.
3. Organize a Neighborhood Action Day with a social after. Clean up. Build a bench, plant a garden, and paint street numbers, etc. as part of the block party activities.