

ORGANIZING AN
AWESOME BLOCK PARTY



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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDEBOOK

"Love Where You Live"

Why Host a Neighbourhood Block Party?

5 Good Reasons

- A fantastic way to get to know your neighbours
- An opportunity to turn neighbours into friends
- A great 1st step towards making your neighbourhood a safe, friendly place for everyone
- A chance to share ideas and plan other activities that will enhance the neighbourhood
- Gives youth an opportunity to build positive relationships with other neighbourhood families

Planning Your Block Party

Step 1 – Recruit a Planning Team

Getting neighbours involved during the planning stage is the key to success. Having lots of help will make the party more fun and less work for everyone.

Ideally, your organizing team should reflect the people living in your neighbourhood, including seniors, youth and neighbours from different cultural backgrounds. This will ensure there are activities, entertainment and foods that appeal to all.

A suggested Planning Team size is 4-8 people.

Step 2 – Create a Planning Schedule

Start planning early. It takes time to get event permits, make the preparations and give your guests enough notice to avoid calendar conflicts. A 2-month planning period is ideal.

Suggested timeline

8 Weeks Ahead Organize your Planning Team

7 Weeks Ahead Decide on date, location, party size and food format



6 Weeks Ahead	Submit applications for any necessary permits Create and distribute "Save the Date" flyers to neighbourhood homes
5 Weeks Ahead	Receive and review feedback from neighbours Make decisions about entertainment, activities and food
4 Weeks Ahead	Send invitations to guests with party hours, details, street closure (if applicable), rainout options, etc.
2 Weeks Ahead	Confirm volunteers for set-up, cooking, activities, entertainment and clean-up
1-2 Days Ahead	Final preparations in place Post no-parking notices (if applicable) for the party date and times
Day of the Party	Coordinate all volunteers Complete the party set-up Fun begins Do the clean-up at end of party
After the Party	Meet with Planning Team to debrief and discuss suggestions for future events.

Step 3 – Organize Communications

As early as possible, deliver '**Save The Date**' notices to let neighbours know when and where the block party is happening.

The *Save The Date* notices should give guests an opportunity to provide feedback. For example:

- Their email address and/or phone number
- Potential calendar conflicts with other events
- Ideas for food and entertainment
- Potential contributions they can make such as connections to entertainers, music, food suppliers, etc.
- Offers to help organize the block party.

Start a neighbourhood email group or Facebook page to keep everyone informed and engaged as the Block Party develops.

Communications Tip

Email and Facebook are great, but door-to-door personal contact at some point during your planning schedule is the best way to meet new neighbours, receive suggestions for the party and recruit volunteers.

Step 4 – Make a Planning ‘To-do’ List

Make a planning checklist that shows the tasks to be done, timelines and who is responsible for each task. This will ensure your team has addressed planning issues and everyone knows who is doing what.

Step 5 – Select a Block Party Food Format

Four optional Block Party food formats are:

- **BBQ** – neighbours each make a financial contribution to a party fund that covers the cost of food purchases; volunteers prepare and grill food
- **Picnic** – guests bring their own meals
- **Potluck*** – guests each bring one dish, with a collective meal including appetizers, salads, main courses and desserts.
- **Catered** – a caterer/food vendors provide prepared foods with guests covering their own costs.

**Potluck Tip:* Start by asking people what they would like to bring. If they have a favourite dish they’d like to share, it adds to the camaraderie.

When assigning dishes, ensure there is a balance of appetizers, salads, entrees and dessert.

Step 6 - Decide How Big You Want Your Block Party and the Type of Event it will Be

Determine how many homes you will include in your guest list. If this is your first Block Party, it's best to keep it simple, then grow it with an expanded guest list over the next few years.

If there are natural neighbourhood boundaries (i.e. the houses on your block), use these to start.

Consider if you want the block party restricted to the families living in your neighbourhood, or if people can bring friends or family from other locations. Make this clear in the invitations, so there won't be unpleasant surprises on the day of the party.

Type of Event

Decide if the party will be a daytime or nighttime event; set start and finish times so people know when to attend.

Decide if alcoholic beverages are appropriate for your party. If so, determine if it will be a BYOB event (Bring Your Own Bottle) or an honour bar with \$ contributions from those who drink the beverages.

Step 7 – Select a Party Site

Closing the street to vehicle traffic and having the block party in a central location, using both public land (street surface, boulevards, etc.) and private property (front lawns) is often the best setting

Other options include a:

- Nearby park
- Nearby school property
- Back lane
- Large back yard
- House or garage (in case of rain)

Step 8 – Apply for Permits Early

If your selected location is on public property (street, back lane, school, etc.), you will likely need a permit from your municipal or school administrations.

** Check into this early as permits may take several weeks to be issued.*

Also, if your event will include alcohol-consumption or certain kinds of entertainment (e.g. sound-amplified music, large inflatables), special event permits may be required. Search your municipality or school board websites or contact these groups directly to determine the permits you will need, their cost, and how to apply.

Step 9 – Decide about Party Entertainment & Activities

There are lots of party games and entertainment ideas for you to choose from. Go online and google ‘Block Party activities’ to find links to hundreds of ideas.

Ensure you have a number of activity options ready so that if one isn’t working, you can switch to something different.

Local Resources

Check with your local Fire Department and Police Service. Often they will attend local Block Parties and let families sit in the fire truck or police vehicle. Officers can talk about safety – it’s an excellent combination of fun and education.

Other community groups such as your local library, recreation department or health department may also be willing to set up an informational display or activity.

Free Stuff

Local businesses or your Council Members may donate prizes, food or other things for your neighbourhood party. When asking, have a written request letter ready, with details about your event and how many people you anticipate will be attending.

Step 10 – Distribute Final Invitations

The final invitation should include important party details:

- Date, hours and location
- Theme (if there is one) Theme ideas: Canada Day, neighbourhood clean-up, cultural celebration, etc.
- RSVP
- What to bring (e.g. chairs, beverages, cutlery and cups, plates, bbq's, etc.)
- Are pets allowed?
- Are outside guests allowed?
- Other important information your guests should know about the Block Party

Step 11 - Day of the Party – Coordinate set-up, food, entertainment and clean-up

Delegate key responsibilities to your Planning Team Members or other volunteers to ensure things run smoothly. Assign the following:

- Food placement and serving set-up, including utensils, plates, glasses
- Grilling (if using bbq's)
- Activity coordination – determine where games and entertainment will take place to ensure these are done in safe locations;
- Music or other entertainment coordination
- Clean-up duties.

Activity Tip –Inexpensive prizes are a good incentive to get people to take part in the games or challenges.

If an activity is not working, end it and try something different.

Clean-up Tip

As the party nears its end, plan an activity that encourages guests (especially children) to pick up litter and help clean-up. Prizes for this are a great incentive.

Place trash cans and recycle bins close by to encourage guests to use these.



Step 11 - Debrief with your Planning Team after the party

Get your Planning Team together as soon as possible after your Block Party to receive their feedback and ideas. Find out what worked well, and what didn't meet their expectations. Is there a desire to organize a similar event in future?

Keep notes and ask for their commitment to run the next event.

Block Parties improve over time as people gain experience in organizing and working together.

Step 12 – Share Your Block Party Memories

Share photos and comments about the block party with one another. It is part of the camaraderie, and builds excitement for your next neighbourhood event.

YOUR PLANNING NOTES
