



Tips,  
Tools and  
Resources for  
Project  
Organizers

# The Nuts & Bolts for Project Organizers

Too often, community projects lose steam or fall short of their goals due to a lack of organization. This toolkit will help you in the successful planning and delivery of your community project, no matter what the focus.

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# The Nuts & Bolts for Project Organizers

## OVERVIEW

### The problem:

If you've ever planned an event, you know that the devil is in the details. This toolkit is designed to help you organize volunteers to help you successfully complete your community project.

### The solution:

Pulling together a team of volunteers – and knowing how to organize and motivate them – can help you run a successful community project.

### Time commitment

Varies by project, from a few hours to a couple of weeks.

### Special considerations

If you have an intact group to work with such as clubs, a group of friends, etc., this may be a great place to start.

### Who can do this?

Everyone! Helpful skills may include strong organizational skills and the ability to work well with others.

### Great reasons to do this project

- Develop a sense of renewed energy and commitment to helping people in your community.
- Connect with neighbors to promote a worthwhile community project.
- Gain new insight and a fresh perspective of your community.





## The Basic Steps

### Step 1: MAKE A PLAN

Define your project goal and what you hope to achieve. Try to avoid assumptions, like “This is a great idea, so I know people will jump on board!” People usually need convincing before they commit their time and energy to something. You can improve your planning by including ways to overcome people’s skepticism of your project.

Before reaching out to people, you should have a fairly firm idea of what you want them to do to help fulfill your community project. Remember: A key element to an effective community project is the planning.

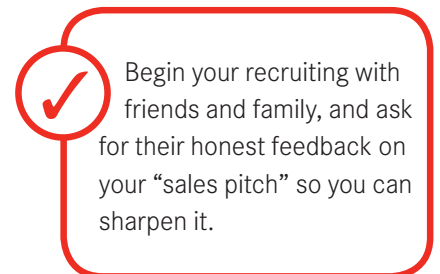
Consider these questions:

- What is the focus and scope of your community project?
- Does the goal have strong group support?
- Will your project have an immediate visible impact in your community?
- How will you measure progress?

The following steps will help you get others involved. For tips on implementing your community project, see the Planning Worksheet at the end of this guide (p. 7).

### Step 2: BUILD A TEAM

Identify the type and the number of volunteers you will need. For example, for a river cleanup, you’ll want people who are passionate about the outdoors. For a public benefits assistance effort, you’ll want people who are patient, detail-oriented and work well with others.





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Consider a co-leader for the project. You probably want someone who complements your skills. For example, if your strength is creativity, think about getting a co-leader who is highly organized. Start with your own contacts and networks.



You should try to recruit at least 10% more people than you think you'll need to account for no shows and dropouts.

Clearly spell out what you expect from team members. Emphasize how much of an impact you can all have working together, and note that your project is intended to improve the community for everyone, not just a select few.

Personally asking people to join your effort can go a long way, so start by contacting people you already know. Then you can expand the recruiting effort to the broader community. Bulletin boards, faith-based newsletters, homeowner's associations, Neighborhood Watch groups and libraries are great examples of ways to reach numerous people with one message. Build on informal networks you may already have in place to recruit individuals. You can even partner with a school, faith-based groups, community centers or other networks to spread the word.

Always include a brief description of your project and desired outcomes so that potential volunteers are clear on your needs. You can leverage technology by reaching out through [Create The Good](#), neighborhood email lists, social media sites (like Facebook) and community blogs. If possible, include a phone number and an email address for people to use to get more information. See tip sheets at the end of this guide: *Crafting a Successful Recruitment Message* and *Sample Recruitment Message* (pp. 8-9).

## Step 3: THINK COLLABORATION

Depending on the size, scope and goals of your project, you might want to seek a collaboration or sponsorship – for example, with a corporation, nonprofit organization or local government. You may already be a member of a group that can collaborate with you.

Before you approach potential sponsors or collaborators, have a very clear idea of precisely how you'd want them to help. For example, you might ask a local company to encourage staff to participate in your project or let you use the company's building on project day. If you're organizing a cleanup, you could ask the mayor's office to provide trucks and manpower to haul the trash away. If you are planting a community garden, a local landscaping company might agree to help design, build and plant.



Don't be shy about asking potential sponsors or collaborators for help.



As a grassroots organizer, you probably won't have anything of monetary value to offer in exchange but remember that many organizations and companies want to be associated with local improvement efforts. Simply including their logo on your flyers and letting them mention their involvement in a press release is often sufficient.

## Step 4: CONNECT THE DOTS


It is crucial to have your entire team on the same page about the purpose, goals and scope of your project. A committed volunteer who is working without clear direction can quickly do far more harm than good for you! Meet with your team periodically – and/or use email blasts (if the members of the team have agreed to receive communications via email) – to ensure that the effort is progressing as planned, and make project leaders available to clear up any uncertainty among the team.

Occasional meetings can also help keep your team motivated. Remember, few people besides you will be thinking about your project every day, and some may lose interest if they feel their involvement isn't appreciated. Sending updates every week – even when you have little news to report – and inviting your team to meetings can help keep people energized.

## Step 5: PROJECT DAY – MAKING IT HAPPEN

Have a solid game plan for your main project day. Here are some items to include in your plan:

- Arrange for snacks and drinks for your volunteers.
- Ensure there is adequate legal parking for your team and attendees.
- Have a foul weather plan if your event is outdoors.
- Get a home or cell number for managers of any facilities you might use (like a community center) in case the building is locked or the air conditioning is out, etc.
- Have a checklist of all the supplies you need and the full day's schedule, and keep it handy so that you're not forgetting important details or overlooking items needed.
- Have a concise, consistent message for any reporters who might show up or call. If any local officials or other VIPs plan to attend, make sure you or a co-leader are prepared to greet them, and give them an opportunity to address the group.

 Very few projects go exactly as planned. Be prepared to make adjustments on the fly. The best thing you can do is to remain upbeat and calm throughout the day, regardless of what goes wrong.



For tips on promoting your community project, see the tip sheets at the end of this guide: How to Gain Visibility for Your Project and Sample Press Release (pp. 10-11).

## Step 6: CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Congratulations! You did it. Take time to celebrate your success and thank your volunteers, partners, vendors and any VIPs who attended. Emphasize to everyone the positive impact they made on the community. Ask them to share any particularly inspiring stories from the day.

In the days immediately after the event, ask your team members for feedback while the experience is still fresh for them. Encourage them to be candid and share their ideas for how the project – from recruitment through completion – could be improved. Hopefully, you will want to lead other community betterment projects in the future and learning from this experience will help greatly in other efforts.

## Step 7: INSPIRE OTHERS ON CREATETHEGOOD.ORG!

### TELL US WHAT YOU DID!

We want to hear stories about how you helped give back to your community.  
<http://CreateTheGood.org/stories> You just might inspire others to do the same.

### SHARE FEEDBACK

We are always looking for feedback on our materials, so please let us know how this guide was helpful or additional information you wish we could have included. Share lessons learned and other tips for others who are organizing projects. Visit us at <http://www.aarp.org/community/groups/CreateTheGood>.

### KEEP UP THE GOOD!

Remember: Whether you've got five minutes, five hours or five days, you can make a positive impact in your community. And if you have more time, consider organizing another service activity, finding local opportunities and posting your events at [www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to](http://www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to).



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

**Below are additional resources that you can use when planning your community project.**

HandsOn Network Volunteer Leader Guide

[http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/HON\\_Vol\\_Leader\\_Guide\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/HON_Vol_Leader_Guide_FINAL.pdf)

Community Organizing Guide

<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/orguide.pdf>

Take Root: Project Development Guidebook

[http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GB\\_TakeRoot\\_Project\\_Development\\_unkn\\_unkn.pdf](http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GB_TakeRoot_Project_Development_unkn_unkn.pdf)

Take Root: A Volunteer Management Guidebook

[http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GB\\_TakeRoot\\_Volunteer\\_Management\\_unkn\\_HON.pdf](http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GB_TakeRoot_Volunteer_Management_unkn_HON.pdf)



## Planning Worksheet

| Community Project                                       |                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is the purpose of your community project?          | List 2-3 project outcomes.                                                                    |
| Recruitment                                             |                                                                                               |
| What do you expect volunteers to do?                    | What is the time commitment?                                                                  |
| Why would someone volunteer for this community project? | List 3-5 individuals that you can contact about volunteering for this community project.      |
| Community Sponsorship and Collaboration                 |                                                                                               |
| What do you want sponsors or collaborators to do?       | What does success look like?                                                                  |
| Who do you want to collaborate with?                    | List 3-5 community-based organizations that you can contact regarding your community project. |





## Crafting a Successful Recruitment Message

Whether it's a written message to a local newspaper, a flyer in a library or a personal ask to a friend, you need a compelling recruitment message that explains why your community project is worthy of someone's time. Keep your message simple and short and include the who, what, where and when of the project. Remember to emphasize the good that people will do in their community by joining your project.

If you have high-profile collaborators or sponsors, mention them in your recruitment message. That helps lend credibility to your effort and gives people a sense that they are joining something that already has some momentum. Your message may also include a statement about being part of a group or a bigger effort, which can be very appealing.

In addition to the necessary elements of a good recruitment piece, there are also **key words and phrases** that can be effective. Here are a few examples:

- Exciting opportunity...
- Give back to your community...
- A little bit of volunteering can make a world of difference in our lives.
- Meet neighbors, have fun, do good...
- The opportunity to make an important difference in your community...



## Sample Recruitment Message

### An Exciting Opportunity for Gemima County Residents

We need your help on Saturday, April 10, for our 2nd Annual Repair Fair to install energy-efficient items, complete prevention checklists and make small repairs in three homes in the Tanner Heights community. We especially need volunteers with repair skills in plumbing or electricity. You can be a part of helping seniors in the Tanner Heights community live in a safer, comfortable home.

**Who:** Gemima County residents

**What:** Second Annual Repair Fair

**When:** Friday, September 10, 2010, starting at 8:00 a.m.

**Where:** Gathering at City Park (light breakfast and lunch provided)

For more information, contact Jane Doe at 555-555-5555.

While finding volunteers through referrals and local contacts still works best, the use of an online recruitment database is another option for finding volunteers. Visit [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org) to post your community project.

Finally, be sure to directly ask people to volunteer with a “personal ask.” You can do this by asking friends and your contacts to volunteer. Be mindful to provide them with all the necessary information to gain their commitment.



## How to Gain Visibility for Your Project

You want your project to have high visibility in your community. How to do that? Here are some helpful hints.

### Publicizing Your Event – Before and After

- Ask permission to display flyers, posters or postcards at coffee shops, libraries, malls and local businesses. Invite local businesses to participate with you (as collaborators or co-sponsors).

### Reach out to local media with a public service announcement (PSA)

- Many local newspapers, magazines, community guides, and radio and TV stations run PSAs on a range of events and projects. Your grassroots community betterment project is a perfect candidate for this type of mention, and the local press welcomes information about community events. Many media outlets have online forms on their websites to simplify event promotion.

### Contact reporters

- Develop a list of local editors and reporters with their names, phone numbers and email addresses. Most newspapers and radio and television stations will list newsroom contact information on their websites. The reporters most interested in your announcement will be community editors.
- Journalists love a touching personal story. Shape your story to focus on the people in your community, and try to find an example of a person or small group of people that will benefit from your effort.
- When emailing event details, use plain text without fancy graphics and include key logistics (who, what, when and where). Put the event's date in the subject line. See below for a sample press release.
- Contact news outlets at least two weeks before the event.
- Follow up with reporters a few days before your event to push them to cover it. Reporters are always on the lookout for news, so don't be shy. The worst that can happen is they say no. After your event, contact reporters to report your success. You will probably have fresh stories of how your project helped people. Offer to connect reporters with people you helped (provided those people are willing to talk to the press).

### Consider Alternatives

- Use email networks and newsletters to get the word out.
- Write letters to the editor of your local newspapers announcing your event. Try to tie your project to a recent, relevant news item to increase the likelihood it will get published.
- Create flyers or poster-board notices and place them in locations with high traffic for better visibility.



## Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact Person: Jane Doe

Telephone Number: 555-555-5555

Fax Number: 555-555-5555

Email Address: jane.doe@email.com

### **Second Annual Repair Fair Needs You**

Tanner Heights, VA, July 10, 2010 – The City of Tanner Heights along with the Gemima County Homeowners Association will repair three seniors' homes in the Tanner Heights community on Friday, September 10, 2010.

“We are hoping to get all three homes done and need volunteers with skills in plumbing, electricity and carpentry to help us out,” says Jane Doe, project organizer.

The Second Annual Repair Fair is an annual program that helps seniors in the community get free small home repairs so that they can live more comfortably and securely in their home. The group is comprised of community members wanting to help their neighbors.

For additional information, contact: Jane Doe 555-555-5555 or at jane.doe@email.com.