

For Block Connectors

"Vital to society, straightforward as a role and personally transforming."

TIM SENGER

Block Connector

The Role of the Block Connector

Nurturing neighbourliness requires practices that we have generally become unfamiliar with today. However, the Block Connector role is not much beyond the good neighbouring of the recent past. Most of the practices are easy to imagine and are often still in our memory. Connecting with neighbours resonates with most people and so only a modest amount of orientation may be necessary to become an effective Block Connector.

AS A BLOCK CONNECTOR YOU HAVE BEEN ASKED BY THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TO BE THE:

1. **Point Person** or the "go-to" person for your Block, keeping neighbours updated about block and neighbourhood life. You might be the holder of a neighbour contact list and help others to get connected too.
2. **Party Person** for the block, initiating block social gatherings such as BBQs and block parties.
3. **Listener** for each neighbour on the block, hopefully hearing from every neighbour. You'll be asking for their ideas for the neighbourhood (i.e. their neighbourhood vision), what pastimes they would enjoy doing with neighbours and the gifts they would be willing to share with the block or with the neighbourhood.

Getting Started:

- Introduce yourself to your neighbours either by getting out and about, bumping into them or chatting across the fence or by knocking on their doors. Knocking on a neighbour's door just for the purpose of meeting a neighbour is a more unusual and awkward practice now than it has been in the past but we have observed that once you let people know that you are a neighbour, any awkwardness disappears. That said you want to quickly let them know who you are and what you are up to, so:
 - Give them your name and orient them to where you live. This may lead to all kinds of shared connections... Pets, kids, mutual relationships, past events... It's fun to discover the things you have in common.
 - Take a minute to let them know about the role the neighbourhood has asked you to take on; the Connector Card is helpful for this. Be sure to fill out the small tear away that has a spot for your name and contact information - sharing this with your neighbour is a simple act of kindness and connection and the first step in becoming the block's **Point Person**.

Some neighbours may not know about community associations so you might want to provide

a bit of an overview. Here is an easy description: “community associations bring community residents together, to improve the community and the quality of life for all residents.”

- Still using the Connector Card, invite neighbours to a block social gathering - there is a place on the Connector Card for you to include invite information for your neighbour. Be sure to get the neighbour's contact information so that you can be in touch. Knocking on your neighbour's door to organize and invite them to a block social gathering generally makes a lot of sense to people and is usually met with gratitude. Doing this is your first step in becoming the **Party Person**.
- Let your neighbour know the neighbourhood wants to hear from them and you are there to listen. Point to the questions on the Connector Card and briefly review them. You may also want let them know why the questions are being asked: vision information goes to the community league to help determine neighbourhood priorities, pastimes information helps to create relevant groups for neighbours to participate in, and skills information helps neighbours to help one another. All answers go into the neighbourhood's database and can be anonymously listed on the community league website. This is your first step in becoming your block's **Listener**.
- An opportunity to have this intentional conversation with your neighbour on the first visit is great! But if they are not home, or busy, or would like more time, leaving a copy of the Connector Card is an option. But we recommend you exchange contact information so that you can be in touch. Use one Connector Card to get contact information and leave one for them to look at and fill out.

The ongoing tasks and tips:

Point Person:

- Greeting neighbours and keeping an eye out for their well-being.
- Be aware of difficult life passages: the block can be an important social unit offering care and support.
- Connect your neighbours with other neighbours according to the interests and experiences you have discovered.
- Keep your neighbours updated on neighbourhood news and events: flyer drops, e-mail or best of all, an in-person visit.
- Check in when you can, especially on those who are most vulnerable. A good way to connect is by dropping off an invitation to a neighbourhood event or block social gathering.
- Invite your block to the major neighbourhood events as a way of staying in touch (request flyers from organizers so that you have something tangible to hand out).
- Create a contact list of neighbours for your block. Get permission. Provide print or email copies.
- Drop off the neighbourhood newsletter to your block

Party Person:

- Identify the neighbours who are keen to help organize the block socials with you
- Use your listening to create party games ie “Guess who is active in a choir?”
- Initiate winter gatherings; after all we are a winter city.
- Try block parties and play street as ways to get neighbours together
- Try a joint garage sale and conclude with a party
- Connect with nearby Block Connectors and plan a joint block party
- It helps to have at least one other household confirmed for your social gatherings before you invite the rest of the block.
- Ask your Support Team or Neighbourhood Connector for help and support in initiating a social.
- The invitation you extend to a neighbour may be as important as the event itself.
- Don’t over prepare. Low-key hospitality works well and increases the likelihood that the event will actually happen.
- Use social events to create connections, nametags, introductions, “get to know you” games...
- Plan block socials, use any excuse to initiate a party! Birthdays, new neighbours, Canada day, “the big game”...

Listener:

- Continue listening to neighbours and inputting what you hear into the database
- Welcoming new neighbours as they move onto your block: use the Connector Card to provide them with your contact information and to get theirs. Begin to weave them into the common life of the neighbourhood after listening to their story.
- There will be a small percentage of neighbours that will not be interested in having a conversation – this is to be expected and accepted. However, it is best not to presume this as we have been surprised many times by an underlying desire for neighbourliness.
- Invite other household members to join the conversation if they’d like. Don’t miss the kids!
- Take notes while neighbours share – it’s an act of listening and demonstrates that you take the conversation seriously.
- Leave the demographic information until the end of your conversation (e.g. phone number and email, etc).
- In addition to name, phone number and email, the *Connector Card* asks for the general **age** group of members of the household. We include this because we recognize that among children in particular, and with seniors occasionally, it is helpful to be grouped by age rather than by activities and interests.

The Neighbourhood Leadership or community association will support you by:

- Explaining the ACI framework, process and resources
- Orienting you as a Block Connector, helping out with the first couple of block connections.
- Engaging in a conversation with you using the *Connector Card* to demonstrate its use and to get to know you

- Assisting you with organizing block socials
- Providing you with resources and the Connector Cards
- Helping you use the database
- Creating a Block Connector community within the neighbourhood
- Assisting you if you decide to transition out of the Block Connector role

More on The Connector Card

The *Connector Card* Provides:

1. A comfortable way to introduce yourself and your role to your neighbours
2. A point of focus for you and your neighbour that looks somewhat official yet neighbourly.
3. A script so you don't have to worry about the basics of what to say. Something to record your neighbours' contact information on.
4. Clear information for your neighbour to keep: A short description of the role the neighbourhood has asked you to take on. Your contact information. A Block Social date. Links that give them the opportunity to see the larger picture through The City's website.
5. Meaningful questions that will create neighbourly relationships and connections on the block and in the neighbourhood.

The order of the Connector Card is significant:

1. "Hi Neighbour..." we want to be clear that we are neighbours.

Below are the parts that make you the "Point Person". ie You are welcoming them to be in touch with you.

2. "My name is..." As the BC you reach out early in an act of hospitality and share your contact info.

3. "I live nearby at..." This really introduces the neighbouring relationship and the irony that you don't know one another.

4. "My Email and Phone number is"... Just easy ways to be in touch.
The next is part is the "Party Person" part of your role.

5. "Our Next Block Social is on..." Having introduced yourself, which is a very nice thing to do, now you provide a tangible easily understood reason for your visit. You are initiating a block social, which is also a very nice thing to do. People like being invited and included. Most people think block parties are a great idea whether they plan to show up or not. So here we just want you to get the planning started. Shoot for a tentative date, you can always change it. So here it is, the little tearaway is an invite to your blocks next social. Oh yes, we avoid calling it a block party because that sounds like a big deal and may be a bit overwhelming. "Block Social" small deal, should be able to happen. With some confidence and help, next time it can be a Block Party.

6. "Our Neighbourhood has asked if I would..." This bold and large font statement says that this is not your idea, but the idea of the neighbourhood leadership. You are just the good person who said yes to the request. By the way, we thank you for saying yes.

7. "...be our blocks **Point Person**, **Party Person**, **Listener**" the job is clear and simple. Who doesn't want to have a Block Connector for their Block?
8. At this point you may want to get your neighbours contact information so that you can be in touch around block social plans and neighbourhood updates. Flip the Connector Card over and have them fill in their contact info. Be sure to check and see if you can read their email address.
9. While you are on the backside you can point out the fact that the city has a web address and a video about block connecting that they can check out
10. Tear the card and give your neighbour the small card. ...
11. As you do you can point out the questions on card and ask "if this would be a good time to hear from them re three questions.
12. So by now as you work down the card you have, done a point person role by giving your neighbour your contact info and said "be in touch". You have also done a Party Person role by initiating a block party and inviting neighbours. Now on the tear-away portion of the Connector Card, you have the opportunity to be a Listener.

The Listening Questions

QUESTION ONE: VISION FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

- This question provides a starting point for your neighbours to talk about their lives and what is important to them. Most people love to give their opinion. We have always marveled at the number of people whose vision of a good neighbourhood is a friendly or neighbourly one!
- There is always some room for improvement in the life of a neighbourhood. The "our" in this question is a step towards shared ownership of, and responsibility for, the greater good of the neighbourhood.
- With this question, you are inviting participation in creating a better neighbourhood. Many neighbours are looking for a way to be more involved in neighbourhood life but have never been asked..
- The vision information is valuable – it can guide neighbourhood decision-making and provides a list of residents who care about particular issues. In one respect this is a comprehensive public consultation in that every neighbour can express his or her hopes and desires to neighbourhood leadership.

Question Two in Activities and Interests You Would enjoy with neighbours?

- The intent of this question is to gather information that can be used to form groups within the neighbourhood. We want to discover ways to bring people together so as to build lasting connections and perhaps even friendships in the neighbourhood.
- Many neighbours are not familiar with possibilities for recreation and connection in the neighbourhood – you, as a Block Connector, can help connect your neighbours with local recreation and connection opportunities.

Question 2.5 "Would you be willing to assist with any of these?"

With this question we are looking to identify, leaders, teachers, organizers...for the lists of neighbours who share common pastimes..

QUESTION THREE: SKILLS, ABILITIES AND EXPERIENCES YOU ARE WILLING TO SHARE WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

- The intent of this question is to discover and inventory the gifts and abilities of neighbours.
We do this so that these can be expressed, celebrated and available for other neighbours who have a complementary need.
- Another objective of this question is reciprocity. Although they may have a need, they also may have some skills they wish to share with the rest of the neighbourhood, which contributes to a sense of equal amount of give and take.
- As a Block Connector you will be a first line of connection to the needs of neighbours. Your own observations are valuable as you assess someone's abilities (e.g. a senior citizen who has difficulties shoveling their walk).
- Many neighbours, particularly older individuals, value the opportunity to share some of their life experiences and stories with the Block Connector and potentially the neighbourhood. The discussion concerning life experiences will no doubt uncover gifts that these neighbours can offer to the neighbourhood and perhaps even interests to share in.

APARTMENT OR CONDO BUILDING TIPS:

- It is a good practice to inform and request collaboration with the condo board or the management group. In many cases your Neighbourhood Connector will have already made contact with these groups. It may be possible to post notices as a resident or to put up a banner or sign for ACI.
- The building itself may become like a "mini neighbourhood" within the whole neighbourhood.
- Condo boards and management groups often have established or will welcome "social committees"
- There may be common spaces in your building to use for social gatherings

Conclusion

The Abundant Community Initiative is excited to partner with you and your neighbourhood in this community-building program, and we hope you find this guide to be a useful tool.

Ultimately it is your enthusiasm for a connected and caring life in your neighbourhood that is making a real difference. Thank you for your commitment to community building in your neighbourhood!

"When we discover the true richness of our neighbourhoods – the vast and amazing potential – it becomes clear that we could fill many lifetimes within the boundaries of a few blocks. And that is more than enough."

JAMIE ARPIN-RICCI

