

# For the Neighbourhood Connector

*"I have been a Neighbourhood Connector in my neighbourhood for over a year now. I am excited and amazed at how initiatives such as block parties are catalyzing neighbourly connections and care, and about how quickly Block Connectors are engaging their neighbours in creative ways."*

KAREN WILK

Neighbourhood Connector

## The Role of the Neighbourhood Connector

Your primary role as the Neighbourhood Connector is to identify and support Block Connectors. While this is a straightforward and exciting role, it is also very challenging. We encourage you to engage in the work as soon as possible to see if it is a fit for you.

### AS A NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTOR YOU WILL NEED:

- **Confidence and passion** for neighbouring to enlist and support a Block Connector on each block in the neighbourhood
- **Leadership ability** to direct and motivate Block Connectors to connect with their whole block, and host annual block gatherings
- **Tenacity and sufficient organizational skills** to engage all blocks in the neighbourhood
- **Boldness and social skills** to engage *all kinds of* neighbours
- **Hospitality** to convene the Block Connectors for encouragement and "team support"
- **Teaching ability** to demonstrate for the Block Connectors how to connect neighbours
- **Interest** in the conversations collected, ensuring collection and relevant follow-up action
- **Care, grace and patience** to work over the long haul with all levels of ability and commitment among Block Connectors
- **Communication skills** to correspond with Block Connectors, the Support Team and neighbourhood leadership (e.g. community league executive)

### Tips for... Identifying Block Connectors:

- **Strike up a conversation.** Walk around your neighbourhood, knock on people's doors. Have a friendly chat and discover who may be a suitable Block Connector. Ask if they know any outgoing or community-minded people in the area. Use the *Connector Card* to explain the work of the Block Connector.
- **Place an ad or article** in your neighbourhood newsletter or website, briefly describing the Block Connector role and how to contact you.
- **Attend neighbourhood events** and bring your neighbourhood map and *Connector Cards*. Discover block enthusiasts, people who have hosted block parties, sold community league memberships, past Block Parents, members of Neighbourhood Watch or Welcome Wagon, etc.
- **Talk with neighbours** in natural gathering spots like parks and coffee shops.

## Tips for... Supporting Block Connectors:

The role of the Block Connector is new and challenging for most. For this reason their success will depend upon **effective support and encouragement** from you.

To Do:

- **Host periodic gatherings** with Block Connectors to offer an opportunity for team support, learning and camaraderie. Try all kinds of gatherings, times of the day, sizes of groups and formats. Create geographical groupings of 4 to 6 Block Connectors who can support each other.
- **Create a positive vibe and momentum** around ACI in your neighbourhood and provide information through newsletter articles, stories and reports. Use the neighbourhood or community league newsletter to share stories about neighbourliness and include photos of block gatherings, group activities and work projects. Make use of social media (e.g. neighbourhood or block Facebook pages).
- **Add ACI information to the community league or neighbourhood website...** Show results of conversations (e.g. list activities neighbours would like to engage in with each other). Make the website a point of entry for Block Connectors and a place of welcome to neighbours to engage in activities and groups. Post the Connector Card with an explanation of how it works as a conversation tool.
- **Stay in touch...** Prioritize face-to-face, phone, text and then email conversations.
- **Get to know the Block Connectors** using the Connector Card (great way to try it out!).

## Neighbourhood Connector Tasks

This section will guide you in your role. It is designed to provide clear direction and reasonable goals that can be agreed upon between you and your neighbourhood leadership (e.g. community league executive). Suggested number of hours per task is included – these may need to be modified to accommodate your specific circumstances. An overview of the tasks follows, grouped into the initiation and start-up tasks, monthly tasks and wrap-up tasks.

### INITIATION AND START-UP TASKS:

Orient your neighbourhood leadership/community league executive and Support Team members on the fundamentals of the ACI process and key roles. The recommended optimal time for this period is February and March, in order to be organized and ready for the optimal block connecting months, which we have observed to be May and June in Edmonton. That said, start whenever you're ready to.

- **Block Connect on your own Block:**
- Find a neighbour who would be willing to help with the Block Connector role
- Plan a block social
- Introduce yourself to your neighbours using the Connector Card
- Enter the answers your neighbours have provided into the database used by your neighbourhood and community league
- Do your best to connect your neighbours with current neighbourhood activities

- **Attend an ACI Practitioners' Gathering:**
- Geared towards supporting Neighbourhood Connectors, Support Team members and neighbourhood leadership, but open to anyone interested in building community in their neighbourhood
- These gatherings build community among Edmonton's Neighbourhood Connectors and their Support Teams, providing a time for sharing resources, stories, research, new information, encouragement and questions
- For information on the next ACI Practitioners' gathering, contact City staff by calling 311
- **Select a Database Tool:**
- Determine a database tool to collect, organize and collate the information gathered in the conversations initiated by Block Connectors in your neighbourhood
- Link the database to neighbourhood or community league's website
- Orient Block Connectors on the database (see the *Collecting and Organizing Information* section)
- **Create a Block Map for the Neighbourhood:**
- Tentatively divide the neighbourhood into blocks and cul-de-sacs, and apartment/condo buildings into floors, of approximately 20 households each (these groupings will eventually each have one or two Block Connectors)

#### MONTHLY TASKS:

- **Identify new Block Connectors:**
  - See the *Neighbourhood Connector Job Outline* for recommended number per month
- **Orient new Block Connectors:**
  - Demonstrate the use of the *Connector Card*
- **Host a monthly Block Connector gathering:**
  - After identifying at least five Block Connectors, invite an experienced Neighbourhood Connector (from another neighbourhood) to assist you in leading your first Block Connector gathering.
- **Accompany new Block Connectors on their first neighbourhood conversations:**
  - Accompany each new Block Connector on at least one conversation (committing at least one hour per Block Connector will go a long way in setting them up for success)
  - As the Neighbourhood Connector, lead the first conversation to demonstrate, then encourage the Block Connector to lead from then on
- **Ensure information entry by Block Connectors:**
  - Actively encourage Block Connectors to upload their information into the database your neighbourhood chooses to use
  - Inform Block Connectors that the community league website is posting the database information – this will help them to connect their block community building work to the bigger neighbourhood picture

- **Attend ACI Practitioners' Gatherings:**
  - Receive ongoing support and training in a collaborative environment
- **Encourage and assist Block Connectors to organize block socials and complete Connector Cards:**
  - Providing ongoing support to your growing team of Block Connectors is important in maintaining momentum
- **Creation of new activity groups of shared interest:**
  - Working with the community league's "Program Director" and the Support Team, look at the responses in the database which seem to stand out for a lot of people, for example, ones in which neighbours are willing to lead or in which there is lots of interest (finding leaders is a good starting point for the formation of new groups in the neighbourhood - provide leaders with a list of neighbours who have indicated the same interest)
  - Post the conversation information and notification of the new groups formed on the community league website
- **Skills, abilities and experience exchange:**
  - Transform information from the conversations into service as you work with the community league, Support Team and/or specifically with a person from the community league executive often known as the Volunteer Coordinator/Director. (In ACI, this person may become known as the Gift Steward – they connect people who have abilities that can fulfill the needs of their neighbours or the neighbourhood)
  - Post the gifts skills and experiences information from neighbours on the community league website
- **Vision information collation and presentation:**
  - Provide the neighbourhood leadership or community league executive with the vision that your neighbours have for the neighbourhood (see Question #1 on the Connector Card)
  - Post the neighbours' vision on the community league website for the neighbourhood to see and invite the leadership to comment on it.
- **Working together with the neighbourhood leadership:**
  - It is important for the Neighbourhood Connector to maintain a good relationship with the community league. Working together with the Support Team to be sensitive to the needs and direction of neighbourhood leadership is important.
  - ACI adds another item to the leadership's agenda, but it is an important and valued one. ACI offers leadership: feedback from the neighbourhood about their vision, identification of the abilities and willingness of residents to contribute to the neighbourhood, and an inventory of activities neighbours would like to engage in together (e.g. ideas for new programs and services that could be offered). And with a Support Team in place, there should be very little extra work on the leadership's plate.

**NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTOR MONTH AT A GLANCE (WITH SUGGESTED HOURS):**

Identify 5 Block Connectors	10
Interview Block Connectors	2.5
Accompany Block Connectors on first interviews	5
Initiative communication via website, Facebook page, newsletter, etc.	3
Connector Card data entry	2.5
Participate in ACI Practitioners' Gathering	3
Block Connector Support gathering	3
Meet with Support Team or community league/group (Data discussions, New groups, Block Connector support, Block Socials, Communication)	2
Email and Admin	2
Approximate Hours per month	33
Approximate Hours per year	400
<b>Submit time sheet to community league</b>	

### Tips for... Tricky Situations:

- There may be neighbours who intimidate the Block Connectors. While there is no absolute imperative to approach these neighbours, as a Neighbourhood Connector you may want to join the Block Connectors on these connections in order to overcome any barriers. Remember this is a long term initiative.
- What do we do about the “tricky people” that live on our block? Try to reach out to all individuals. This situation presents you with the greatest opportunity for neighbourhood growth. Those that may be isolated can be the most impacted with some words of welcome. Balance this intent to reach everyone with your intuition and sense of what is safe.

### WRAP-UP AND TRANSITIONING INTO LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY

This is the last period of establishing the ACI framework in your neighbourhood, as laid out by the *Neighbourhood Connector Job Outline*. The work you've completed so far has hopefully enabled a long-term, sustainable model for community building and organizing in your neighbourhood. We hope that the impact of forming the network of Block Connectors will continually enable a more connected and caring culture in your neighbourhood.

Focus on engaging the Support Team and the community league in entering the valuable information learned in neighbourhood conversations into the database of choice, and then into action! Use the information from Question #1 of the Connector Card to report on the vision of residents for their neighbourhood and help inform the neighbourhood leadership about the types of programs and services the neighbourhood would benefit from the most. Review the responses from Question #2 to form new groups and invite neighbours to existing groups. Questions #3 will establish an ongoing gift inventory.

- Co-host with the Support Team a Block Connector thank-you gathering
- Provide a report on your progress establishing the ACI framework in your neighbourhood to the community league executive via the Support Team
- Option to continue as a volunteer (if previously paid) Neighbourhood Connector in partnership with the Support Team

## Collecting and Organizing Information

**Guarded information:** The information provided by neighbours is intended to be shared with the neighbourhood. And while this is true, the community league has a responsibility to guard the information from misuse. They do this in much the same way as they guard the community league membership information that has been entrusted to them.

### **PROTECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION:**

It is important to tell people what will happen with the information that they provide to you as their Block Connector. The primary intent of gathering the information is to share it in order to facilitate relationship building and connection in the neighbourhood. This does not mean that it will be shared outside of the neighbourhood. It will be handled with care, following the guidelines of the *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)*, which governs the protection of personal information for non-profit organizations in Alberta. The *ACI Personal Information Protection Policy* can be provided to you upon request.

## Neighbourhood Database

Organizing neighbourhood information has come a long way from the recipe box of cards with phone numbers and community league membership information. Now database and organizational tools are available, secure and easy to use by your neighbourhood. As neighbours provide their contact information and vision for the neighborhood, pastime interests and skills to share, these can be stored, sorted and used to create a flourishing neighbourhood.

The information collected from the neighbourhood conversations, as noted earlier, has three primary functions, to:

1. Provide a picture of the neighbourhood's vision;
2. Connect and invite neighbours to join existing groups of interest, or assist in the formation of new groups; and
3. Provide an inventory of skills, abilities and experiences to share with the neighbourhood.

Database and organization tools are ready for use by you and your neighbourhood. These user-friendly online applications are aligned with the *Connector Card* and community league membership cards.

**FEATURES OF THE LATEST DATABASE OPTIONS:**

- Accessible, secure and easy to use online applications
- Convenient repositories for neighbourhood information collected in conversations
- Effectively identify common interests and activities to facilitate the formation of new groups (or invitation to existing groups)
- Easily generate reports (for example, a report on things that are important to people - the vision for the neighbourhood)
- Display neighbourhood information visually using interactive lists, while still protecting privacy
- Provides an in-the-background organizing tool that does not remove the need and opportunity for face-to-face connection in the neighbourhood
- Responsive and easy to adapt as neighbourhood processes evolve