

Neighborhood Block Party Guide

A series of how-to-guide for residents working to improve their neighborhoods.



Why Have a Block Party?

Dear Palo Alto Residents,

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 4th 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.

You don't have to live in an area of single-family homes to be involved in a block party. 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.

This kit is organized so that all necessary information forms and "do's and don'ts" are included. In addition, your neighborhood community center or police may be able to direct you to others who organized block parties in your area if you want to organize a big event!

So don't hesitate! Gather a couple of neighbors, pick a date, follow the instructions in the guide and invite everyone to join in!

Sincerely,
Frank Benest
City Manager

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 city-sponsored group such as Neighborhood Watch or Palo Alto Neighborhood Disasters Activity (PANDA).
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 interests.
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 old-time 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.

Suggestions on How to Start Organizing

1. Gather a few neighbors and divide up the tasks. Decide on a possible theme, activities, etc. Decide what to do about food.
2. Start knocking on doors to find out if there is enough interest and, if so, which day would be the best for the most people
3. Pick a date and time (mid-afternoon to evening works best). Respect neighborhood quietness after 9:00pm. Think of an alternate plan in case of poor weather.
4. Go door to door.
 - Hand out invitations (use the one included in this guide or create your own).
 - If you plan to close off the street., you will need to complete Block Party application form with a signature and deliver it or mail it to the Palo Alto Police Department, Attention: Code Enforcement Officer, 275 Forest Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301 or fax it to (650) 329-2565,
 - Recruit volunteers to help with the planning.
5. Decide if this will be a block party restricted to those on the street/block or will people be able to invite friends/relatives (if yes, how many). Make this clear in your flyer/invitation.





Good Ideas

- Invite a city council member, school principal, or city staff member.
- Call the Police Department, Fire Department, Environmental Services or other city departments to obtain literature, give-aways, or to request a presentation.
- Make sure you have a record of everyone who attends and everyone you contacted; after all, the idea of a block party is to connect neighbors.
- Identify special talents your neighbors might have - you may be living next to a magician, singer, dancer, artist, radio host or prize winning cook.
- Plan lots of activities for children.
- Have an environmentally friendly party. Ask everyone to bring their own reusable plates, cups and cutlery to limit paper garbage and litter.
- 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.
- 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. Also, neighbors may want to contribute towards the cost of a truckload to the dump and use this to clean out gardens, garbage or alleys.
- Distribute an evaluation form to participants (to get a good response, number the forms and have door prizes for returned entries).

REMINDERS



- Alcohol is only permitted on private property, not on city streets or in parks.
- Residents should observe security precautions, for example lock back doors to houses and keep equipment in sight.
- In hot weather, food spoils quickly; all perishables such as mayonnaise, salads or meats should be stored in coolers and be kept at the proper temperature.
- Food cannot be sold on city streets unless the proper permits have been obtained.
- Loud amplification of music is prohibited.
- Remember, when you set up tables and chairs on the street, that emergency vehicles may need to have access to the area, so leave room.
- Observe safety precautions for all activities, for example keep barbecues away from activities for children.
- Post signs the day before reminding everyone to remove cars and that the street will be closed.

YOU ARE INVITED TO



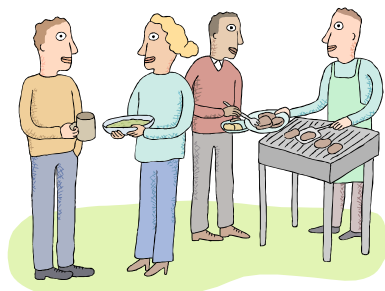
A BLOCK PARTY!

DATE:

TIME:

PLACE:

THEME/EVENT:



To RSVP or to help out, please phone:

_____ at _____ or

_____ at _____

Suggested Activities for Getting to Know Your Neighbors



4th of July

- Who can trace their family origins back the farthest.
- Who is the newest "American."?
- Play charades using American heroes.
- Include a cake decorated with the American Flag.
- Play patriotic music.

Neighborhood History

- Research through the library, and the museum of local history of your neighborhood.
- 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.

Cultural Connections

- Have everyone bring his or her favorite family dish.
- Teach everyone how to say three things in another language.
- Use a map to indicate where everyone originally came from.
- Record the story of how everyone came to live in the neighborhood and what he or she likes best about it.

Neighborhood Action

- Discuss what issues/concerns people may have (keep this to a predetermined time: remember, a block party should be fun).
- Establish teams to explore how to resolve the concerns.
- Have a clean-up time.
- Build a bench, plant a garden, and paint street numbers, etc. as part of the block party activities.

Getting Your "New American" Neighbor to the Block Party

Many new citizens/neighbors want to meet their neighbors and make friends. It is important to make everyone feel at ease and to communicate clearly your intentions.

Here are some suggestions that may help new neighbors feel welcome:

- Use a translated description of what a block party is.
- If possible, knock on the door of a new neighbor with someone who speaks the language.
- Be specific about what the expectations are.
- Remember, words like barbecue, face painting or potluck may need to be explained.
- If you are blocking off the street for the day, explain about street parking changes.
- It may take more than one invitation for a new citizen/neighbor to fully understand what a block party is, so make a point of following up in the weeks leading up to the party.
- Make activities accessible to those with limited English language skills.
- Ask about special cultural/religious diet or activity constraints.
- Safety is a big concern for many new citizens because of past experiences or fear caused by not knowing the language.

Fun Family Activities for Block Parties

- Invite a clown, balloon artist or magician
- 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

