

STRUCTURING YOUR ORGANIZATION

HOW FORMAL SHOULD YOU BE?

Informal groups that pick up garbage and plant flowers on an occasional basis can do a very good job of beautifying the park without ever even giving themselves a name. However, if your group has larger goals you'll need more structure to help your group stay organized, handle money responsibly, and keep track of important information.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational structure is everything that makes it possible for your group to achieve your goals, from leadership hierarchies to filing systems. There are many models of overall organizational structures groups can adopt, such as conservancies, 501(c)(3) organizations, or formal coalitions, and more detailed information about each of these can be found later in this tip sheet packet.

On a smaller scale, the organizational structures your group creates and uses play a role in defining your organizational *culture*. Like clothes and haircuts, you'll want to pick organizational structures that fit your group's style. Here are some examples of different organizational structures to get you thinking about creating an organizational culture for your group.

- ✓ **Elected Leadership:** Though the general membership usually vote for the "natural leaders" anyway, elections ensure that your group is democratic, that one person isn't calling all the shots. Regular elections also mean that a leader can pass on the torch before he or she burns out.
- ✓ **Committees:** A great way to delegate responsibility and find new leaders. By spreading out the work, responsibility, and credit among many people, committees let you get a lot more done.
- ✓ **Official Memberships:** By officially recognizing members and letting them know that they are members, you create a support group—people you can ask to volunteer, people you can send mailings to, people you can ask for money, people you can call "members" when you're asking someone else for money and trying to look big and well-organized.
- ✓ **A Name (and a Logo):** A name makes your group official, while a logo looks great on flyers and in newspaper articles and on top of your letterhead.
- ✓ **Regular Meetings:** So that group leaders can report to the general membership and ask for their input. Meetings keep your organization from turning into a one-person show.
- ✓ **Regular Communications:** As your group gets bigger, you'll need a way to make the general membership feel like they're in the loop. Even if they are only published once or twice a year, newsletters and bulletins are an important tool for holding on to your membership. (They're also good for sending promotional material to people you want to impress.)
- ✓ **Records:** Files filled with letters you've written and received, newspaper articles, old flyers, photographs, legal documents, membership lists, and business cards. If your group is to continue to exist through the years as leadership changes you must have a way of passing on important information.

Adapted from "Tools & Tactics for Building Neighborhood Organizations," Citizens for NYC, www.citizensnyc.org