



FOSTERING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES:

Building Bridges



KEYSTONE

Connected communities are built on strong interpersonal connections between homeowners in an HOA community. Having a strong sense of community is a key component to making communities thrive and more desirable to live in.

Life in a community association provides tremendous value – from orderly, attractive common areas to exciting amenities – however, dedicating time to build a stronger sense of community requires deliberate action on the part of the HOA board.

In this guide, we look at how HOA board members can:

- Foster strong interpersonal connections between residents**
- Boost HOA member engagement across the community**
- Bring community members together with special events**





Building Bridges via Strong Interpersonal Connections

HOA boards can prioritize the opportunities to create connections between neighbors and build stronger interpersonal bridges between residents through the following:

Practice transparency

Create a more welcoming environment by making sure the membership is informed and included in decision-making. Throwing back the curtain on issues facing the association makes community residents feel more involved and lets them know their input is valued.

SOME WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY & OPENNESS:

- Make a concerted effort to remind all community members that their presence is welcome at open session board meetings
- Use digital conferencing tools like Zoom to make meeting attendance even more convenient
- Share the “why” behind HOA policies, proposed rule changes, and actions that the Board implements
- Listen with an open mind: community members feel valued when they are heard

Increase the frequency and detail of communications

Today's association members are accustomed to receiving communications on multiple platforms from every organization that touches their lives. They expect the same from their HOA. Although many communication platforms are now digital, make sure that your community utilizes the best options to serve your membership's demographics and desires. Ensuring that a vast majority of your community members are staying informed will help alleviate miscommunication and dissatisfaction with the association.

Community association management leaders should excel at communicating on multiple platforms. Consider obtaining feedback from homeowners as to what methods of communication will be most conveniently received, whether via phone, text, email, websites or online notice boards, social media platforms, or printed newsletters. The more fluently your board can communicate across every medium, the more involved community members feel.



Demonstrate the full value of assessments

HOA members become disengaged or sometimes downright contentious when they cannot see the direct translation of their monthly assessments into lifestyle-enhancing benefits. It's up to the association's board to show a clear connection between the fees that association members pay and what they receive in return.

In addition to the numerous behind-the-scenes expenses that go into successful community association management, remind HOA members of the outcomes of their assessments by directing the funds toward fun, engaging initiatives that include everyone.

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Use the communication platforms above to illustrate the clear connection between members' assessments and lifestyle-enhancing projects like community-wide events, seasonal decorations, improvements to common areas, landscaping initiatives, amenities upgrades, and more. Drawing a direct connection between the efforts of the association and how these can impact property values is important in establishing a clearer picture of the goals of the board.



Assume best intentions

People take their home environment very personally, so issues can escalate quickly. Approach every interaction with an open mind and a willingness to listen. Board members have a fiduciary responsibility to the community, which means protecting the association's best interests – while representing the will and desires of the residents who live in the community.

Reacquainting yourself with the community's rules and regulations often can help articulate the reasoning behind certain decisions. Practice patience as you listen to homeowners and weigh their input carefully against every decision.

Using the above methods shows the membership that their interests are always top-of-mind as everyone works toward achieving the shared goal of a successful HOA and protecting property values. People feel connected when they understand what is happening in their community.



Build Bridges by Increasing Member Engagement

Involvement from community members is the cornerstone of quality HOA management. However, boards often struggle to increase participation from homeowners.

Ironically, less engagement from community members is often a sign that association management is going well. After all, homeowners are more likely to speak up when they have concerns than when they're satisfied. However, a significant part of successful HOA management is getting homeowners involved in a positive way.

So, how can you encourage more homeowners to actively participate in your community's association management?



HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO GET STARTED:

Update your HOA's communication platforms

As mentioned above, homeowners expect communication to be clear and via their preferred channel of communication. As such, it's important to be proactive about sharing real-time announcements on all communication platforms. These include your community's website, email blasts, newsletters, signage in common areas, member portals, social media, and all the other methods your community uses to communicate. You want it to be easy for homeowners to find the information they need at any time.

Activate your amenity set

Your community's unique amenities play a significant role in what makes your HOA special. Use your amenities as a centerpiece for homeowner engagement. Ensuring that the pool, parks, trails, sports complexes, and fitness center, etc. are well-maintained invites resident usage and enjoyment. Additionally, scheduling events and activities around amenities not only serves as a reminder of the value the association provides but helps re-engage and re-connect homeowners.



Invite board members to speak at events

Some homeowners are unlikely to ever attend a board meeting, but community events provide an opportunity to bring HOA announcements to them. Ask at least one board member to attend each community event and share a brief update about any exciting news on the horizon for the HOA. Putting a face to the board of directors helps homeowners see that the board is comprised of volunteers who are working hard to support property values by maintaining a well-run HOA.

Invite community members to join the social committee

A social committee can be a huge help for an HOA and alleviates some of the board's responsibility for planning and executing events. Social committees are comprised of volunteer homeowners and don't require elections.

Every HOA has a few homeowners with strong ties to the social fabric of the community and possess ideas for the types of events that would be well-received by the community. These are the perfect individuals to head up the social committee. Their "boots-on-the-ground" input is critical. When putting out the call for volunteers, be sure to encourage involvement from different demographics who can bring diverse perspectives to the social committee.

Don't give up

When it comes to increasing community member engagement, remain vigilant. If a particular event is not well-attended, update the idea next time the event occurs. Community events should evolve over time to remain relevant. Making incremental improvements will keep things fresh.

Remind homeowners their involvement is valued

In the rush of daily life, homeowners may miss out on important community updates. Continue to remind homeowners of available tools and technology provided to make their lives more convenient like the homeowner portal, online maintenance request forms, and who to contact for various concerns so that they can access the information when their schedule allows. When contact methods are easy, homeowners are more likely to share valuable feedback with their HOA management company and board.

Once again, communication is important. Inviting feedback can help determine what resonates most with residents. Provide homeowners with plenty of advance notice to mark their calendars, then release event re-caps and photos after events conclude. Traditions take time to build. Consistency is key.



Encourage homeowners to run for a seat on the HOA board (or join a committee)

If a community member has lots of great ideas about how the association should be run, urge them to run for a board seat during the next election cycle. Encourage them to speak with your community manager or other board members about what to expect when occupying this important position.

For those unsure whether they want to take on the responsibility of serving on the board, suggest they join one of the community's planning committees. In addition to the social committee, many associations have separate groups for architectural review, landscaping, and more. These volunteer committees need people with all skillsets.



Involvement shapes your community

Whether serving on the board, participating in a committee, attending HOA events, or getting involved in another aspect of association management, engagement helps to shape your community. Community associations rely on homeowners volunteering their time and sharing their opinions to guide the future trajectory of the HOA. Volunteering time is personally rewarding and provides incredible benefits to your community. Help others see how being directly involved in what shapes your community's present and future decisions can be beneficial to them and their neighborhood.



Building Bridges with Your Next Community Event

Planning and executing special events for an HOA always include a long list of considerations, but as we slowly turn the corner on the Covid-19 pandemic, there are even more factors to consider. While your HOA management team is a great resource to tap into, here are a few expert tips to make your next event successful and make your community residents feel connected.

Start with a good team

HOA boards are generally tasked with final approval of event logistics and budget; however, that doesn't mean that the event planning and execution should fall solely on the board members' shoulders. Establish a social committee to plan your upcoming event. Reach out to established social clubs within your community and ask for volunteers who are socially minded, enthusiastic, and have lots of ideas to contribute.



Plan an event that fits with your community

Plan events that make sense for the residents of your community. For example, communities with many families might enjoy an outdoor movie night, live music, cookouts, or a pool party. Communities with an active adult population might enjoy arts and crafts, wine tasting, or game nights like bingo or trivia.

Inspiration can also be found in the different cultures within your community. Events that coincide with a special holiday such as Chinese New Year, Cinco de Mayo, or St. Patrick's Day can springboard from a festive state of mind.

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Consider centering an event around the amenities in your community. Focusing on outdoor activities initially will help residents feel more comfortable reconvening after a long period of social distancing. Walk-a-thons, scavenger hunts, BBQs, or outdoor concerts are all ways to celebrate the unique amenities that make your community special. If your HOA had success with virtual, drive-through or drive-in events, keep those on the calendar, too.

Not sure which idea to choose? Survey residents to determine what's popular.



Set a clearly defined budget

Budgets will vary by event and HOA but establishing an expense limit will help with decision-making as you plan. If your association has a limited budget for social activities, don't let that stop



you from planning a fantastic event. Offset costs by selling tickets, holding a raffle, or asking for sponsorship from local businesses. Community volunteers can also help reduce expenditures by donating their time and talents.

Promote, promote, promote

Start drumming up excitement about your event at least one month in advance, then increase the frequency of promotion the closer you get to event day. Use all the communications channels available to you – community website, message boards, emails, newsletters, social media groups, and on-site signage – to keep the event dates top of mind for homeowners.

At the event, hire a professional photographer (or better yet, source out a community resident with photographic skills) to take lots of candid photos, then use these pictures as a post-event re-cap while simultaneously generating interest in the next community get-together.



Consult with your management company

Remember that your manager is always available to help. Lean on your HOA management company for support handling all the event paperwork and logistics like permitting, insurance coverage, vendor coordination, communications, and feedback surveys. Your manager's experience can save your social committee from wasting time reinventing the wheel.



Enjoy yourself

Event planning may occupy a lot of energy and time, so make sure to delegate wherever possible. Establish a plan to hand off responsibilities on the day of the event so members of your social committee can enjoy the fruits of their hard work, too. If all the details are accounted for in advance, your event should be a welcome opportunity for all attendees to enjoy your community.



Keep the momentum going

As residents begin to warm up to the idea of more social activities, it may take time to build comfort levels and enthusiasm for community events. Attendance may not be off the charts initially but stay the course and continue to build on your successes. If your events add value for the membership, you'll find that residents will become more engaged and excited about what's next on the community calendar.

Looking to foster more connections within your HOA community?

CONTACT US TODAY TO LEARN HOW KEYSTONE IS HELPING TO BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER.

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