



### **Include Renters in Your Neighborhood Association**

One of the key questions for neighborhood associations in single family neighborhoods is whether to limit membership to homeowners... or actively recruit all residents, including renters.

Many groups consciously include renters. For example, by its very name, Burlington Residents Association is clearly meant for renters as well as homeowners. The bylaws of the Fourth and Gill Neighborhood Organization state that all residents within its borders can become members of the organization. The South Knoxville Neighborhood and Business Coalition created a welcome packet for its member groups to distribute to all newcomers in single family homes, renters and owner-occupants alike.

Other groups struggle with the question of whether to include renters, or they limit membership to homeowners for legal reasons.

One argument against spending time on recruiting renters is that they tend to be more transient than homeowners, but this is not always the case. Some renters remain in the same home for years, particularly in well-tended properties.

Another argument against renter inclusion is that renters have no equity in their homes and therefore are not concerned about property values. On the other hand, a neighborhood's property values are tied to the quality of all housing in the neighborhood and to the character of the neighborhood in general. It is safe to say that most renters, like most homeowners, care about the safety of their families and about the quality of the neighborhood in which they live.

Finally, it has been said that renters are less likely to contribute time and resources to the neighborhood group, but if this were true there would not be active resident-led groups in rental properties throughout the city.

On the positive side, there are a number of reasons to target renters as well as homeowners in your membership recruitment plans:

- ✓ Renters may have chosen to live in your neighborhood because they like the area. You can build on that choice. Plus, they could end up as homeowners.
- ✓ Having a problem with a particular landlord? The tenants may be able to help --- or may need your support!

- ✓ Is there a problem with a particular renter? Excluding that person will not solve the problem. Invite them to the neighborhood meetings and try getting to know them.
- ✓ Most renters care as much as homeowners about children's safety, criminal activity, traffic problems, and related issues.
- ✓ Inclusivity increases the credibility of an organization that claims to represent the residents inside well-defined geographic boundaries.
- ✓ Since the recession of 2008, home ownership has declined, and the percentage of renters has increased. It has been widely reported that millennials, for now at least, are less interested in owning a home. See for example: [http://www.newamerica.org/downloads/Millennials\\_and\\_Homeownership.pdf](http://www.newamerica.org/downloads/Millennials_and_Homeownership.pdf)  
For the foreseeable future, neighborhood organizations that focus only on homeowners will be focusing on a declining percentage of homes in their neighborhoods.
- ✓ Renters can make coffee, hand out fliers, set up chairs, plant flowers and serve on committees just as well as anyone else. Excluding renters limits the human resources available to a neighborhood organization, and thereby limits the potential of the organization.

Building relationships among neighbors is the key to creating a successful neighborhood organization. When it comes to watching out for criminal activity, making sure children stay out of a busy street, and getting to know one another over a potluck meal, does it really matter who owns and who rents?