

Planning a neighbourhood event



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



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NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

GUIDE VERSION

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About this guide

Neighbourhood events are great ways to meet and connect with neighbours. There are many event options including a street concert, movie night, party in the park, or community skate.

This guide outlines the basic steps for planning a neighbourhood event. There is also a helpful resource section at the bottom of the guide to help neighbours with detailed parts of event planning.



Every event is unique and groups may work through these steps in different stages. If you have questions about your event idea, or are unsure where to start, connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#). Staff are happy to help!

What is a neighbourhood event?

Neighbourhood events are fun ways to interact and build connections with neighbours in a specific part of the city like a street, block, or multi unit building. Neighbourhood events are:

- tailored to a specific neighbourhood (not city-wide);
- inclusive for all neighbours;
- promote a sense of belonging and community connection; and,
- hosted in a space where all neighbours can attend.



Each neighbourhood event will be unique and have different considerations. For example, some events may require certain permits and approvals, and others may need special equipment and supplies. If you have specific questions about your neighbourhood event, reach out to the neighbourhoods team for support.

Step 1: Connect with your neighbours

Before starting to plan your event, consider reaching out to neighbours to determine event ideas and get an estimate of how many people are interested in attending. Having an idea

of the size of your event, and community interest, will help you make important decisions moving forward.



While connecting with neighbours, develop a group of neighbours that would be interested in helping to plan and deliver the neighbourhood event. Having a group of committed helpers can make the process easier.

Before you start planning your event, consult with your neighbours about some event details. Consider asking important questions like:

- What type of event would you be interested in attending?
- What times/days work best for you?
- What types of activities would you like to see?
- Do you have any suggestions for inclusive food choices?
- Do you want to help with the event?

Asking these questions will help you plan a well-attended and inclusive event that is engaging for all neighbours.



If you have a virtual neighbourhood group, such as on Facebook, WeChat, or WhatsApp, consider posting a poll to ask some of these important questions.

Step 2: Brainstorm important details

Once you have connected with neighbours, it is time to start considering some important event details. Specifically, start to think about:

- What type of event will you host?
- Where will the event be hosted?
- When will it be?

For help answering these questions check out the information below.

TYPE OF EVENT

There are many different types of neighbourhood events. When determining the type of event to host, consider the responses from neighbours who provided feedback and other factors like the time of year. For inspiration, here are a few ideas for fun neighbourhood events:

- Potluck

- Concert
- Talent show
- Learning or skill-building workshop
- Market
- Swapping event
- Ice cream or food truck social
- Street or block party
- Sporting event
- Winter skating event
- Craft workshop
- Board games night
- Outdoor movie night

For more event ideas, check out the [neighbourhoods website](#). When thinking about these different event options, think of ways to make the event inclusive for all neighbours. For example, if you are hosting a board game night, make sure to provide a range of options for neighbours of different ages to play.

LOCATION OF EVENT

The location of the event will depend on the type of event you plan to host! When considering spaces to host your event, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

- Is the location close to your neighbourhood and easily accessible for all neighbours? Think about walking, biking, public transit, and access for persons with a disability.
- Does the space have all the features you need? Think about access to electricity and water, paved spaces, space for activities, and more.
- Is the location large enough for all neighbours to comfortably attend and enjoy?

To help you find a location for your upcoming event, check out the [Gathering Spaces Map](#). This tool displays places to gather across Waterloo including, parks, city facilities, restaurants, cinemas, businesses, schools, places of worship, and more.

DATE OF EVENT

To promote inclusivity, select a date that works for the majority of neighbours in the neighbourhood area. Check the feedback received to see what dates/times may be best for neighbours. It is also a good practice to plan any event at least 3 months in advance to encourage high attendance and manage logistics. When selecting a date, it is important to think about the following:

- Choose a date/time that works for neighbours. Check the feedback received to see what dates/times may be best.
- Consider putting the date to a vote.
- Be sure to schedule a rain date or develop a plan for poor weather.

- Confirm availability of the space based on the selected event details. If it is a busy space, you may only have a few select dates to choose from.
- Try to avoid planning events during religious observances, holidays, or cultural celebrations.

Step 3: Connect with the neighbourhoods team

Once you have an idea of the event type, location, and date, connect with the City of Waterloo's neighbourhoods team to chat about your idea. The team will help you determine the important next steps for items such as permits, approvals, and insurance.

Permits and approvals are required when events are being hosted on local streets/blocks and park spaces. Applications for these types of permits and approvals can take up to 90 days. The neighbourhoods team will help you with necessary approvals.

Insurance is an important part of hosting an event. For more details on obtaining liability insurance, check out the resource section at the bottom of this guide.

Park spaces can be reserved for events, but a park access permit may be required for any vehicles. Contact the [neighbourhoods team](#) with questions.

APPLY FOR FUNDING

The neighbourhoods team offers funding to support neighbourhood events and connection opportunities. Funding is available from \$50 up to \$7,500 with neighbourhood grants. For more information on grants and how to apply, check out the neighbourhoods website or reach out to neighborhoods@waterloo.ca.

Step 4: Organize event details

The next step in planning is to think about event details like food, entertainment, equipment, and more. This section provides information to help you plan these important details.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

Food and beverages are often a part of social gatherings. When planning your neighbourhood event, take time to consider if food and beverages will be offered at the event and how they will provide these items. Some things to consider:

- Barbeques – Pick up items to grill that are precooked for quick and safe preparation.
- Potlucks – Ask each family to bring a certain item (main, side, dessert, etc.). This is a low-cost alternative that can promote sharing recipes, connections, and trying new diverse foods.



If you run a potluck, encourage neighbours to provide an ingredient list for the item they are bringing. This will help neighbours select options that fit with their dietary needs.

- Food truck – Have a food truck come to the event and serve food. Interested neighbours will be able to purchase options they enjoy. To operate in the City of Waterloo, food trucks must be licensed. To check if a vendor is licensed, visit [this website](#) and search for the business name.
- Caterer – Consider having a caterer prepare the food for the event. When considering this option, make sure to think about how to cover costs such as a small entry fee or fundraising opportunities.
- Picnics – Ask each household to bring their own food to enjoy. This can help keep costs down and each neighbour is responsible for their own food safety.
- Snacks – Offer pre-packaged snacks (like chips, popcorn, popsicles, freezies, juice boxes, or fruit).

When including food at your event, it is important to consider health and safety guidelines related to safe food handling. For information on this, check out the resource section at the bottom of this guide. Also, to make sure all neighbours feel included and welcome at your event, ensure you are offering food and beverages that fit with neighbours different dietary needs.



Serving food and beverages can create a lot of waste like disposable plates, cutlery, and cups. If possible, encourage neighbours to bring their own plates and cutlery from home (and have them take items home to wash after the event). This can help save costs and reduce single-use items.

ENTERTAINMENT

Depending on the type of event you are hosting, entertainment may be a nice addition. Check out this list for inspiration for different types of entertainment:

- Local musician or DJ
- Magician or busker performer
- Community speaker or educator
- Bouncy castles or inflatables (requires proof of insurance if on city property)

- Carnival or lawn games
- Face painting
- Craft table
- Puppet show
- Sporting activity
- Scavenger hunt or neighbourhood bingo
- Local arts workshop or performance
- Science experiment
- Nature or outdoor education opportunity
- Dance team or dancer

When planning entertainment, have different neighbours contribute ideas they might enjoy. For example, a bouncy castle may be great for young children, but not ideal for older adults. Having a variety of activities and entertainment planned can help ensure all neighbours are included.

To use bouncy castles and inflatables on city property, organizers must book the item through a vendor that can provide proof of insurance naming the City of Waterloo as an additional insured. Reach out to the neighbourhoods team with questions.



EVENT EQUIPMENT

To support neighbourhood events, the City of Waterloo offers event equipment like tables, pop-up tents, and lawn games, free of charge. Items are available for neighbours that are hosting neighbourhood-based events that are inclusive and free or low cost. To reserve equipment follow these basic steps:

1. Contact the neighbourhoods team for an equipment list and review available items.
2. Let the neighbourhoods team know about your event and how it will bring neighbours together.
3. Complete an online form to request the list of equipment you are interested in renting and the date of your event.
4. Work with City staff to coordinate a pick-up and drop-off times at the storage location.

If you are hosting your event in a park, the City of Waterloo parks department offers equipment, like picnic tables, fencing, garbage cans, and recycling bins for rent. If you are interested in booking any of these items, let City of Waterloo staff know at the time of your park booking or contact parkservices@waterloo.ca.



Consider asking neighbours to volunteer for use of household green bins or recycling containers. This can go out with their weekly collection and helps make the event more budget and environmentally friendly.

If you are looking for specialized equipment, like carnival games, inflatables, and fun food items, check out vendors in the Waterloo area. Explore local vendors that offer services for community events or connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#) for a business list.

INCLUSION

When planning your event, it is important to take steps to make sure all neighbours feel welcome and included. To encourage a sense of belonging, prioritize inclusion when promoting and communicating the event, selecting an event space, and determining other details (like food, entertainment, and activities) foster engagement of all neighbours.

To promote inclusive communication, consider the following tips:

- Make promotional materials simple, clear, and easy to understand
- Use a variety of communication methods to invite neighbours like social media, printed posters, flyers, and more
- Ensure graphics are accessible for all neighbours
- Offer promotional material in alternate formats and languages upon request

When selecting an event space, consider some of these tips:

- Ensure space is easily accessible by different ways of travel
- If your event is outside, ensure the event space has pathways and paved areas to promote accessibility
- If your event is inside, review if the space has gender neutral washrooms, changing tables, and accessible washrooms

When planning activities and entertainment, consider how all neighbours will engage with them. Think about some of these considerations as you select activities and entertainment:

- Ensure there are events for all neighbours to participate in
- Make sure the entertainment is suitable for all ages at family-friendly events
- Offer activities and entertainment that appeal to adults (with and without children)
- Consider offering childcare at planning meetings
- Offer food and beverages that are suitable for neighbours with dietary needs

THINK ABOUT EMERGENCIES AND SAFETY

Promote community safety when planning neighbourhood events, activities, and projects. Some considerations are listed below:

- For outdoor events, make plans for inclement weather such as windy, rainy, or stormy conditions. This may include planning a 'rain date', hosting an event indoors, or postponing the activity.
- Plan for how to communicate with participants. If you are cancelling the event or activity, you will want to have an approach for communicating with participants such as an email list, social media group or page, or community message board posting.
- Create a plan for emergencies. This may include a plan to evacuate, shelter in place, and communicate with attendees.
- Make sure you have the proper insurance coverage in place.
- Activities that need approvals like community campfires and other outdoor events require the right conditions to make them safe. Make sure to monitor conditions and follow directions from City staff.
- Depending on the size of your event and the activities that you want to include, it may be helpful to have an onsite first aid service attend, such as [St. John's Ambulance](#).
- Think about supplies you may need to respond to emergencies or safety concerns at an event like first aid kits, megaphone to communicate with neighbours, pylons to mark out safe zones, and more. The neighbourhoods team has free event equipment to help support neighbourhood events – reach out to neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for more information.

Overall, when planning neighbourhood initiatives, think of ways to make the event safe for all attendees. Taking extra precautions, planning ahead, being flexible, and connecting with City staff will help make sure attendees are safe.

Step 5: Promote your event and start communicating with neighbours

After getting necessary approvals and selecting your event date, it is time to start spreading the word about the upcoming event! To get the word out, consider recruiting a team of interested neighbours to help. Whether it is designing posters, sharing flyers across the neighbourhood, or posting on social media, having a team to help connect with all neighbours shares the workload.

To reach all interested neighbours, consider promoting the event in a variety of different ways. Some ideas for communication methods include:

- Print posters and hang them in common areas in your neighbourhood (parks, businesses, mailboxes, common spaces in multi-unit buildings)
- Spread the word on different social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, WeChat, WhatsApp, or Nextdoor
- Translate invitations and other promotions into different languages or let folks know who to contact for this option
- Post details about your upcoming event on a community message board or chalk board
- Print flyers or postcards and deliver to neighbours
- Spread the message with sidewalk chalk
- Start an event page on social media and encourage neighbours to invite other neighbours
- Provide promotions in accessible formats (plain language, use alt-text for images, offer online and printed formats, etc.)

Not all neighbours use the same forms of communication – promoting your event in a variety of ways helps to ensure that all neighbours are receiving your message.

To reach out to neighbours in townhouses, apartments, and condos, it's good practice to approach the building manager or superintendent first. Work with management to spread the word about the neighbourhood event (this may include distributing flyers in mailboxes and posting posters in common spaces). Connecting with a neighbour who lives in the building can also be useful to understand possible ways to spread the word.



If you need help printing promotional material for a neighbourhood event, connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#).

Step 6: Setting up the event!

After lots of hard work and planning, it is time to set up for the event. To help prepare for an easy set up (and clean up) consider the following tips:

- Prepare a 'to do' list to help guide the set up work
- Recruit a team of neighbours to help set up/clean up the space
- Create a diagram to highlight how the space will be set up. Note where you would like tables, tents, and other items (like entertainers) to be located. This will help all volunteers understand the vision for the event
- Delegate set up tasks to volunteers
- Ensure all volunteers and organizers know what to do in case of emergency, such as assigning an exit to each volunteer or having a designated person for announcements

- Make sure event equipment is set up in a way that allows emergency vehicles to access the event space. If you are hosting a party on a street, roadway, or public park, this may involve leaving sufficient space for emergency vehicles to enter the event
- Make sure your event space is accessible. Check with neighbours to see if there are any accessibility needs prior to your event, such as including closed captions during a screening

To promote easy clean up and prevent littering, make sure to include recycling and garbage bins throughout the event space.



Step 7: Celebrate!

Now that the planning and set-up are complete, it is time to celebrate with your neighbours! Enjoy yummy foods, entertainment, and meet and connect with neighbours. To ensure the event runs smoothly, consider recruiting a team of neighbours to monitor the event, lead different activities, and greet and welcome attendees.

When celebrating your event, make sure to snap some photos and videos to share. It is a good idea to let guest know photos/videos are being taken at the event. Posting printed notices is a great way to inform people.



To help promote conversations and neighbourhood connections, consider providing attendees with name tags. Whether you are hosting a barbeque, or a learning event, nametags are a nice way to help promote discussion.

Step 8: Clean up

Recruit a team of neighbours to help with the clean up after the event. If the event is in a public space, like a park or city facility, make sure to follow booking guidelines and clean the space promptly after the event.

If you rented equipment from the City of Waterloo, make sure to clean, dry, and/or package equipment properly. When returning the equipment, make sure to return it on time and to its correct storage location. If the equipment was damaged in any way, please reach out to the [neighbourhoods team](#) to let us know.

Resources

Check out other helpful neighbourhood [how-to guides](#) such as planning an outdoor movie night.

NEIGHBOURHOOD EVENT CHECKLIST

This checklist is here to help you stay on track while planning your neighbourhood event. You don't need to complete every item unless they are required. If you have questions or want support, connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#):

- ☐ Book your event space. Using a city park? Use the [Gathering Space Map](#) to find parks near you and request a booking.
- ☐ Having a vehicle enter the park space (i.e., a food truck)? Apply for [Park Access Permit](#) 30 days in advance.
- ☐ Using neighbourhood event equipment from the city? Reach out to the neighbourhoods team to request a booking.
- ☐ Serving food at the event? Be sure to meet [public health requirements](#)

FOOD AT EVENTS

Safe food handling

- When planning to serve food at a neighbourhood event, there are some important ways to ensure neighbours are safe and included. If you decide to serve food, start by thinking of these important questions:
- How will the food be provided and paid for?
- Do I have food options for neighbours with dietary needs?
- Do neighbours have allergies that you need to be aware of?
- How will I ensure the food stays hot or cold?
- If the food is being prepared on site, do I have the proper equipment?
- How will you ensure everyone's safety and prevent the spread of germs and bacteria?

Food Safety Practices

To ensure food is prepared and distributed safely, it is important to follow food safety practices. These practices outline tips for cleaning, separating, cooking, and storing food. For more information on food safety practices, visit the [Region of Waterloo's website](#).

It is recommended that anyone planning to prepare, sell, or give food to the public take a food safety-training course. Training courses are offered by Conestoga College and can be completed in roughly 8 hours. If you are interested in more information or registering, check out [Conestoga College's website](#).



Reach out to fellow neighbours and see if anyone is interested in taking the food safety course, consider signing up for the training together! Not only is this a great opportunity to learn, but also to build connections.

Necessary Forms

If you are planning to have a mobile food vendor at your event, make sure they are licensed by the municipality and inspected by Region of Waterloo Public Health.

If the vendor is not licensed and inspected, you must submit the special event form for food vendors from the Region of Waterloo. This form must be completed 30 days prior to the event. For more information and to complete the form, visit the [Special Event Form](#).

OTHER TIPS

When planning to serve food, keep the following tips in mind:

- If you are planning a potluck, ask all neighbours to provide a list of ingredients with their dishes.
- Consider hosting a picnic style event where each household brings food for their group. This will minimize issues with food safety and ensure everyone has food that fits their unique dietary accommodations.
- Before the event, ask neighbours if anyone has dietary restrictions to consider.
- It's a good practice to have some different food options on hand. For example, if you are hosting a neighbourhood barbeque, think about purchasing some vegetarian options, an alternative to beef or pork, and a few gluten free buns. Having different options on hand can help make sure all neighbours are able to enjoy the meal.

To keep food budget friendly, consider the following tips:

- Host a potluck and ask households to bring a favourite dish. This will reduce costs, and allow neighbours to try new, diverse foods.
- Plan your event around major meal times. To avoid having an entire meal at your event, think about planning an event for mid-morning, mid-afternoon, or evening. Instead of serving a meal, provide smaller snacks for neighbours to enjoy.

- Ask neighbours to bring their own cutlery and dishes. Not only does this reduce waste and benefit the environment, but it also helps reduce costs of purchasing these items.