

# LET'S HAVE A NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK PARTY!

A neighborhood block party is a great opportunity for neighbors to get together, meet each other, have fun, and work together on a common activity. Just knowing who lives on your block makes you and your neighbors safer. Knowing your neighbors -- where they live, their skills, and even their needs -- also builds community. In a community, neighbors can share skills, labor & resources. And it's **FUN!**

**Start by recruiting** a few neighbors to help organize the party. It's not that much work, but it's always more fun when you have friends helping. It is possible to take the "Lone Ranger" approach and still have a great event, but it may make it harder to find someone else to organize the next block party.

If this is your first block party, you may want to distribute a flyer to block residents explaining what a block party is and why your block should have one. Invite everyone on the street and poll them for possible dates, times and locations. Arrange a way for comments to be returned: by email, phone, or even a drop box at your front door. When working out details, keep it simple, easy and relaxed. What will work best for your block and be easy for you to organize?

**Choose a date** six to eight weeks in the future so you'll have time give your neighbors plenty of notice and apply for a Block Party Permit. Weekends or holidays during mid-May, June, July and August are usually the best bets.

A blocked off-street is a great place for a neighborhood party -- it's an open, public space where neighbors feel at home. If a group is small enough, it's possible to have a neighborhood party in a backyard, house, or garage -- but it will feel less open to new neighbors.



**Check out the City requirements** for blocking off a street as soon as you think you *might* want a block party. Go to [www.lincoln.ne.gov](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov), keyword: *block party*. The application is also available there. Once your completed application and a check for the \$45 fee are sent in, allow up to two weeks for it to be processed. If your application is approved, City staff will notify you, arrange for delivery and pick up of barricades, and notify the Police Department about the street closure.

In summary, the City requires:

- Uses limited to **community purposes** -- no private, for-profit uses.
- Closures limited to **residential streets** in residentially-zoned areas. Busy streets and bus routes can't be used for block parties. No mid-block closures and no more than one-block long closures.
- Duration of up to **six hours** between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.
- **Survey of all residents** along the street. Not everyone has to approve, but they need to know about the block party. *This survey is part of the application.*
- Signed **hold harmless agreement** protecting the

City from liability claims and damage or loss to City property – *also included in the application.*

- Because streets are City property, **no alcohol** is allowed on the blocked-off street.

**After your permit is approved**, think through what is needed for the party and coordinate with neighbors who can provide it. For example:

- How will food be handled: potluck, BBQ, catered?
- Will everyone bring their own tables and chairs, plates, cutlery, cups and beverages? If using grills, who will bring them?
- Will pets be allowed?
- Will guests from outside the block area be allowed?
- How will clean-up be handled? Trash cans?

**Distribute a final flyer** with all information, ideally about three weeks before the party:

- Date, time and location
- Alternate rainout day or location, if available
- List of what will be provided
- List of what people should bring

Getting the word out will certainly be easier if neighbors volunteer their phone numbers or email addresses. Person to person is always the most effective -- talk with people working in their yards and walking their dogs. Put up a yard sign. Make an extra effort to get new neighbors out to the event. To reach neighbors in townhouses, apartments and condos, approach the manager for the best way to contact residents.

**Safety is important** and blocking off a street has some unique safety concerns.

- Equipment in the street during the party should not completely block **street access**. In the unhappy circumstance that you need to call for emergency help, you'll have time to move the barriers, but probably not the tables, chairs, coolers, grills, etc.
- With most of the activity in the street in front of the houses, residents need to keep their **back doors locked**.
- Have a **bathroom policy** that maintains home security. The easiest -- everyone uses their own.

**Other activities:** Besides the obvious sharing of a meal and visiting, other activities can help people get to know one another. Here are some possibilities to consider:

- Use a **sign-in book** to develop a neighbors' contact list for those attending.
- **Name tags** can be a great help -- decide what you want neighbors to write on their name tags (e.g. first and last names, house numbers).
- Have a **greeter**, perhaps one of the party organizers, to help people make connections.
- Play **games** for kids and/or adults (some organized, some spontaneous).
- Take time to **introduce** one another and point to one's house.
- Make a **map or chart** to show address relationships.
- Have a **talent show** by and for neighbors. *If it will be loud, check with the Health Department to see if a noise permit will be needed.*
- Update an existing **Neighborhood Watch** group or start a new one.
- Take **photos** and catch people having fun! Find a way to share the photos -- securely -- to help neighbors put names to faces.



**A BLOCK PARTY TAKES TIME & WORK,  
BUT GETTING TO KNOW YOUR  
NEIGHBORS IS WORTH IT!**