

Organizing a Neighborhood Block Party

by Lisa Veldran, Area 6 Representative

Maybe you've just moved to Meadowood, or maybe you've lived here for several years but still don't know most of your neighbors. Deciding to organize a block party on your street with your neighbors is a great way to help create community on your block. Not only will you get to know the people who help you organize the party, you'll also get to know everyone who decides to attend.

Whether you plan a pot-luck in the backyard or a party that requires you to block off an entire street, start planning your party three to six months before. The following are some things to think about.

Date & Location

The first step in planning a block party is to choose a date and location. Get together with a few neighbor friends and find out what date works best for everyone. This way you're guaranteed to have at least a few families in attendance. Most block parties are held in the afternoon to evening. Don't plan the event for a holiday weekend, since most people will already have other commitments. Also, take weather into consideration. Plan the party far enough in advance so people can put it on their calendars and you have enough time to organize it all. If there are other people willing to help with the planning, welcome them with open arms.

Just because you don't have a "block" doesn't mean you can't have a block party. A block party is really just a gathering of neighbors. If you don't live in a house but an apartment complex or town home complex you can still organize a block party – it's still a great way to meet and fellowship with your neighbors. Plan to have the event at a local park or in the parking lot of your building.

Choose a location that will accommodate a large number of people. You will have chairs, grills, coolers, tables, and more, so make sure to find a space that is large enough. Also, find a setting where kids will have lots of room to play. If your community has a park with a playground, plan to have the event there. The kids will be able to play while the adults are socializing close by. Having the party in a cul-de-sac is also a nice option.

Volunteers

How many volunteers do you need? Only you as the organizer? A group of three to four neighbors? This will depend upon how large your block party will be. Start asking your neighbors if they want to help out.

Location

Do you want to block off your street? You will need to apply for a City Street Use Permit: <http://www.cityofmadison.com/specialevents/blockparties/> Note, you will need to have 75% of the residents on the block sign a petition and pay a fee of \$50.

Not blocking off the street? Options can include someone's front yard, back yard or a big garage.

Food

You could have it catered (think subs), a potluck or a hybrid potluck where whoever hosts provides the grilling items and everyone else brings a salad or dessert.

Drinks

Options include: everyone bring their own beverage, host/volunteers provide soda or water and everyone else can bring their own alcoholic beverage or go big and get a keg (for large block parties). Think about providing a cooler with ice.

Other Stuff

Will you need tables, chairs? If you have a couple of people that can bring tables you can ask people to bring their own chairs or blankets.

Though you can never predict the weather, you may want to take it and other things into consideration when choosing a date. You may also want to avoid picking a date that competes with a major local event, like a music festival or church picnic happening in your neighborhood.

Promoting the Block Party

You can tape Save-the-Dates to everyone's front door on your block. This is probably the easiest way to promote the block party. Remember to provide the date, (rain date if there is one), time and location (is in the middle of the block in the street or someone's house) and contact information of the organizer(s). If you want people to RSVP give people a deadline for signing up. Deadlines motivate people who might otherwise wait until the last minute to join the party, and you want to have a relatively solid count before the big day.

Although it may be time consuming, the best way to deliver these flyers is door to door. When I say door to door, I mean walking up to your neighbor's front door, knocking, and cheerfully speaking with the person who answers. Inviting someone in person is much more personal and effective.

Cost

The cost of a block party varies. Block parties can be thrown with no cost at all if everyone pitches in. An elaborate party with caterers, musicians, inflatable water slides, and helium balloons will be pretty pricey. If you plan on throwing a larger-than-life bash, make sure there is a money source.

When I organize block parties I ask people to bring either a salad or a dessert and their own alcoholic beverages. I supply the brats, hot dogs, salads, paper products and utensils. I asked families to chip in \$10 and individuals to chip in \$5. That typically covers the costs I incurred. Anything leftover went into an envelope and given to the next host.

Pertinent information about the block party should be included in the flyer, such as date, time, location, RSVP contact, and what to bring.

Sample Flyer



The flyer features a central illustration of a barbecue grill on a stand, with a plate of food and a glass of beer on a table in front of it. The background is a light green and yellow gradient. The title 'Elk Lane Block Party' is written in a large, bold, red serif font at the top. Below the illustration, there is a list of details: 'When: Sunday, April 19th 4:30 pm', 'Where: Grassy area behind the mailboxes', and 'What to bring:' followed by a bulleted list of items to bring. At the bottom left, there is a call to action and an RSVP contact.

Elk Lane Block Party

When:
Sunday, April 19th
4:30 pm

Where:
Grassy area behind
the mailboxes

What to bring:

- Meat for your family to grill
- Drinks, plates and utensils for your family
- Lawn chairs or a blanket to sit on
- A side dish or dessert to share

Do you have a barbecue, table, or cooler to share?

RSVP: Susan 615-453-6806

Come meet your neighbors!

Food

You can't have a terrific party without delicious food. The cheapest and easiest way to organize food for a neighborhood block party is to have a potluck. Potluck meals are usually jam-packed with fabulous dishes because people prepare their all-time favorite recipes. Casseroles, salads, breads, and desserts are among the most popular potluck cuisine. There will most likely be children at the party, so make sure there are plenty of kid friendly food options. When people RSVP, ask them what potluck dish they plan to share. As the organizer, keep a list of what people are bringing to make sure you don't end up with eight pasta salads and no cookies. As stated on the invitation, families will bring their own drinks and meat for the grill. A potluck meal simplifies the food planning duties of the organizer.

Activities

Most of the planned activities at the party will be centered on keeping the kids happy and entertained. Red rover, capture the flag, potato sack races, and tag are all fun outdoor activities that require minimal equipment and set up. For very young children, duck duck goose and red light green light are fun and age appropriate. If you'd like help with kids' activities, ask each

family to bring something fun for the kids to do during the party. Sidewalk chalk, frisbees, kites, balls, water balloons, inflatable swimming pools, sprinklers, and slip n' slides are all tons of fun. If you plan for water activities, check for a water source nearby before the day of the party. Most importantly, make sure the kids are always supervised around water. Here's an interesting option:

MSCR offers the Fit2Go Activity Van:

[FIT2GO-4You!](#) -- Rent the FIT2GO Van for your event!

Interested in having the FIT2GO van and staff at a birthday party, corporate event, family reunion, neighborhood block party?

MSCR has several options available to fit your needs:

Equipment Rental - \$75/2 hours (\$20 for each additional hour)

Includes - Imagination Playground, Hula Hoops, 2 Portable Disc Golf Baskets and 10 Discs, 2 portable Slacklines, 4 small portable soccer goals and 2 soccer balls

Small Event Rental - \$175/2 hours (\$30 for each additional hour)

Includes - 2 hours of specialized activities for groups up to 20 children, 2 staff to lead activities, Fit2Go van and equipment

Large Event Rental - \$225/2 hours (\$45 for each additional hour)

Includes - 2 hours of activities for groups of 20-50 children, 2 staff to lead activities, Fit2Go Van and equipment

Free Community Event - Free or Reduced Pricing

Events that are open to the public, serving Madison residents, and willing to promote MSCR and Fit2Go at their event, may be eligible for free or reduced programming.

Please complete the [FIT2GO Rental Request Form](#) to see if your event qualifies.

[Learn more details](#) or contact: (608) 442-1340 or admontgomery@madison.k12.wi.us

While the kids are playing games, the adults can mingle, eat, and get to know each other. Name tags might be helpful in a large group of newly acquainted neighbors. It's fun to have music in the background, so delegate someone ahead of time to set up a stereo. There are lots of games adults can enjoy with the kids. Bobbing for apples, water balloon tosses, and watermelon seed spitting contests are lots of fun for all ages.

Some neighbors may have talents they can contribute to the activities, such as musicians or jugglers. Ask if they will perform at the event. Other people might be able to contribute different services. If the guy next door owns a party rental business, ask him to set up one of his inflatable play structures free of charge. Another neighbor might know how to make balloon animals. Ask her to perform a short demonstration for the kids. There are hundreds of games, sports, and other activities that would be entertaining at a block party. Choose some that will be a big hit with everyone. I once had a neighbor come over and perform an opera selection!

Day of the Party

With organized planning, the only sizeable tasks on party day will be setting up and cleaning up. When the big day arrives, recruit some older kids to set up tables, barbecues, coolers, and chairs about an hour ahead of time. As people start to arrive, introduce yourself and offer a name tag to each person. Place potluck dishes on tables. Direct the kids to the play area. Don't forget to be flexible if things don't go exactly as planned. Remember that the main reason for the get together is to relax and get to know one another. So sit back and enjoy yourself. Soak up the sense of community that is building.

(Sources: <https://holidappy.com/party-planning/How-to-Organize-a-Neighborhood-Block-Party> and <http://www.instructables.com/id/The-Basic-Block-Party/>)