

Start a Community Association

Community Associations (CAs) typically represent an identifiable geographic area. The impetus to create one might stem from an issue that residents want to protest, or a project the community wishes to undertake, recreation initiatives, crime prevention or neighbourhood safety issues, traffic problems, zoning and development issues, neighbourhood clean-up or improvement initiatives, or volunteer activities.

There might be an existing association that you're unaware of, or there may have been an association in your area previously. Check this list on the City of Ottawa web-site:

[Existing Community Associations](#).

If there is an association nearby, ask if you may attend some of their meetings, to give you a feel for how they function. As an alternative, you may wish to contact the FCA and ask to be put you in touch with a similar or nearby association, willing to help guide you through the process.

The next step is to talk with your neighbours to determine if there is sufficient interest in proceeding, and if there is, ask a few people to help you form a committee to work toward your goal of creating an association.

This is an appropriate time to contact your City Councillor to alert him/her of what you are planning to do. Having your councillor on board can prove invaluable, but remember that this is YOUR community association. Do not allow your Councillor to control your agenda!

DECISIONS THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE NEEDS TO ADDRESS

- **What are the logical geographic boundaries for your proposed association?**

The CA is likely to endure for many years and, through its life, will need to address many different kinds of issues. It is worth contemplating a geographic area that has shared characteristics and shared concerns.

You might want to check a postal code map before setting your boundaries. Canada Post and some other door-to-door delivery services will not restrict delivery to only a portion of a postal district; so making your geographic boundaries coincide with Canada Post's Letter Carrier's Walk is worthwhile. Of course, if you can round up enough volunteers to make door-to-door deliveries, this will not be a concern.

On this [CP Community List](#), locate Ottawa and click on the first three digits of your postal code. At the top and bottom of the chart which appears next, click on "LCW Map", to see the Letter Carrier routes in your neighbourhood. Note the number of the Letter Carrier Walk. Back on the chart, using the LCW number, you can find the number of houses, apartments and businesses served by each letter carrier. These numbers will help you know how many copies to make of anything you plan to distribute. There may be several postal codes in your proposed area. Click on the "FSA Map" to locate them, identified by the first three letters of the postal code.

- **What name will you give your Community Association?**

A name that identifies the geographic area works best. Is there a real estate descriptor that reflects the area? Could you combine the names of two or three real estate areas to represent the area of the proposed CA? Is there a main street/road or local park after which you could name the CA?

- **What form will membership, in your CA, take?**

Some CAs consider everyone living within their boundaries to be members. These CAs typically ask for “donations” to cover the association’s operating expenses. Other CAs ask residents to pay a fee to become a member of the association. Fees range from about \$5 to \$30 in the National Capital Region, with many CAs offering individual or family memberships, at different prices. A few CAs even offer corporate memberships to businesses in the area. They can charge more for these or, in some cases, negotiate services-in-kind (web hosting, printing, office supply discounts, etc).

WHAT’S NEXT ?

With these decisions made, it’s time to get the word out to everyone within your boundaries. Use a door-to-door flyer to explain what you hope to do. You don’t have any funds yet, so you’ll need to rely on volunteers to distribute the flyers.

As your first communication with potential association members, the flyer should accomplish three specific goals:

- It should **include a proposed “mission statement”**, which explains the purpose of the organization you hope to create. Take time to get this expressed well. Then, discuss it thoroughly at the community meeting. Accept and include as many ideas and contributions as possible, for you will want buy-in/consensus in order to proceed. The agreed-upon mission statement can form part of your by-laws at a later date.
- It should **ask people to identify themselves**. Ask specifically for e-mail addresses. This will be your most cost-effective means of communicating with the people in your neighbourhood. You are now beginning to establish a communications network. You will need to assure people that you will not share their e-mail addresses. Privacy is an important issue for many people.
- It should **invite everyone to a meeting**. [You’ll need a location](#). Your City Councillor may be able to help. You could approach a local school or church to request use of their facilities, or you could hold your meeting in a local park (BYOLC – bring your own lawn chair).

In advance of the meeting, prepare an agenda, so people know what business will be conducted. Your goal in holding the meeting is to gain consensus on the need to form a community association, and to build enthusiasm for participating in the organization, and gather more volunteers willing to help achieve the agreed-upon mission/goals.

CONSIDER A STRUCTURE FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION

Your CA will require some organization and structure. You might prefer to operate in an informal way; but, to ensure things actually get accomplished, it’s advisable to adopt some formal practices.

A **Board of Directors** can manage the Community Association on behalf of the residents. There are boards with as few as three directors. Others have as many as twelve. More can become quite unwieldy.

The first directors might be chosen or elected at the first meeting of the CA. Subsequent boards may be elected at the Annual General Meeting. Establishing these positions will let you get started:

- a **President** chairs each meeting and ensures that work is being performed by those to whom it is assigned.

- a **Vice-President** acts for the President when s/he is unavailable and assists by performing assigned tasks.
- a **Treasurer** manages the association's finances, keeping accurate records of all revenues and expenditures.
- a **Secretary** takes and distributes meeting minutes, and informs residents of upcoming meetings and activities.

Committees can be established to address specific matters such as membership, communications, fund-raising, etc. You may want the Chairs of such committees to be part of your Board of Directors. Further sub-committees can be assembled to tackle specific tasks. The Chairs of these committees may or may not be part of your Board.

Board meetings must occur regularly, perhaps once each month. A board needs to establish and follow some basic rules. A written **constitution** and **by-laws** will ensure smooth operation. Assign the preparation of these documents to a board member. It will require substantial research and collaboration. Allow sufficient time to assemble this documentation. You might plan to present it, for approval, at the first Annual General Meeting (AGM).

As your CA begins to function, you will need to establish **policies** and **procedures** beyond the by-laws. Don't worry about having these in place before you start operating. They take time to develop.

INCORPORATION

You may wish to **incorporate your association**. The relevant provincial legislation is the [Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act](#), which will take effect sometime after January, 2014. Some CAs have chosen to avoid this step; but, to give your organization legitimacy (especially at City Hall), it is worth considering.

INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

You need to consider the **insurance requirements** for the various liabilities that your Community Association may face. If you will hold your meetings in a City of Ottawa facility, you can arrange liability insurance at the same time as you sign your contract for use of the space. The City administers a User Group Liability insurance program with a \$1,000,000 limit that can be purchased directly from the City. This is Comprehensive General Liability Insurance.

Because individuals can be held liable for decisions or actions they take as members of a Board of Directors, it is advisable to have insurance for your board members (Directors and Officers Liability Insurance); however, this can be quite expensive, so you may decide not to implement this until you are well-established and have accumulated adequate funds.

Be aware that if your association hires anyone, you may require Employer's Liability Insurance.

FINALLY

That's enough to get you started. Have meetings, keep records (of decisions and finances), communicate openly with your members, pursue your interests/issues with integrity and vigour.

Congratulations! You've formed a Community Association.

Two final steps:

- [Register your new association with the city](#) to ensure that you receive all the information that your organization may need.
- [Join the Federation of Citizens' Associations \(FCA\)](#), the umbrella organization which serves to organize the many different types of community groups in Ottawa and the National Capital Region, by sharing knowledge and experience to permit each individual association to gain confidence and expertise.

Be aware that another organization within the region will most certainly have dealt with almost any issue or challenge that may confront your new association. Most will be eager or at least willing to lend support or assistance to you, when you require help. And, that is one of the most valuable advantages of an FCA membership.