

Becoming a Block Connector



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Great neighbourhoods start with you.



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E-NEWS UPDATES

Visit waterloo.ca/subscribe and sign up to receive monthly updates on all things neighbourhoods. Waterloo Neighbourhoods e-newsletter includes information about neighbourhood projects, grants, ideas, and what's happening.

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.

Why Block Connectors?

Neighbour to neighbour relationships are at the heart of great cities. When residents interact, support one another, share interests, skills, talents and resources, connected neighbourhoods form resulting in high levels of belonging and inclusion.

Creating opportunities to connect and engage with neighbours takes a few people willing to start up friendly conversations. Introductions, sharing and social gatherings are how bonds form in neighbourhoods.

The City of Waterloo's **Neighbourhood Strategy** has a vision that Waterloo is a city of caring, vibrant, engaged neighbourhoods where everyone belongs. Encouraging neighbourhood interactions is an important goal of the neighbourhood strategy.

One of the ways the City is helping to achieve this vision is through the Hey Neighbour! Block Connector program. This guide will help you understand this program and how you can get in

Recruitment

On an ongoing basis, the City of Waterloo is recruiting residents to become neighbourhood leaders as Block Connectors. The Hey Neighbour! Block Connector program aims to build relationships between neighbours by sparking neighbourhood community-building that connects neighbours residing in close proximity to each other to:

- Share information;
- Support one another; and
- Build a sense of community in good times and challenging ones.

Benefits

There are so many benefits to connecting with neighbours! Although this may differ across the city, some benefits include:

- **Safety** - Help nearby when needed, fewer “strangers” and less social isolation
- **Care of neighbours** - Improved mental and physical health through new opportunities/strengthened relationships
- **Creativity and problem solving** - Benefit from collective wisdom/ideas

- **Social and cultural awareness** - Improved sense of belonging, sharing experiences across cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and ages
- **Awareness of shared spaces** - Increased community pride, sense of shared responsibility for local greenspaces, playgrounds, community gardens, and outdoor rinks
- **Civic engagement** - Connected residents are more likely to express thoughts/opinions/ ideas, come together for collective action that makes their neighbourhood a better place to live
- **Local economic impacts** - Share local business support and understand how they support the community because businesses are part of neighbourhoods too

Anyone has the potential to be a Block Connector!

Block Connectors support neighbors by:

- connecting – being a primary contact and information source
- listening – collecting information to build community with the ideas, talents and experiences of those you connect with
- organizing – social connection activities a few times per year



During the pandemic limitations for in person social gatherings apply, but connecting with neighbours virtually and via social media are great options.

Block Connectors are people who:

- Have 3-4 hours per month to contribute;
- Reside in any neighbourhood blocks or areas in the City of Waterloo;
 - including multi-residential housing such as apartment buildings, condos or other clustered homes
 - areas inside and outside of existing neighbourhood and homes associations
- Self-identify as individuals that want to develop connections with neighbours in a set area surrounding their residence; and
- Value diversity and relationship building.

Block Connectors commit to provide neighbourly connection, which may include:

- Welcome new neighbours as they move onto your block, provide them with ways to stay connected - contact information, Facebook page, neighbourhood message board, or others
- Create a neighbours contact list - get permission to provide print or email copies
- Greeting neighbours, provide social connection
- Connect your neighbours with others according to interests/experiences
- Check in and watch out for each other, especially with vulnerable members
- Consider fun and enjoyable ideas for connection - virtual book club, activity kits, neighbourhood “I spy” game, coffee exchange, or others

Getting Started

Block Connectors initiate connections with the neighbours that live around them:

- For larger groups, block connectors may choose to initiate through a poster or postcard inviting neighbours to join a Facebook group, Nextdoor page, listserv or other virtual resource.
- For smaller groups, block connectors may choose to initiate through a postcard introduction, neighbourhood email or survey.

There are many easy ways to get to know your neighbor!

- introduce yourself
- leave a treat
- shovel your neighbour's sidewalk, mow their lawn
- introduce other neighbours to each other
- keep an eye out on neighbourhood homes and property
- show care and kindness by offering your unique knowledge, skills or talents



Respect neighbourhood inclusion and diversity

- A small percentage of neighbours will not be interested in participating, this is to be expected (do not presume this though) and accepted
- Consider supports for various languages - connecting with another member of the household for possible translation
- Do not assume traditional family structures
- Do not miss the kids or pets!

RESIDENTS CAN GET INVOLVED BY:

- applying to be a **Block Connector**
- joining a Block Connector group in their area
- helping get the word out about this program

Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca to find out more.

AFTER APPLYING, THE BLOCK CONNECTOR WILL:

- Participate in an orientation session to discuss the program;
- Work with staff to coordinate connection opportunities that are appropriate for their area;
- Connect with staff on a regular basis for support;
- Receive resources; and
- Notify staff to transition out of the role when desired.

Resources

Want to learn more about supporting a vibrant, caring, and connected neighbourhood? Check out these:

- Funds
 - Learn more about **neighbourhood grants** available from the City of Waterloo
- Activity Supports
 - **Stay Connected: journal + activity book**
- Education
 - **30 day challenge**
 - **Conflict resolution**