

# Planning a neighbourhood market



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



# How to reach us

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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

This guide was last updated March 2026.

# About this guide

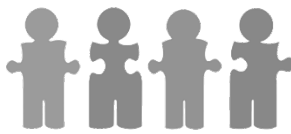
Neighbourhood markets bring together local vendors and neighbours to create a fun space for all to enjoy. Whether you are hosting a weekly farmers market or a one-time craft fair, careful planning is needed to make sure it's a success. Neighbourhood markets will help to:

- Promote neighbourhood connections and strengthen community bonds
- Support walkable communities and encourage physical activity
- Promote environmental sustainability by sourcing items locally
- Support local small businesses

This guide will outline the steps neighbours should take to plan a neighbourhood market.

## STEP 1: CONNECT WITH NEIGHBOURS

If you are considering organizing a neighbourhood market, connecting with neighbours is a great place to start. Discuss the idea with them to help you gauge interest in hosting a market in your neighbourhood. When you reach out, ask if anyone is willing to help with planning. Organizing a market involves many steps, so having more volunteers will make the process much smoother and more manageable.



Connect with your neighbourhood association or neighbourhood connectors to help you find interested volunteers in your neighbourhood. Check out the [Find your Neighbourhood Map](#) to see if there is a neighbourhood association near you.

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## STEP 2: BRAINSTORM MARKET DETAILS

Now it's time to start brainstorming the details of the market. Work together with your neighbours to think about the following important details about the neighbourhood market:

- When will it take place?
- Where will it be held?
- What costs and logistics are involved in hosting a neighbourhood market?
- What type of vendors will you host?
- Will you and your neighbours need any funding to organize the market?

### Date and time of the market

The date and time of your neighbourhood market are some of the most important details to decide. Neighbourhood markets can be held annually or on a recurring schedule, such as weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. When determining how often you will host the market, consider the following:

- What is manageable for your team of volunteers
- What resources are available to you

- How often do vendors want to participate
- Costs of hosting the scheduled times

Starting small is a good approach to see neighbourhood interest. If you and your team receive positive feedback from neighbours and vendors, you may choose to host markets more often.

The timing of the market will also depend on what you and your team plan to offer. Neighbourhood markets focused on artisan goods are more flexible in scheduling. However, if you want to feature fresh produce, be sure to consider the growing season when selecting your dates.

## Location of the market

Another important detail of neighbourhood markets is the location. The requirements of a neighbourhood market will influence where it can be held. Work with your team of volunteers to check out possible locations by considering the following:

- Is the space accessible and inclusive for all members of the neighbourhood?
- Is the space large enough to accommodate the size and scale of the neighbourhood market?
- Does the space have access to electricity, or is there someone nearby who would let you use their power, if needed?
- Do the costs seem suitable based on your plans and resources?
- If it is outdoors, how will you handle poor weather conditions?



Check out the [gathering spaces map](#) to explore spaces in your neighbourhood. This is a great tool to help you find the ideal location.

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## Costs and funding

Organizing a neighbourhood market will likely involve costs. Make a list of resources you and your neighbours have on hand and then determine what other materials or funding will be needed. Here are some ways to financially support your market:

- Consider charging vendors a small fee. This fee can help cover recurring expenses, such as marketing, equipment, and entertainment.
- If you are working with a neighbourhood association that receives foundational operating funds, explore the possibility of allocating some of these funds to support the operation of the market.
- Brainstorm fundraising initiatives with your team of volunteers to help cover the market's expenses.
- Explore [neighbourhood grants](#) or other sources of funding tied to food access.

- Partner with other local organizations or businesses that can contribute financially to the project.

### **STEP 3: REACH OUT TO THE NEIGHBOURHOODS TEAM**

After confirming neighbour interest and brainstorming market details, reach out to the neighbourhoods team. The neighbourhoods team is available to support you throughout the planning process and guide you through the next steps. Be sure to contact the neighbourhoods team early in the process to make sure your plans include all the required permits and licences.

### **STEP 4: COORDINATE MARKET VENDORS, EQUIPMENT, AND ENTERTAINMENT**

Once basic details are decided, you can move forward with the next stages of planning your neighbourhood market.

#### **Coordinate vendors**

A key step in organizing a neighbourhood market is selecting the vendors. You and your neighbours will need to decide what types of items will be sold, as this will influence your market plans. You will need to take different approaches depending on whether you plan to offer fresh produce or artisan goods.

Once you've determined the types of items you would like to offer, start reaching out to local businesses and vendors to invite them to participate. Think about asking local partners to help you recruit vendors. The Uptown BIA or other market hosts could help you get started on connecting with vendors.

Consider making a sign-up form for vendors to fill out and submit online. Include a description of the event, a deadline for submission, and other relevant information. Consider using tools such as Google Forms or Microsoft Forms. When talking to vendors, include the following in conversations:

- Requirements for attending: Include what vendors are required to have, such as a business licence.
- What to expect: Will vendors be provided with hydro, tables, chairs, tents, and other helpful items or will they have to source it themselves.
- What not to bring: Include items vendors cannot bring, such as foods that need to stay hot or cold, food items not made in a certified kitchen, and beauty items not certified by public health.

#### **Equipment**

When hosting the neighbourhood market, it's important to consider the equipment you'll need. Some key factors to think about include:

- Will you and your neighbourhood volunteers provide tents, tables, and chairs for the participating vendor booths?

- Will you offer any games, music, or other entertainment for your market attendees?
- Will you need any items to ensure a safe market experience such as cones, first aid kit, wagons or trolleys, microphone, or other important items?

Discuss these needs with your neighbours to determine what equipment you already have available and what will be required.



Consider borrowing equipment from the neighbourhood special event equipment program. Available equipment includes pop-up tents, tables, first aid kits, large lawn games, and more!

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## Entertainment

Entertainment can enhance the overall market experience for neighbours attending. Some entertainment options that you and your neighbours might consider are:

- Live music or a DJ
- Busker, dancer, magician, juggler, bubble artist, author, or other performance
- Lawn games such as bean bag toss, giant Jenga, Kan Jam, bocce ball, or ring toss. Make sure the lawn games have enough space, so everyone stays safe when doing activities.

Be sure to discuss with your neighbours what entertainment fits the market's atmosphere and how much capacity your team has to plan and coordinate the required activities. Before you book entertainers, ask what they require for space and set up needs (such as a speaker or access to hydro) to have a successful event.

## STEP 5: SUBMIT REQUIRED DOCUMENTS AND PERMITS

To host a neighbourhood market, there are permits, licences, and insurance documentation required. This documentation will vary based on the items being sold, organizers of the market, and the location of the market.

Required documentation will need to be submitted by the application deadlines. Many items are required by the business licensing team and involve completing details no later than 30 days prior to the event.

### Required permits, licences, and insurance

The permits, licences, and insurance that are required include:

- **Vendor Market Licence:** This application is required for markets with multiple short-term vendors. These are usually small or independent businesses offering their goods or services in a shared area. This includes pop-up stores, craft festivals, or farmer's markets. Apply for this online with vendor market details or reach out to [bl@waterloo.ca](mailto:bl@waterloo.ca) with questions. There is no fee for eligible neighbourhood events.
- **Proof that the organization/organizer is in good standing:** If you are applying on behalf of a neighbourhood association, you may be asked to provide a copy of the

service agreement. Non-profit corporations can submit a corporate profile report. Informal groups and neighbours can provide government-issued ID.

- **Proof of insurance:** \$2 million liability coverage is required for markets, and the City of Waterloo must be named as an additional insured. Insurance coverage can be purchased from any insurance provider for special events, such as [PAL](#) or [Duuu](#), or a certificate of insurance is required to show existing insurance coverage if your organization has this.
- **A list of vendors attending:** A list of vendors attending is required and they must all have the appropriate licences and insurance. If you are hosting more than one market (such as monthly throughout the summer), attach a schedule of all vendors at the time of application.
- **Neighbourhood Event Noise Exemption:** If you are planning on having loud entertainment at your event, a [noise exemption](#) will be required. For neighbourhood-led events, the noise exemption must be submitted 30 days prior to the event date and is free of charge.

## Food trucks and food vendors

If you and your volunteer team are planning on having food trucks or food vendors at the market, the following is required:

- **Licences:** The food vendors attending must be properly licenced in Waterloo. Search up the food vendor on the [permit portal](#) to check if they have an issued licence. If you have questions about a specific vendor, connect with staff on the [business licencing team](#).
- **Special Events Form:** If a food vendor is not already licenced and inspected by the Region of Waterloo, the [Special Events Form for Food Vendors](#) will need to be completed.
- **Permitted locations:** Food trucks and trailers are permitted to operate in certain spaces to help ensure road and community safety. If you plan on using a street location, the road needs to be closed. If you are planning to use a park space, a park access permit is required. To learn more about street closures and park access permits, read the section below.

## Street closures and park permits

If the neighbourhood market is hosted on a street or sidewalk, a special event permit is needed:

- **Special Event Permit:** If the neighbourhood market is being hosted on a street or sidewalk in the neighbourhood, a [Special Event Permit](#) will need to be submitted. Special event permits should be submitted 60 days in advance for street or road closures. Check out the [Using neighbourhood streets and sidewalks for events](#) guide to learn more.

Park permits include:

- **Park Permit:** If the neighbourhood market is being hosted in a neighbourhood park, a passive park permit is needed. Check out the [gathering space map](#) to find a park near you and reach out to the neighbourhoods team to request a passive park permit.
- **Park Access Permit:** If the neighbourhood market has vehicles entering a park, such as a food truck, then a park access permit is required. To learn more, check out the [Park Access Permit](#) webpage.

## STEP 6: DESIGN SITE AND SAFETY PLANS

### Site Plan

Work with your neighbours to create a site plan for your neighbourhood market. In your chosen space, map out where each vendor will be located, as well as where things like lawn games, entertainment, registration/welcome table, or other event items will be placed. Be sure to give enough space for each section. This will help reduce crowding and keep neighbours and vendors safe.

A site plan offers many benefits for you and your team. This will help organize the market setup on the day of the event, ensuring all volunteers are clear on what equipment needs to be set up and where. Additionally, this plan can be shared with participating vendors ahead of time. This will allow participating vendors to easily locate their assigned booth on the day of the market.

### Safety Plan

Having a safety plan is an important part of hosting a community event. This plan can help identify to volunteers, organizers, vendors, and others what will be done in various emergency situations.

- **Weather:** For outdoor events, this is a helpful way to clearly identify how you will determine cancellation conditions for things like high winds, lightning or heavy rain, and extreme heat or cold.
- **Contact details:** Safety plans should also help those involved understand who to reach out to if something happens. This could be the phone number of a main organizer or a volunteer trained in first aid.
- **Call 911 in emergencies:** In all situations of serious injury, crime, or other emergencies needs, 911 should be identified as the immediate response for all participants.
- **Attendance limits:** While all markets aim to be successful, event locations will have a limit on how many people can safely move through a space. Indoors, this is a requirement for any venue. Outdoors, this is harder to determine so organizers should have a plan in place. For any location, there should be enough volunteers to assist with communication and direction if entrance to the market needs to be counted, monitored, or prevented.

## STEP 7: PROMOTE THE MARKET

Another important part of organizing your neighbourhood market is promoting it to your neighbourhood. Collaborate with your neighbours to create posters, social media posts, email updates, or flyers. Include all important market details, such as date, time, location, rain date, and consider a list of vendors who will be attending.

Here are a few ways to promote your neighbourhood market:

- Print posters or flyers and post them around the neighbourhood, such as on neighbourhood message boards or on A-frame signs.
- Use social media platforms to share the market details and generate excitement. Consider posting this on your neighbourhood Facebook page or contacting your neighbourhood group to post this on their social media.
- Word of mouth is also an effective method for spreading the word about your market. When you are walking around your neighbourhood or out in your yard, let your neighbours know about the market and the details.
- If you don't have an existing neighbourhood newsletter or email update process, consider starting one! It's a great way to share what's going on in the neighbourhood and to notify interested neighbours about fun activities.

## STEP 8: EVENT DAY SET UP

On the day of the event, it's key that you have enough support to set up and manage the neighbourhood market. If you feel additional help is needed, consider recruiting more neighbours to assist for each event date.

Here are some useful tips for planning the market set up:

- If it is possible, test the equipment you will be using before the market to ensure the volunteers are familiar with the setup. This will help to make sure that the setup goes smoothly on the day of the market.
- Have a team member send a reminder email to the setup and takedown volunteers before the market day. This email should include the neighbourhood market date, the setup time, a breakdown of the assigned tasks that volunteers will be doing, and details for cancellations (for example, we will email you by 12 p.m. if the storm cancels the event).
- Provide volunteers with a to-do list to guide the setup and takedown process, ensuring that all volunteers know their responsibilities.
- Give volunteers a copy of the site and safety plans so they can clearly understand how the space will be organized and what to do in emergencies.

For market vendors, consider the following tips:

- Share a site map or check-in details with vendors in advance. If you require them to check-in at a registration table when they arrive, provide some details as to how they can find it even if they are unfamiliar with the space.
- Designate a drop-off area. Since vendors will be bringing goods to sell, it's a good idea to have a clear drop-off and set up process. Let them know where they can park,

remind them to bring staff or helpers to unload, and identify clear timelines such as a set up time cut off.

- Communicate cancellation plans. Storms, extreme heat or cold, venue emergencies like plumbing or hydro issues, and other unpredictable things happen! Identify clearly how you will reach out if the market is cancelled and deadlines for things like weather forecast decisions.
- Remind vendors of any important market or licence rules. Examples could include certified prepared foods only or no driving on the venue's grass.

## STEP 9: DELIVER THE NEIGHBOURHOOD MARKET

Now that the planning and setup are complete, it's time to host your neighbourhood market!

Throughout the event, make sure you and your neighbourhood volunteers support vendors, welcome attendees, and keep an eye on the market to ensure everything runs smoothly. Consider ways to gather feedback, track attendance, and let neighbours know how they can get involved in future events.



Take pictures and videos of your event to share! Make your attendees are aware that photos are being taken of them, and respect peoples wishes to not be included in them. Reach out to the neighbourhoods team for a sample photography poster for your event.

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## STEP 10: AFTER THE NEIGHBOURHOOD MARKET

After the neighbourhood market has taken place, it's time to organize the takedown and cleanup. Be sure to recruit a team of neighbours during the planning phase to assist with this task. If the event took place in a public space, such as a park, make sure to follow the booking guidelines and clean up the area promptly after the neighbourhood market.

Once the market is over and cleaned up, hold a debrief with the neighbourhood volunteers to discuss what went well and identify areas for improvement. Reach out to the market vendors for feedback on the market including what worked well and what can be improved for the future.

Finally, consider steps for the next market, whether it's next week or next year, it's best to get an early start on the planning!



Thank the vendors and entertainers, if applicable, for their participation. This will help to build relationships with these vendors for future neighbourhood markets.

# Resources

For more information about organizing neighbourhood initiatives, check out the [Planning a Neighbourhood Event Guide](#).

## NEIGHBOURHOOD MARKET CHECKLIST

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

- Hosting the market at a city park? Use the [Gathering Space Map](#) to find parks near you. Reach out to the neighbourhoods team to request a booking.
- Hosting the market on a street or sidewalk? Apply for a [Special Events Permit](#) 60 days in advance for a street closure and 30 days in advance for a sidewalk closure.
- Get insurance for the market. [PAL](#) or [Duuu](#) are possible providers or explore your own insurance contacts.
- Complete a [vendor market license](#) at least 60 days in advance, including a list of all vendors.
- Having a vehicle enter the park space (i.e., a food truck or movie trailer)? Apply for [Park Access Permit](#) 30 days in advance.
- Having loud noise or entertainment? Apply for a [Noise Exemption Permit](#) 30 days in advance.
- Using neighbourhood event equipment from the city? Reach out to the neighbourhoods team to request a booking.
- Design a site plan and safety plan. Be sure to send them to vendors before the market.