

# Block Party 101

Throw your own block party



[neighborsproject.org](http://neighborsproject.org)



Dear Neighbor,

On behalf of Neighbors Project, welcome to your guide to throwing a block party in Chicago. In this booklet you'll find tips and timelines for planning a block party with your neighbors using the food, furniture and supplies sold in your neighborhood. We've also posted this guide and bonus block party tips on our Web site,

neighborsproject.org. Use the site to upload your own block party story and share tips with other block party hosts.

Neighbors Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit that inspires, trains, connects and supports younger city residents to improve the quality of public life in city neighborhoods so that they're the preferred place to live for Americans of every kind. We reach out to the whole community, though we focus on people in their twenties and thirties in order to ensure that this emerging generation of city residents connects with their new neighbors. Get connected at neighborsproject.org.

Sincerely,

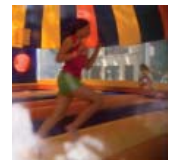
Mandy Burrell  
President, Chicago Advisory Board  
Member, National Board of Directors



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## 10 tips for getting along with your neighbors before and after your block party.

1. Say hi to your neighbors.
2. Use your porch/balcony/stoop for sitting, gabbing, reading, etc.
3. Ride your bike or walk to get around the neighborhood.
4. Skip the big boxes and shop local.
5. Have fun in your local public parks.
6. Pick up trash in front of your home, especially if you've been partying outside.
7. Shovel snow in front of your home.
8. Invite your neighbors to your parties — or at least warn them.
9. Join your neighborhood association or block club.
10. Throw a block party.



# Checklist: Basic Block Party

With some creativity and planning, you can throw a great, free or very low-cost block party with a laid-back vibe.

## Fall through January

- Decide you want to** throw a block party.
- Find a team.** Post fliers at local hot spots and on neighbors' doors, inviting anyone interested to a kick-off meeting to help plan the event.
- Get a permit application and set a date.** All Chicago block parties require permits, which are free and available from your alderman. Visit [civicfootprint.org](http://civicfootprint.org) to find your alderman, and then call, e-mail or stop by to ask for a permit application. *Bonus: all block party permits include some freebies!* Some Chicago aldermen require first-time block party organizers to collect signatures from their neighbors before applying for the permit. This can take some time, so visit your alderman's office as soon as possible for details. When you're choosing a date, try to avoid scheduling your party on the same weekend as local street festivals. *My date:*

## By February

- Collect signatures.** If signatures are required, pair up in teams to knock on doors until you've collected enough John Hancock's.
- Apply for your permit.** Drop it off at your alderman's office.
- Organize your team** into four groups:
  - Publicity. *My team:*
  - Food and Drinks. *My team:*
  - Entertainment. *My team:*
  - Set-up and Clean-up. *My team:*

# Checklist: Basic Block Party

## Three Months Out

*My deadline:*

- Get some buzz.** Publicize your event through local community organizations, condo and homeowner associations, and by posting "save the date" fliers at local businesses. Hang a large sign at both ends of your street with event details, and include an e-mail address and phone number people can contact if they have questions or want to volunteer.
- Find sponsors, if necessary.** It's best to buy your food and drink supplies from local stores, but if you're really pressed for money, you can also visit local shops at this point to solicit food and drink donations.

## Two Months Out

*My deadline:*

- Organize a potluck.** Ask all adults planning to attend the block party to contribute a dish and beverages.

## One Month Out

*My deadline:*

- Load your iPod.** Download your heart out so that your iPod is ready to go on the day of the party.

## Week Of

*My deadline:*

- Notify car owners.** Recruit a team to help post "no parking" signs.
- Advertise!** Hang signs advertising the event up and down the block.

## Day Of

*My deadline:*

- Get it clean, keep it clean.** Recruit a team to tidy up the streets and sidewalks. Ask neighbors to drag their lawn chairs and picnic tables out front for communal use. Designate at least two or three people to walk the street after the event, to remove "no parking" signs and sawhorses and pick up trash.
- Thank any sponsors.** Hang a sign thanking local businesses that provide donations or sponsorships. Include their logos!

# Advanced: Block Party 2.0

Extra tips for taking your block party to the next level

## Raise Money to Pay for a Bigger Party.

- ▶ **Raise party money by selling raffle tickets.** Local stores often will donate great prizes.
- ▶ **Charge a small admissions fee** for all adult guests. \$5 to \$10 for adults is typical, and not at all unreasonable if you'll be supplying food and drinks.

## Have Fun the Inexpensive Way.

These **inexpensive party events** require some forethought and a few extra pairs of hands, but they can be a lot of fun for all ages:

- ▶ Bike, stroller or dog parades
- ▶ Cornhole tournament
- ▶ Poker tournament
- ▶ Neighborhood photo contest
- ▶ Costume contest
- ▶ Face painting
- ▶ Dance contest
- ▶ Watermelon seed spitting contest
- ▶ Chalk art contest
- ▶ Bake-off (*Bonus: the entries are edible!*)

## Have Fun the Expensive Way.

- ▶ **Rent folding chairs, tables and tents** to set up in the middle of the street. This encourages people to mingle in a common area.
- ▶ **Rent a dunk tank** and invite your alderman to go for a swim!
- ▶ **Bring in a commercial grill** for maximum grilling efficiency.
- ▶ **Rent a commercial beer truck** for the day, which provides the added bonus of providing space to refrigerate your meat.

# Checklist: Neighborly Add Ons

Ideas for making your block a friendlier place throughout the year

## One Month Out

My deadline:

Set-up and clean-up team & volunteers

- Organize a neighborhood cleanup the morning of the event. It's one more way for neighbors to come together and take pride in their block.

Publicity team

- Invite the local newspaper to document the event.
- Or find a local photographer willing to capture the event and post the photos online in exchange for free advertising.
- Create an online form neighbors can use to provide feedback after the party, including praise, concerns and suggestions for next year's bash. Try [zoomerang.com](http://zoomerang.com). Have this ready to go the day of the event, so people can provide fresh feedback.

## Day Of

My deadline:

Publicity team

- Use the event to collect e-mails of people on your block. Set up a block listserv to stay in touch with your neighbors even when it's chilly outside. It might help you and your neighbors solve snow removal problems and other issues that arise throughout the year.

## Months After

My deadline:

Everyone

- If you have a surplus in your block party bank account, consider using the funds to purchase street furniture or plantings for your block, or equipment for the nearby park. A plaque dedicated to block party goers is a nice touch.



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**Photos:** Zach Wagner (zachwagnerphotography.com),  
Katheryn Hayes



**Start your neighbors project.**

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