
How to Organize a Neighborhood Cleanup

Yes we can!

A great way to get neighbors together and make some changes is to organize a neighborhood cleanup.

*A **How-to Guide** for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek*



How to Organize a Neighborhood Cleanup

Tired of looking at the trash in the lot next door? A great way to get neighbors together and make some changes is to organize a neighborhood cleanup. It's a lot easier than you may think. Residents have gotten together all over the Greater Battle Creek area to clean up vacant lots, parks, and streets — and keep them clean. All it takes is a little investigation, elbow grease, and a group of willing neighbors.

“A neighborhood cleanup creates a sense of community and pride among the residents of a neighborhood.”



What Are the Advantages of a Neighborhood Cleanup?

- Increases awareness and creates the groundwork to keep the community clean over a long period of time.
- Creates a sense of community and pride among the residents of the neighborhood.
- Gets people out for a one-day event that has visible results — which can go a long way to getting people interested and involved over the long haul.

Identifying the Problem

Take a look around your neighborhood to figure out where you might want to start. Is there a park filled with litter, a vacant lot that people have used for dumping their old furniture, or trash lining a block? Walk through your neighborhood, looking at it through the same eyes you would use if you were inspecting your home for things that needed cleaning. This walk-through will help later when you work with Waste Management (your local sanitation service). Carry a notebook or piece of paper with you and jot down what you see. Try to be as specific as you can, noticing “when, where, and what” in your observations. What you jot down might look something like this:

Early September...

- Empty lot on Creek Street full of old furniture and car parts
- Tires on West Road
- Trash in McCaren Park, mostly around the benches



Getting Your Neighbors Organized

A well-organized neighborhood group can have powerful influence when addressing the needs and problems of local residents. A group representing the whole neighborhood will have the stability, credibility, and political clout necessary to make a difference.

Reach out to people who live around the area that you've targeted for cleaning first. They will probably be the most interested in getting rid of the trash and would make a strong first line of recruits. Then, move out to surrounding homes, blocks, and businesses. Talk to people about the problem and about the idea of a cleanup. Find out whether they might be interested, remembering that you only need a few volunteers to start. Others will join when they see something happening.

Try catching people when they're coming home from work, before or after worship, or out in the park. You might even try going door-to-door on a nice evening. Ask people for their names and phone numbers so you can call them when you're ready to get together to plan your cleanup. Ask them what would be the most convenient date and

time for them to come to this meeting. Realize that there is not going to be any one time that works for everyone — the best time will be one that works for the most people.

Here are some organizations in Battle Creek that can help you tap into existing neighborhood groups and leaders:

- Neighborhood Partnership Office of the City of Battle Creek – Works on supporting the development of neighborhood associations throughout the city of Battle Creek.
Linda Ross-Sides, director 966-3339
- Neighborhoods Incorporated (NIBC) – Work happens in five targeted neighborhoods in Battle Creek to promote home ownership and affordable rehabilitation projects, as well as the maintenance of healthy neighborhoods through resident involvement.
Yvonne Cooper, outreach coordinator 968-1113
- Neighborhood Planning Councils – City-appointed resident councils covering large groups of neighborhoods in Battle Creek. These groups provide input to the city on various issues.
Mike Buckley, planning director, City of Battle Creek 966-3320
- Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts – Supports the development of youth through a variety of activities and may help with involving young people.
Cassie Claibourne, local coordinator 962-8513
- Local elementary schools and churches

Holding the Planning Meeting

Where and when

Find a meeting space — a church, school, library, local restaurant, or someone's home — that will hold your group and schedule a time and date for the meeting. Get back in touch with all of the people who said they might want to get involved as well as any other folks you think should be there. Print a flyer that has the time and date of the meeting on it and ask local churches, schools, and businesses to pass out copies of it.

What to discuss

Greet everyone and share with them the areas of the neighborhood that you thought could be the target of your cleanup. Be sure to listen to everyone's ideas, too. You may hear a new one. After talking for a while, bring folks together to decide which area of the neighborhood you want to clean up first. Don't worry if there is more than one good idea. In fact, that will be a great reason for the group to stay together to take on more cleanup projects over time!

Once you've all agreed on your first cleanup target, make sure participants don't end the meeting before the real work begins! Pick a date and time for the cleanup day and figure out all of the jobs that need to be done to make it a success. Make sure everyone has a job to do and that one or two people aren't doing everything. Remember, cleaning up should be a simple and easy way to help the neighborhood and no one person should be burdened with all of the responsibility for making it happen.

Once your group has decided what it wants to do, you may want to invite someone from Waste Management to come and speak to the group or give you tips over the phone. If you let them know what you're planning, they'll be better able to help you with advice and assistance.

Making Your Cleanup Day Happen

Before the cleanup

Several things have to be done after your first planning meeting, but before everyone meets to begin cleaning on the big day. Following is a list of things that should happen before the cleanup day — get volunteers to take responsibility for these things, too.

- **Get the word out.** Follow up with those who said they would help, hand out flyers, announce the cleanup day on our local cable channel, Access Vision, send out a press release to the local paper — whatever you think it will take to get people to your cleanup day.
- Try to get **young people** on the block involved in the cleanup. Their enthusiasm and energy can make a project really successful and motivate others to get involved.
- Canvass your neighborhood and talk to **local merchants and businesses**. Explain what you are doing and remind them that customers prefer to shop in clean, welcoming neighborhoods. Most will be happy to get involved. Ask them to donate equipment, food, and refreshments for volunteers. You could also try the Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department.
- **Get approvals** for the space, if needed.
 - If you would like to clean up a park, call Linn Kracht at Parks and Rec (966-3431) for approval. They will likely provide support for your project.
 - If the lot is city-owned, call Mike Buckley at the Planning Department (966-3320).
 - If the lot is privately owned, call Dennis McKinley at the City Code Compliance Office (966-3387). A letter will be sent by Code Compliance ordering the owners to clean it out within five days. If the owner fails to do this, the city will send a crew to mow the lot and bill the owner.

Yes we can!

How to Organize a Neighborhood Cleanup

- Contact **Waste Management** and tell them about the neighborhood cleanup. They may want to schedule an extra garbage pick-up day after the event. Also ask about regulations on refrigerator and air conditioner removal, yard waste removal, recycling options, and dumpster rental.

On and After Cleanup Day

- **Kick off the event.** You may want to gather all of your volunteers in a public place to “kick off” the day and then “march” to your cleanup site (be sure to mention this on your flyers and other promotions). This will allow other people in the neighborhood to see you in action and join in. If you want, you can even have a local politician or someone from a neighborhood organization or group give a “pep talk” to the volunteers before you begin. It makes people feel good to be recognized (and may also give you a better chance of getting the news media to cover your cleanup).
- **Find tasks for everyone.** When you get to your site, make sure everyone has a job to do that matches their physical ability. Older people may need to be sitting in a shady area while younger people may be better prepared to handle the physical labor. Remember that volunteers have taken the time to come out, so you must always find tasks for them to do! Manage food and refreshments for hungry and thirsty volunteers.

- **Thank the volunteers.** When you’re done, thank everyone for their time and effort. Write thank you notes to businesses and organizations that donated supplies, refreshments, and volunteers.
- **Gather contact information.** Make sure that you have a record of everyone’s name, address, and telephone number so you can contact them again to get back together for celebration and future cleanup projects.

Even if you can’t finish the cleanup work all in one day, stay positive and celebrate what you were able to do together. You’re on your way to making a cleaner and safer neighborhood for everyone!

A Neighborhood Cleanup in Battle Creek

Lucy lived next to Post Park, a large park in the Post Addition Neighborhood. She became concerned with the lack of adequate lighting and the trash that would accumulate there between the days that the city picked up trash. She voiced her concerns at several neighborhood forums and realized that several neighbors had similar concerns about all of the parks in the Post and Franklin Neighborhoods. After getting in touch with Linn Kracht of the Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department, Lucy contacted the concerned neighbors and created the Summer Saturdays Crew. This group cleaned up the parks on the days the city wasn’t scheduled to pick up the

trash. Every Saturday morning she and 5 to 15 other neighbors (depending on the week) gathered in one of the local parks and spent an hour gardening and picking up trash. Now the parks are much cleaner and people use them more often. The crew celebrates for a half-hour every Saturday after the cleanup by having a small picnic in the park. This allows them to socialize with one another and also enjoy the atmosphere of the park they have helped clean.

Cleaning up your neighborhood can make life better for your family, your neighbors, and your community.

Local Resources

Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department — responsible for all activities and facilities at City Parks.
Pete Baum, activities or Linn Kracht, facilities 966-3431

Battle Creek Streets Department — responsible for all streets and parks maintenance in Battle Creek including mowing, watering, painting, etc. of play grounds and parks.
Rande Johnson 966-3507

Calhoun County — operates a recycling center. The Road Commission periodically accepts old tires for a small fee.
781-0818

Waste Management — provides dumpsters for rent (they deliver and pick up) as well as other support for waste collection such as household trash cans and cardboard “picnic” waste containers and bags.
Cheryl Mead 962-4040

Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.

Yes we can! is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. Yes we can! is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For general questions about Yes we can!, call 269-969-2228 or visit www.wkkf.org/yeswecan. To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.

Source: The Citizens Committee for New York City, Inc.

Yes we can!