



Communicating with Residents

Communicating effectively with members and residents will do more to ensure the success of the board and the association than any resolution the board may pass or rule it enacts.

HOW DOES A BOARD COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY?

- Communicate frequently, in varying settings and places, and in as many ways as possible.
- Be positive, open, and direct.
- Listen and be inclusive.

Another approach to communicating effectively is by answering these questions:

- What does the board want to accomplish with this communication?
- What tone is appropriate to accomplish this goal?
- When do residents need to receive this information?
- To whom is the message directed?
- What is an appropriate expense for delivering this message?

CORRESPONDENCE

Individual correspondence is one of the most direct and personal ways to communicate with residents. Some of the more common forms of correspondence include:

- Rule-violation letters are one of the necessary evils of community association management. It's a good practice to begin with a gentle reminder letter giving residents an opportunity to comply followed by two to three progressively stronger letters if they don't.
- Thank-you letters let volunteers know their efforts are appreciated.
- Thank-you letters let residents know their compliance with rules was noticed.
- Welcome letters give new residents a sense of belonging.
- Congratulating letters are appreciated by staff, board members, and residents for major accomplishments or jobs well done.
- Business correspondence is essential to the operation of the association. Do your letters to contractors, lenders, committees, public officials, and others clearly identify all parties involved, what they're supposed to do, where and when they should do it, and why?

NEWSLETTERS

The association newsletter is a valuable and important way to communicate with residents. The board may prepare the newsletter or delegate it to the manager or a volunteer. Important aspects of good newsletter preparation include the audience, content, presentation, and design.

Audience

- Is yours a family-oriented community, a retirement community, or a busy, professional community?
- Are all residents owners; are all owners residents?
- Will managers and developers see your newsletter?

Content

- A message from the board or the president
- Reports on project status, financials, committee work
- Minutes or summaries of minutes
- Rule reminders
- Events—including meeting notices
- Association contact information
- News from CAI

Presentation

- Snappy headlines
- Fair reporting of the facts
- Well written and easy to read
- Different or creative presentations
- The most important information is up front

Design

- Lighthearted, eye-catching artwork and photography
- An attractive, consistent, simple layout

WEBSITES AND E-MAIL

Making full use of technology will strengthen any association's communications program. Websites are cheaper, faster, more accessible, and more convenient than traditional means of communication, such as newsletters, and they provide immediate and interactive exchange of information. Place the following types of documents on the association website:

- Governing documents, forms, rules, budgets
- Back issues of newsletters
- Meeting minutes and annual and committee reports
- Announcements: upcoming events, meeting notices

Like websites, e-mail allows board members, managers, and residents to communicate effectively because it's convenient, provides a written record, allows quick exchange of documents such as minutes, and reduces postage expense.

TOOL 14.1: See *Getting Started with Your Website* at the end of this section.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Annual reports can:

- Provide a permanent record of the association's activities.
- Inform members about board and association accomplishments.
- Provide realtors and others with valuable marketing information.
- Provide valuable data for the resident handbook or welcome packet.

Annual reports generally include:

- A list of key accomplishments.
- An overview of the association's finances, including the budget for the coming year.
- Names of volunteers who worked for the association during the year.
- Plans for the coming year.



Cautions

Consider adopting a newsletter policy for your association that specifies what content is acceptable, what gets priority, the need to avoid libel, what types of advertisements, if any, are acceptable, and the ceiling for ad revenue according to your tax status. It's important to have a framework within which everyone can work comfortably to produce your newsletter.

Being the association webmaster is a demanding assignment; volunteers come and go, have varying levels of expertise, and a limited amount of available time. Boards should keep the association website fresh and current, so consider contracting with a professional web provider.

It's easy for board members to discuss association issues via e-mail; however, to avoid the risk of conducting "secret" discussions or meetings, boards should not reach consensus or make decisions via e-mail. It's important for board members to print out all e-mails and make them part of the public record by appending them to meeting minutes, or avoid e-mail discussions and conduct all business in the open during regular meetings.

Some of these documents and communications can be regulated by state law.



FOR MORE HELP

Available online at www.caionline.org/bookstore.cfm or call (888) 224-4321 (M–F, 9–6:30 ET).

Communications for Community Associations, Guide for Association Practitioners Report #15, by Debra H. Lewin. (Community Associations Institute, 2000.)

To download a PDF of the entire Board Member Tool Kit, go to www.caionline.org/toolkit.

Getting Started with Your Website

If you would like to build a website, where should you begin? Start by developing a list of goals and requirements for your website. If your site will offer dynamic or interactive features, such as calendars, online forms, or surveys, you may opt to work with a web service provider that can build and host your site for you. Many of these companies offer a content management system (CMS), which can enable you to post content without having web publishing experience. You may find web service providers in CAI's online National Service Directory.

If your site requirements do not include interactive or dynamic features, you may choose to develop your own website. You will need a computer, an Internet connection, and a web browser (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer), so you can build, test, and upload your site.

If you plan on developing the website yourself, you should familiarize yourself with the following:

HTML. You will need a working knowledge of HTML (HyperText Markup Language), since it is the primary authoring language for websites. HTML defines the structure of a web page through tags, which are formatting commands placed around your content. If you search for "HTML" in a Web search engine you will find many online resources to help you learn HTML. In addition, there are numerous books available on the subject; check your local bookstore.

WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") HTML editors. Although your web pages can be edited with a simple text editor, such as Notepad on Windows, WYSIWYG software lets you create your web pages visually, while the software generates the HTML. There are many WYSIWYG editors available—Microsoft Front Page and Macromedia Dreamweaver are two examples. For best results when using a WYSIWYG editor, you will need to learn the basics of HTML.

Graphics. For images, you can find digital images from photo and clip-art libraries that are available online or on CD-ROM. Alternatively, if you have a digital camera or a scanner, you can post your own digital photos. You will want some photo editing software, such as Paint Shop Pro, to optimize your images for the web. Many digital cameras and scanners come with software and instructions for producing web-ready images.

Server. Once you have your web pages and associated images, you're ready to put your site on the Internet. Find a good hosting company by asking friends and colleagues who have websites, or use an online search engine to find hosting companies. Your hosting company will provide space on an Internet-connected computer and help you purchase a domain name, which will be used for your site's web address. Your hosting company can help you upload your content.