

PROJECT REALTOR®

RESTORE

A unique program designed to bring together Realtors®, local public works entities, police, churches, school organizations, civic groups and private volunteers to improve the quality of life with little or no costs. The program design is simple and effective.

Most communities, large and small, have areas in need of some improvement.

Sometimes it is as simple as cleaning a city park area, but can be as labor-intensive as cleaning several city blocks. Realtors® have always been leaders in their communities and this program is designed to bring about lasting change and restore peace and safety to areas experiencing decline.

Now it is time to get to work.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Arkansas Realtors® Association, through the local Boards, will collaborate with municipalities across the state to help ensure a safe and clean living environment for those living in areas of cities and towns experiencing decline or blight.

Realtors® across Arkansas will use their networking capabilities to recruit volunteers to participate in local clean-up efforts on a quarterly, semi-annual or annual basis in their communities.

By acting as community coordinators for those projects, Arkansas Realtors® will assume the leadership role and help guide their communities through labor-intensive projects with minimal costs to the citizens and great rewards to participants and to those living in designated clean-up areas.

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GETTING STARTED

Project Realtor® Restore is a simple concept and designed to be done in small increments over a defined period. It requires a commitment from the volunteer pool and the city to be effective. Generally, the volunteer pool is large, so the effort should be designed with the anticipated numbers in mind. Too many volunteers can be as problematic as too few.

NOTE: Templates are in the back of this workbook and on the ARA website for correspondence, press releases, check lists and forms. These are noted throughout the workbook with a (T-).

Personal contact with the Mayor or City Manager is always preferable to a letter. Since this is not always possible, writing a letter of introduction is perfectly acceptable (T-1). This is where we begin.

Set up a meeting with the Mayor or City Manager (or designated representative), the Police Chief and an official of Code Enforcement. This is where the ground work is laid for the entire project. Since code enforcement concerns and police calls for service are usually concentrated in certain areas, it will be necessary to determine exactly where those areas are. This matrix approach will be the definition of your cleanup area.

Once the area has been defined, it is time to take a “road trip” to the defined area with a representative from the code enforcement department, the police department and the Mayor or City Manager. At that time, the actual size of the area will be clear in your minds and the determination as to how many volunteers may be needed will be far easier to determine. While on this “road trip” take digital photos of the area for comparisons later.

The area is now defined, so it is time to set the date and time for the clean-up. Generally, a month to six weeks will be needed for all the preparations ON THE FIRST CLEAN-UP ONLY. Subsequent clean-ups can be accomplished is much less time.

NOTES:

Outline the Plan

Utilizing both your visual observations and the photographs of the area, a plan of attack should be agreed upon between the Board and the municipal officials. The following are some suggestions:

Clean debris from fence rows, ditches and vacant lots.

Permission will be needed to go on to private property and the municipality should be responsible for that.

Determine if there are senior citizens or handicapped residents in the area with apparent debris issues around their property. Special assistance will be made available to them. See page 8.

Working with the municipal representatives, determine if this will be a one-time effort or if it will require several clean-ups. Plan accordingly. Long-term projects should NOT be viewed in the same light as smaller projects. Example: a long-term project should begin with a "light dusting"~ A clean-up effort that simply picks up trash and clears debris. The second time around would be fence rows, mowing and a general cleaning. Citizens WILL follow up on this process once it is begun.

Determine if there are structures currently under condemnation. If there are, the day of the clean-up is a perfect time to do the demolition. This is when the "Bob-the-Builder-Demolition-Crew" phenomena come out in grown women and men!! Enjoy.

Set the Guidelines

It is critical to resist the temptation to “expand as you plan”. Consider the parameters determined by the Realtors® and municipal representatives to be set in stone.

Make a list of what will be provided by the municipality. A word of caution - since not all municipalities have the same resources, it may be necessary to ask for assistance from a local contractor or builder. Below are some suggestions as to what the municipality should be responsible for:

1. Sanitation equipment and manpower. Suggested equipment: residential sanitation trucks, commercial trucks and roll-back dumpsters, knuckle-boom trucks and trailers for tires.
2. Minimal police presence the day of the clean-up. The Dispatch Center should be advised volunteers are covering the defined area and that any call emanating from that area is Priority One. Also, patrol officers should be nearby and drive through the area periodically.
3. If inmate labor is to be utilized, the municipality will be required to arrange for their transport and supervisors.
4. If public-service workers are to be utilized, the municipality will need to work with the court system to determine if there are individuals available to assist.
5. The police department will need to check for any sex offender, subject to notification and living in the area. They will also be needed to make notification to the volunteers the morning of

the clean-up. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD VOLUNTEERS WORK AT THE RESIDENCE OF A SEX OFFENDER.

6. The municipality will need to arrange with the landfill to take debris from the clean-up. Tipping fees (if applicable) will have to be absorbed by the municipality. Many solid-waste authorities will no longer take tires except on specified dates. The municipality should determine if the local authority will take tires and if they must be on or off the rims. This will be crucial information later on.
7. Code Enforcement Officers will need to canvass the area about ten days prior to the clean-up to issue warnings to the worse offenders. They should be warned that all debris must be taken to the street by 8 a.m. the morning of the clean-up or be cited to court. This is an excellent "*encouragement*" to those who live amid the trash.
8. Should there be areas of high weeds such as on vacant lots, the Municipal Parks Department is a good resource for mowers. These should be operated by Parks Department employees and NOT volunteers. The same is true of high weeds and weed-eater operators. Some municipalities have maintenance crews and these can be used in lieu of Parks employees.

Clearly outline what the Realtors® are willing to contribute. Here are some suggestions:

1. Volunteers. Your database, in addition to Realtors® can be comprised of:

- Church members
- School groups
- Civic organizations
- Friends and family members
- Special Olympians
- Habitat for Humanity
- College fraternities and sororities
- Police fraternal orders and/or unions

Firefighters organizations and/or unions
Students: Jr. High, High School & College
(Arkansas State University, Departments of
Criminology and Sociology give credit points to
students participating)

IT IS STRONGLY SUGGESTED TO NOT USE
CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 12 EVEN IF
ACCOMPANIED BY A PARENT.

2. Food - hot dogs, hamburgers, buns, condiments, chips, bottled water, ice, soft drinks and napkins. Although this seems like it may be a costly undertaking, the truth is that volunteers can be fed and watered for less than \$1 each. This can also come in the form of donations of food. Some radio stations and banks have their own grills and will donate the food. This can be a mine field, however, and should be approached with caution. **Remember: this is collaboration between the Realtors® and the municipality.**
3. Heavy-duty garbage bags.
4. 8 to 10 pair of work gloves for those workers who fail to bring their own. Home improvement companies generally will donate these.
5. Grill and charcoal.
6. Volunteers with a truck(s) to deliver bottled water to the others and another to assist with picking up tires if tires can be collected.
7. A VIP to cook and serve. The Mayor is always a good choice, however, there are others who will enjoy this activity.
8. A commitment to continue the project until the proper results have been achieved. This is the foundation on which the long-term effectiveness of the Project will hinge.

Publicity

Publicity is critical to the effectiveness of this Project. Not only will this make a positive impact on the public perception of the Realtors®, but it will ensure that those living in the area are fully aware of the event.

Jointly issue a press release (T-2) with the municipality. Clearly define the area of the clean-up along with the date and time.

Press releases should go to radio stations, television stations and newspapers. Generally, three press releases are sufficient. The media will show great interest in the clean-ups since they show activity and are the rare “WARM FUZZY” story that makes great news.

The first press release should be immediately after the decision is made to do the project. The second made about three weeks prior to the project and the third made the week of the project. Media outlets will generally participate in the project itself, so be sure a spokesperson is available to them.

Keep the releases concise and upbeat with the focus on the collaboration aspect of the project. This will bring in more potential volunteers than those events appearing to be closed to the outside.

Hype it!!

Special Needs

Most communities have citizens with special needs. Sanitation Departments are a good source of information on those individuals requiring front-door trash pickup. Police Officers, as well, generally know where these individuals live. Some may be seniors and some may simply have challenges that keep them from being able to adequately maintain their home and surroundings.

These individuals need special attention. Ten days to two weeks prior to the clean-up, volunteers should canvass the area passing out fliers. (T-3) It is not necessary to ring every door bell and talk with the people, but a flier should be left in every door. The Code Enforcement Officers are usually very happy to assist with this effort and possibly can use this time to canvass for “trash” offenders. Posting these fliers in store windows in the area of the clean-up is helpful also.

It is suggested that one number within the city and one number of a volunteer should be printed on the flier. Both of those should be able to talk with the caller and make an assessment of the actual need as opposed to the perceived need. There WILL be those who are quite capable, yet would rather the work be done by others. Do not fall into this trap.

It will be necessary to keep a careful list of these names and addresses. A team of three to five should be assigned to each address. Generally, the younger men and women - with supervision - should handle these cases.

Add these notations to your map of the area.

Checklists

THREE WEEKS BEFORE:

- Prepare flier
- Press Release - Second (T-4)
- Check with city - are they ready?
- Check the volunteer base for numbers
- Locate a meeting site - church, school, business, park or vacant lot
- Arrange for bathrooms
- Revisit the clean-up site - changes?

TEN DAYS TO TWO WEEKS BEFORE:

- Pass out fliers in clean-up area
- Food, drinks and VIP to grill
- Follow up with city - are they ready?
- Check the volunteer base for numbers
- Print several copies of the area map and note special- attention areas
- Arrange for one or two volunteers to drive the “water wagon” and the “tire truck”

CLEAN-UP WEEK:

Make one last trip to the clean-up area.

You may find that some residents have been “motivated” to clear their personal space and you will be able to remove the area around those residences from your target clean-ups.

Follow up with your city contacts - are they ready?

This is when it will become necessary to know the location of the dumpsters as these will be mentioned in your final press release. You will also have to determine if tires can be collected for the same reason. It will be necessary to make sure there are employees assigned to operate mowers and heavy-duty weed-eaters.

Contact the volunteer coordinators to remind of the necessity bringing work gloves, hoes, rakes, clippers, etc.

Issue the final press release (T-5) and place a telephone call to each media outlet inviting them to participate. Hand-carrying final press releases are helpful.

NOTES:

CLEAN-UP DAY SCHEDULE

1. Food, drinks and supplies.

One or two person(s) should be responsible for purchasing and food, drinks and supplies to the meeting site.

Water should be iced down immediately - especially in warmer weather.

A grill, charcoal and grilling supplies will have to be brought to the site.

2. Organizers should arrive at meeting site around 7:15 a.m.

3. Garbage bags and additional gloves should be readily available.

A laundry basket works well for this. The used gloves can be deposited back in the basket after the clean-up and washed for the next time.

4. Syringes and Needles:

Often clean-up areas are also home to some drug usage and sales. Needles and syringes are a part of living in these areas and preparations should be made to pick these up when it is safe to do so. A "sharps" container or a coffee can with a lid can be used BY ONE PERSON ASSIGNED TO REMOVE THESE WEARING GLOVES. The sharps container or the coffee can be taken to the local County Health Unit for disposal. DO NOT THROW THEM IN DUMPSTERS OR GARBAGE BAGS...THIS IS CRITICAL. Police are generally happy to handle this task. They learn a lot this way!

5. Be prepared to start gathering teams between 8 and 8:15.

6. Use a sign-in sheet (T-6). This will become your data base for future clean-ups.

7. First assign teams to special-needs individuals. Young people do very well with these projects.
8. Name team captains and allow them to choose their teams.
Using the template (T-7) for the phone list, have the captains gather and add their cell numbers to the phone list. Each should be given a map and a phone list. This is their communications with each other and the organizers.
9. Gather everyone together and if sex-offender notification is needed, have an officer do so first.
This is done simply as a precaution. This is a good time also to remind participants that there are sometimes snakes and spiders in unkempt areas. Each of these should be taken seriously, however, it is counter-productive to make large issues out of these possibilities.
10. Remind teams that the “water wagon” and “tire truck” will be making the rounds. Both should carry extra garbage bags.
11. Remind volunteers of the location of bathrooms.
12. Remind volunteers to work with others - never alone.
13. Remind volunteers to stay off private property. The only exception will be those who have been assigned to the special needs situations. Anything else should be at the discretion of the organizers.
14. Thank volunteers and remind them to come back to the meeting site when their work is completed.
15. Remind the volunteers that lunch will be served at exactly ??.
Never work beyond Noon

16. After the clean-up is completed, a general clean-up of the meeting site will be needed.

17. BE VERY SURE TO TAKE A LOT OF PICTURES DURING THE EVENT.DIGITALS CAN BE POSTED ON THE ARA WEBSITE.

NOTES:

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES/SUGGESTIONS/RANDOM THOUGHTS:

Troublesome residents:

Yes, there will be those who really would rather you NOT be in their neighborhood. These people are generally the very reason the area is in decline. Confrontation is not a part of what you are expected to do. The police officers are more than happy to deal with problem residents.

Loose animals:

This can be a concern. If a loose dog is noticed, do not approach the animal unless you can be very sure the dog is friendly. A better approach would be to call Dispatch and ask for an animal control officer to pick up the animal if a leash law exists in the community. Common sense goes a long way. It should not be considered all participants will use common sense.

Liability issues:

Individual Boards may wish to handle this in different ways. If the municipality is the lead in the effort with the Board making up the volunteers, municipal tort immunity should be considered. If Boards are uncomfortable with this, a waiver may be signed. Consider, by the nature of the position, volunteers are just that.

Working hand-in-hand with municipalities:

Municipal employees and elected officials are generally overwhelmed with their responsibilities. This needs to be considered when working with them. A team concept is such an important part of the success of this program. Realtors® provide the manpower; municipalities provide the infrastructural components and together THE CITIZENS REAP THE BENEFITS.

One final thought:

Project Realtor® Restore can be one of the most gratifying programs ever. In Community Policing and Problem Solving, the “broken-window” theory is one of great significance. That is the theory that a broken window, left without repair, will begin the decline of any area. The lack of concern on the part of those living

adjacent to that one lack of concern on the part of those living adjacent to that one broken window shows their inability or unwillingness to repair such a minor problem. The area will then experience blight accordingly. In so many of these areas, there are senior citizens who have lived in one home for most of their adult lives. This project is designed to help those seniors and others who, by necessity or choice, live there.

As Realtors® we see these needs from an economic point of view.

As humans and Realtors® we will make a difference.

NOTES:

TEMPLATES

T-1 - Letter to the Mayor/City Manager

T-2 - Initial Press Release

T-3 - Flier (for distribution in clean-up area)

T-4 - Second Press Release

T-5 - Final Press Release

T-6 - Sign-in Sheet

T-7 - Phone List