

Cupertino Block Leaders: Volunteer Handbook



CUPERTINO

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Introduction

Good neighborhoods are those where neighbors work together on common concerns and look out for each other. Block Leaders take extra steps to connect neighbors and build community -- helping our neighborhoods to be safer, healthier, and happier.

The Block Leader program helps residents how get to know their neighbors and organize activities so neighbors can more easily communicate. Block Leaders receive updates on neighborhood activities and services and are vital links between City Hall and the neighborhoods.

Members of the Block Leader and Neighborhood Watch programs are volunteers, and do not represent the City of Cupertino.

Going forward, the Block Leader program will take an iterative, continuous improvement approach. As we identify opportunities to increase the program's participation and efficacy, focus groups will pilot potential changes. If successful, these changes will be implemented within the broader program.

Should I Join Block Leaders or Neighborhood Watch?

It's up to you! Both Block Leaders and Neighborhood Watch volunteers stay informed with newsletters and participate in the REACH program.

However, Block Leaders go the extra mile to build a sense of community, attend at least one meeting per year, and host a neighborhood gathering.

A benefit of being a Block Leader rather than a Neighborhood Watch volunteer is that Block Leaders can email documents to the Program Coordinator who will print up to 30 copies of the document.

FAQs

1.) How much territory should I try to represent?

Some neighborhoods have logical boundaries that are easy to recognize, while others require more judgment on the part of the Block Leader. In general, established Block Leaders have told us to target about 20-30 homes and hope for 5-10 initial responses. As Block Leaders become more established, they may choose to expand their area, but the number of people and area you coordinate is always up to you.

2.) How do I get people interested and motivated to participate?

There are probably as many answers to this question as there are Block Leaders! One of the first things you can do is ask yourself why you were motivated to become a Block Leader. It may well be that many of the same reasons that engaged you will be the same ones that will motivate your neighbors.

You might want to begin your initial introduction to your neighbors by letting them know why you have chosen to become a Block Leader and the benefits of an active neighborhood.

3.) What is the first event I should host?

This depends on whether your neighborhood has already begun to work on a common issue. Some experienced block leaders report that a block party is the most casual way to get neighbors together since they're most likely held on a blocked-off city street. However, if your immediate concern is to increase neighborhood safety, you may consider coordinating a Neighborhood Watch or emergency preparedness meeting.

4.) What should I do if only a few people respond?

If you have a few people respond, congratulate yourself on your efforts because this means you are on your way! Getting started is always the hardest part and once you have a few neighbors interested, they can help you get the ball rolling and help to energize you as you continue to connect with more neighbors.

Block Leader Requirements

Block Leaders are current residents of the City of Cupertino, who are comfortable with written and verbal communication in English. Block Leaders are also expected to be familiar tools such as email, most communication will be through email and the (digital) newsletter. As this is a City program, Block Leaders must be willing to partner with local government and be willing to relay information between the City and residents. Block Leaders should also be passionate about community safety and cultivate trust and connection within their community. Volunteers are welcome to team up and act as Co-Leads.

Block Leaders are required to be current residents of Cupertino, as most of the information sent out is connected to the City and will be less relevant to nonresidents.

Block Leader Onboarding

On boarding is currently held as needed and usually takes between 45 minutes and an hour. In the future, on boarding may only take place quarterly or biannually.

Doorhangers are available at the onboarding to help volunteers establish contact with their neighbors. The doorhangers have a short greeting for the resident and space for Block Leaders to write in their contact information¹. On the reverse side, there is an overview of the program and short informational blurbs about Cupertino 311 and AlertSCC.

Block Leaders are encouraged to gather and share contact information or start a chat group (such as WhatsApp) so that neighbors can contact each other as needed. Volunteers are expected to update the contact list/group as neighbors move in and out. While everyone is encouraged to participate, residents are not required to share their contact information.

Block Leaders are also expected to keep this information safe and secure and should not share personal data without permission.

Example contact list

House	Point of Contact	Resident(s)	Phone	Email
101 Street	Melissa Hurtado	2 residents, dog	555-777-0000	hurtado@email
103 Street	Kamlager (CPR + First Aid certified)	3 residents	555-777-0000	kamlager@email
104 Street	John Laird – Block Leader	2 residents	555-777-0000	laird@email
105 Street	Leyva (oxygen tank)	1 resident	555-777-0000	leyva@email

¹ Block Leaders may choose to create a separate email for Block Leader activities, such as DeAnzaBlock@email. However if you choose to do so, please check this other account regularly so that you do not miss anything.

How to Stay Active

To remain active participants in the Block Leader program, volunteers are asked to attend a program meeting, organize a community event, and participate in REACH messaging each year. Block Leader meetings are held quarterly. Community events may include permitted Block Parties, coffee hours, Neighborhood Watch presentations, or Go Bag kit building events.

In fulfilling these three requirements, Block Leaders affirm their commitment to the program and to their community. Block Leaders are welcome to team up with each other or neighbors to organize community events and are not expected to single-handedly cover the costs of community gatherings.

Block Leaders who are not able to fulfill these requirements are expected to contact the program coordinator.

REACH

REACH, short for Raising Emergency Awareness of Community Hazards, is a relatively new program. The program was created to formalize the expectation that volunteers share information with their community in an emergency. The program also aims to build a more connected community, to create pathways for information sharing between the City, individuals, and households; and to better prepare the community to respond to threats and mitigate risk. The program also serves to build credibility in their community and ensure that everyone has up-to-date contact information.

The REACH program is used when the National Weather Service predicts moderate or higher risk in the near future. A member of Cupertino Office of Emergency Management staff will send a message through email, Better Impact and GovDelivery. Volunteers are then asked to spread this information using whatever communication routes work best for their community. In higher risk situations, volunteers are asked to confirm receipt of message and estimate how many people they passed the information to.

The program is used to evaluate the volunteer programs, not to evaluate individual volunteers.

Risk	NWS PRODUCT	Likely City Actions
green NONE		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal Operations
yellow MINOR	OUTLOOK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor situation • Coordinate with partners • Share information
orange MODERATE	WATCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer outreach • Anticipate impacts • Additional public information
red MAJOR	ADVISORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor impacts • Additional public information • Pre-position resources as needed • Pre-plan for shelters
magenta EXTREME	WARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for continuous operations • Request needed resources • Additional public information sharing • Additional volunteer outreach • Consider alert and warning

Program Meetings

Program meetings are held quarterly on various topics. Past speakers include representatives from the County Sheriff's office, the City's Sustainability Division, and the City's Innovation and Technology Division. The program manager selects meeting topics based on speaker availability, demonstrated interest, and relevance. City Departments and Divisions are prioritized so that volunteers are familiar with City processes and services.

There will also be time set aside at each meeting for an "open forum" so that Block Leaders can ask for advice or support from other volunteers.

Attendance is not limited to Block Leaders – all are welcome.

Community Events

Community Events are any gathering where neighbors in a Block can get to know each other and form community bonds. There is no set agenda for community events.

Examples:

- Neighborhood Watch presentation
- Ice cream social
- Group CPR training
- Emergency Preparedness presentation
- Potluck
- Bag lunch at a nearby park
- Coffee at local café

People are often busy and have conflicting schedules – not all residents must attend an event to “count” as a community event. However, Block Leaders must invite all residents of their Block to the event.

To schedule a Neighborhood Watch or Emergency Preparedness presentation, please contact the program coordinator at least two weeks before the event date.

As COVID-19 continues to be a concern, Block Leaders may choose to hold a community event virtually.

Report community events to the program coordinator by the end of each calendar year. In the report, include the event name, date, and summary as well as an attendance count and community impact.

Example:

Our Block met at the library café on the 15th. 10 people showed up and we talked about summer camps in our area.

We have a new neighbor who does not have kids, but they enjoyed the coffee! This meet up has helped them settle into the area and get a better idea of what Parks and Recreation offers. They are very interested in drought tolerant gardening so we ended up learning a bit about that. Attached is a photo, but I don't think everyone is comfortable sharing it widely.

Newsletter

Newsletters are sent out every other week (barring holidays) through the GovDelivery portal, using the “Block Leader Newsletter” template. Newsletter topics include reminders of upcoming meetings and orientations for the program as well as news from City departments and partners.

Inactive Volunteers

Volunteers who have not fulfilled the program requirements, or communicated with the program manager will be contacted by email. If there is no response, volunteers are assumed to have left the program and moved to an “inactive” status on Better Impact. If the volunteer later reaches out, they will be asked to attend an orientation session before regaining “active” status.

If a volunteer creates or contributes to an environment that is unsafe or unwelcoming, the program manager will reach out to discuss the situation. If the behavior continues, they will be moved to an “inactive” status.

If a Block Leader would like to keep receiving the newsletter but is not able to fulfill the program requirements, they can be moved to the Neighborhood Watch/Information Only group. Neighborhood Watch volunteers are still expected to participate in the REACH program.

Volunteers marked as “inactive” in both programs will not receive the bimonthly newsletter.

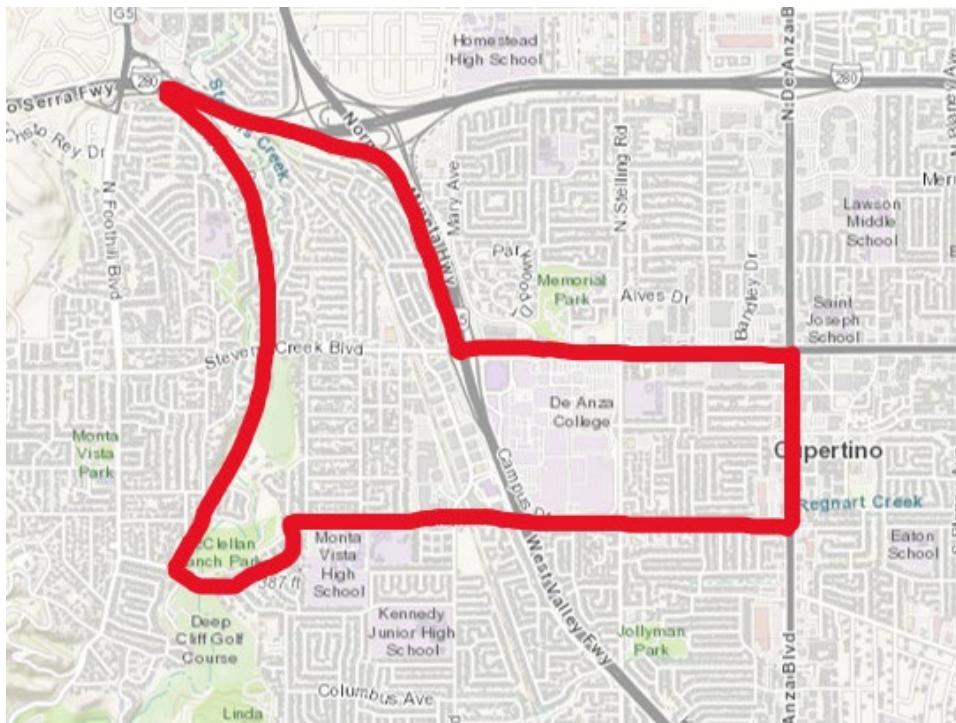
Neighbor to Neighbor

California Volunteers, Office of the Governor contacted the City, inviting the Block Leader program to apply for the Neighbor to Neighbor funding opportunity. Cupertino and San Jose were both selected for the funding.

As part of the Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) pilot, the Block Leader program is focusing on a census tract with slightly higher risk levels based on FEMA risk analysis. The census tract also has a lower ratio of Block Leaders to residents.

Recruitment focused on the priority area seeks to increase the number of new Block Leaders. The Block Leaders in the area are asked to set up a community event for their Block, focused on emergency preparedness, where the City will provide a “go kit” workshop – offered in partnership with California Volunteers. This workshop fulfills the community event requirement.

The workshops are intended for the residents that a Block Leader is including in their Block, i.e. people that the Block Leader would send REACH messaging to or invite to community events.



Residents outside of the priority area are also welcome to organize emergency preparedness trainings for their neighborhood. There is a limited number of go bags available for Cupertino residents.

Program History

Cupertino's Block Leader program was introduced after September 11, 2001 to connect neighbors and build community while also sharing resources from the City, resulting in safer, healthier, and happier neighborhoods.

In 2022 the program began a revamp. The primary goal was to increase participation for a more robust program. An emergency preparedness element has also been added with the move into the Office of Emergency Management. In late 2022, the REACH program was introduced and implemented for all OEM volunteer programs (Block Leaders, Cupertino Amateur Radio Emergency Services, Community Emergency Response Team, Medical Reserve Corps, and Neighborhood Watch).

Acronyms

CARES	Cupertino Amateur Radio Services
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
MRC	Medical Reserve Corps
NWS	National Weather Service
N2N	Neighbor to Neighbor
OEM	Office of Emergency Management
REACH	Raising Emergency Awareness of Community Hazards
SCC	Santa Clara County