



In The Know

the newsletter for association board members
Winter 2018



An Association is made up entirely of owner-members. The greatest challenge an Association faces is communicating effectively with members. Ensuring that community members understand the roles of both the Board and the management company should be a top priority. Make it understood that they are both there to support the direction of the community and have everyone's best interest in mind. Clear and timely communication is the key to avoiding conflict or frustration.

Ways to Communicate

Welcome Letter

A Welcome Letter that is sent to every new community member is a must. It should be a concise explanation outlining what the Association is responsible for, and what the management company is responsible for as is defined in the Governing Documents. Newcomers should be urged to participate in meetings and to serve on committees. Other items to consider including or covering:

- The name and contact information of the management company, and community manager
- Schedule of Board meetings

Association Newsletter

Newsletters are sometimes considered a little “old school” but are still a great way to consistently communicate with members. Research shows that at least 60% of homeowners will read a printed newsletter. Sentry offers Welcomelink, a tool that streamlines the community newsletter process. Great information to provide to homeowners through a newsletter is:

- Briefing on topics scheduled to be addressed by the Board
- Announcing upcoming community events
- Giving notice of special or upcoming projects like tree trimming, road paving, fence repairs, etc.
- Emergency preparedness plans
- List of contacts to call for a pool key, seek management company assistance, enforcement policy of violations, and other key processes

Community Website

Many HOAs and condos, especially larger ones, want to be found online by residents and the general public. That requires a separate site, that usually connects to a password protected area for homeowner only information and for making assessment payments. It is important to keep websites updated with timely and relevant information because it reinforces that the Association is being transparent and openly communicating with residents.

A community website should generally include:

- Alerts and reminders for Board meetings and community events
- Governing document (Articles of Incorporation, By-laws, and rules and regulations). Half of associations make them generally available, others choose to put them in a password-protected area of the website
- Request forms that allow residents to quickly and easily submit any requests, depending on the type of community
- Galleries for photos of events, celebrations or improvement projects

Bulletin Boards

A bulletin board is a centrally located place for members to leave their community-generated information and notices. A gathering point in the community, like an office or central mailboxes, is the ideal location. Large electronic bulletin boards are a good option for larger HOAs.

Social Media

Homeowners will get information about your community online whether your Board participates in the social media forums or not. Be proactive and strive to become the source of news and events for your community. Consider having an “official” Facebook or other media page and actively moderate the content. Official pages are particularly effective in countering unofficial or rogue homeowner pages or undesirable Nextdoor forums. Always urge residents to check for information on official sites.

Personalized Mobile Phone App

A mobile app that offers push notifications, like the Sentry CommunityAPP™ allows instant communication with anyone that has downloaded the app. Send emergency alerts, information about repairs being made around the community, and Board meeting reminders.

Communication Tips

Any type of communication should be informative, timely, and worth reading. A few things to keep in mind while writing for your community:

- **Keep articles short.** Get to the point, and use headings and bullet points to grab readers’ eyes
- **Include good content.** Consider profiling people, like Board and committee members, or maintenance workers
- **Remember to proofread.** Use a second set of eyes to review
- **Share the good news.** Communicate accomplishments of the Association
- **Highlight and recognize volunteers.** Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Association—promote them
- **Use compelling pictures and graphics.**

“Do It All” For Optimum Communications

To the extent you can, use all of the communications approaches. Building consistent and effective ways to communicate with community members is important to build consensus, remain a credible source, and to avoid confusion within when a member has a request, or question and does not know the proper way to have it resolved. By providing information via several different platforms, more residents will be reached. It can also reduce the number of complaints and remove the idea that the Association is not doing all it should for the community. Lots of official communications can serve as an antidote to possible negative online reviews and comments.