



# COMMUNITY BUILDER

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## Building Community Relationships Through Good Rules Enforcement

The members of your association have just elected you to serve as a board member. Congratulations! You are now responsible for ensuring that each community member adheres to the rules and regulations published in your association's Articles of Incorporation, Covenants, Bylaws, adopted rules and regulations, and architectural standards. You are responsible for the enforcement of those rules, which are vital to maintaining property values, and a social responsibility to build good community relationships and promote a sense of harmony for the membership.



This responsibility can feel overwhelming to board members – equally for those who are new to service and those who have volunteered for years. Board members aren't just leaders; they are volunteer *neighbors* tasked with ensuring that their *fellow neighbors* willingly and cooperatively follow the rules. You have been given the authority to govern. You must now identify the manner in which to use this authority to ensure compliance, foster good relationships, and keep all residents on the same path towards achieving the association's goals.

### What Does a Successful Community Look Like?

Drive through any community, and you'll get an immediate sense of the value that the board and owners place in following rules and working cooperatively – the neat appearance of well-maintained homes, the thoughtful care of common grounds and

plantings. You are led to feel that this is a community where everyone works together to make the community a great place to live.

### Help Owners Understand the Necessity of Enforcement

There's a responsibility that comes with living in a neighborhood that has established rules. And you'll have the support of your membership if those rules are created, explained, and enforced thoughtfully and reasonably.

Enforcement does not need to be a negative, unrewarding task. With the help of your Sentry Community Manager, board members can re-evaluate their approach to enforcement with a priority in fostering a sense of real community. It begins with creating a goal and providing education to community members about their role in that goal.

### Start With the Basics

Good rules provide structure. When developing an enforcement strategy, board members first need to:

1. Review all governing documents and rules of the community to determine if they are reasonable, fair, and up-to-date with the most recent local and federal laws. If your rules are outdated, assign a task force to determine what regulations may need to be changed or removed altogether because they have outlived their necessity.
2. Consider whether the rules are over-burdensome and find creative ways to make them easier to comply with. You may find that you can split the compliance requirements into seasonal tasks to make enforcement more manageable, like focusing on yard rules in the spring and painting and carpentry requirements in the fall. Breaking compliance requirements up in this way can make them less daunting and more affordable for all owners.
3. Ensure that the board has the authority to enforce the rules and then apply them to all members on an equal basis. Your governing documents define the rules, and the board cannot enforce stricter requirements than what has already been established.
4. Ask yourself if the rules promote the growth and overall harmony of the membership. If they don't, brainstorm to determine how you can better align and enforce them to encourage compliance.

Once you have worked through this process, consider creating a goal statement for your community that promotes the established rules and reflects the lifestyle and values of the membership as one body. Invite members to add their voices to refine the statement, giving them a chance to buy into the board's vision. Include this positive statement in your welcome packets and new owner orientation materials and programs. Remember, owners who understand why rules are in place are more likely to respond positively when they are advised that they are in some way out of compliance.

### Promoting Compliance

Successful boards promote compliance and avoid conflict by encouraging members' cooperation before a problem arises. Your duty as a board member is not to punish; instead, it is to compel owners to stay in compliance by making the process easy to understand and follow.

- Regularly publish rules in a positive manner through newsletters, association websites, e-blasts, and message boards. Knowledge is power, and owners with knowledge are functional members of a community.
- Before annual reviews, provide owners with a list of items that they may wish to focus on at their own homes to give them an opportunity to self-cure violations.
- Use language that focuses on community pride and cooperation.
- Make your first notice of violation a friendly reminder. Remind owners that everyone is working towards the same goal of keeping the association well maintained.
- Establish reasonable deadlines for compliance. All homeowners live busy, complicated lives and may need more than a week or ten days to cure a violation.
- Let fairness and empathy be your guides as you work to motivate your membership to remain in compliance. Be certain to practice due process and thoughtfully accept and review appeals to ensure that all homeowners are treated equally throughout the process to reduce tense or uncomfortable conflicts.
- Thank and reward your members for their hard work through social programming and community events. By doing this, board members show respect for the efforts of others and motivate more people to respond positively to rules enforcement practices.

Remember that you are not just a board member who was elected to govern. You are a *neighbor* who has been given the responsibility and the opportunity to set the tone for the community. When it comes to rules enforcement, guide as you would be guided to reach your compliance goals.

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