STAFF SPARK TOOLKIT

Festival of Neighbourhoods

Kitchener

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Section I - Festival of Neighbourhoods Outreach

How do we define Neighbourhoods?

There is no one single way to define a neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods can be defined through physical geography, proximity, people, and our perceptions of where/how we fit in relation to this. You may determine your neighbourhood by characteristics such as how small or large it is or how connected you believe you are to people and places in it.
Neighbourhoods can have a sense of homogeneity or diversity; older adults, young families, single people, extended families, persons with disabilities, busy professionals, homemakers, pet lovers and bikers, visible and audible minorities, etc. Socioeconomic status, education, ability, language, culture, skin colour and gender are just a few examples of differences we can encounter within neighbourhoods.

The boundaries and the sense of one's neighbourhood can also change over time. Physically, many neighbourhoods undergo frequent and dynamic changes. People moving in and out, intensification/development, new roads/ transportation routes, economic and social migrations can change the character of a neighbourhood pretty quickly.

What is neighbourhood engagement? And why do we need it?

Neighbours getting to know each other creates a foundation for healthier, meaningful, and inclusive lives for everyone. As trust between neighbours grows, neighbourhoods become safer and neighbours can rely on one another for help such as child care and house sitting. When communication between neighbours increases, opportunities for more organized and formal types of engagement become possible, like block parties or associations. Strong neighbourhoods provide an environment for greater resilience in times of need.

Quotes from the Decent Lives Project, Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

"Having someone to talk to, someone to turn to, someone to help out, someone to ask, someone to spend time with and have fun together on regular basis is what many people perceive as a strong neighbourhood."

"Once you get to know your neighbours, it changes everything, it makes life more interesting and humanizes the neighbourhood."

What role does Festival of Neighbourhoods play?

FON is focused on the relationships among neighbours that are created in informal ways: people knowing their neighbours by name, meeting regularly to talk about their day-to-day lives, finding common interests, learning about other cultures, asking and offering support to each other, and sharing small and big acts of kindness to build a greater sense of connection. FON encourages the simplest ways of engaging like greeting neighbours on the street, stepping off of the front porch and crossing the road to say hi, knocking on the door to welcome a new neighbour, starting a conversation at the bus stop, inviting someone for a walk or for a cup of coffee, getting a few neighbours to the park, or going together to a neighbourhood event.

FON recognizes that the process of creating neighbourhood connections will vary for everyone. For some people it is easy to get to know other people. Others experience challenges or barriers such as language, shyness, limited mobility, or the need for additional support. FON believes the individual neighbour is the expert of their own environment. FON uses a broad framework to advocate and provide resources for all types of neighbours with an ultimate objective to demonstrate how simple making connections between neighbours can and should be. FON challenges neighbours to acknowledge that we underestimate neighbourhood interactions and the many ways in which we could rely on one another.

Section II: Festival of Neighbourhood Spark

What is it?

A Spark is a type of a neighbourhood outreach, created by the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region to explore different areas of the region, to establish initial contacts with residents, learn about the life in a neighbourhood and bring the neighbours together through face to face interaction. Festival of Neighbourhood Sparks create an initial ignition so people can share ownerships of geographic spaces in the neighbourhood, get to know each other, and start building lasting connections.

Immersing into a neighbourhood, FON immediately begins by learning from people sitting on their porches, walking their dogs, playing at playgrounds, working in their gardens or just passing us by. FON visits parks, gardens, school yards, pathways, allies, strip malls, or buildings in order to feel the atmosphere and explore natural gathering places. Years of experience have taught us that talking to neighbours face-to-face and inviting them to meet each other makes for a much more enthusiastic response. Even the people who would describe themselves as “liking to keep to themselves” would usually be supportive of good-neighbour spirit and would be curious to meet others.

Why do we use it?

The goal of a Spark is not to form concrete objectives for a community (like gardening clubs or youth groups) but to simply encourage people to get to know each other. We plan simple neighbourhood gatherings, bring toys and games from our neighbourhood activity trunk, support conversations/storytelling and offer a friendly environment that gives neighbours an opportunity to engage with each other.

We use the Spark to:

- Advance our knowledge of different areas in the city
- Connect neighbours so they get to know each other
- Establish an environment where neighbours can start conversations on their own terms and at their own pace
- Challenge neighbours to step outside their comfort zone of familiarity and learn from neighbours with different backgrounds

- Bring ideas and tools to neighbours who want to bring people together but do not know how to start
- Show how easy neighbourhood engagement can be
- Encourage neighbours to actively participate in being more inclusive
- Connect neighbours to resources through promotion of other groups and organizations that are support neighbourhoods
- Excite neighbourhood groups to become a part of the Festival of Neighbourhoods family
- Learn and share ideas and experiences that feed the common knowledge and movement toward healthier and sustainable neighbourhoods

Section III: Executing your own Spark

Exploration & Selection of Neighbourhood

The selection of a neighbourhood can be determined in a number of ways. Staff can look at the FoN map and look for “empty spaces” or areas that have not had registered or unregistered activities (that we are aware of) in the past few years. FoN may check in with areas they have explored in the past or visited through other initiatives. In some cases, Kitchener residents or neighbourhood leaders/champions come to the FoN team seeking assistance with neighbourhood engagement, not knowing where to start.

In the exploration phase, the FoN team put on their friendly t-shirts and go out to an area in an attempt to soak up as much information about the neighbourhood as they can. The team gathers visual data through assessing the condition of the landscape/buildings, the type of people in the area, how many people are out and about, etc. Staff can achieve this through notes and pictures.

Whatever the reason for selecting a specific neighbourhood, there are some basic questions to ask when selecting an area for a Spark:

- Are you interested in specific socio-demographic groups? Specific builds or density?
- What will the boundaries of the neighbourhood be?
    - Natural boundaries
    - Number of households you can reasonably visit
- Who do we now know/think lives there? How does that influence the planning of the door to door and the gathering?
- What are our team objectives? What do we want out of this?
- Is there any activity organized by neighbours already?
- How resourceful is this neighbourhood already?
- How connected is the neighbourhood already?
- Does this neighbourhood have a larger central space to accommodate a gathering?
    - Is the space accessible to everyone (mobility)?
    - Is the space visible and known to the neighbours?
- What challenges are we going to face?
- Would the neighbourhood require short or long term supports to create connections among neighbours?

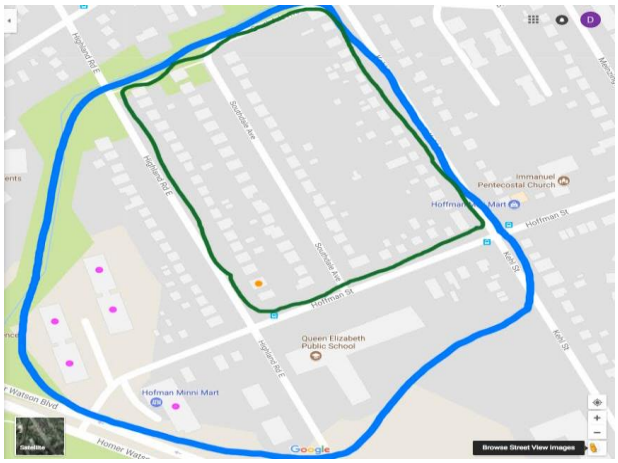
- What is the neighbourhood's objective from what we heard? Did they recognize it as a common interest/concern?

The team also gathers data through personal contact and gains resident's perceptions of their neighbourhood. Conversations should be organic and less structured than a survey or an interview. Exploration is all about receiving the honest perceptions from the residents themselves to grasp the level of neighbourhood connection that already exists. Remember that the Spark is for the neighbours, not the team's agenda. Notes about important information pertaining to the planning of the Spark can be taken after the conversations.

Types of questions that could be asked to residents during the exploration phase could include:

- How long have you been in the neighbourhood?
- How well do your neighbours know one another?
- What do you like about the neighbourhood?
- Are there many neighbourhood events/gatherings?

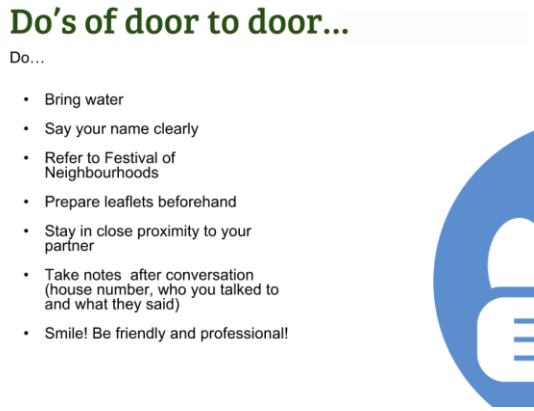
In regards to having multiple neighbourhoods of interest, many heads are better than one! Gather the team and brainstorm pros and cons of having a Spark in one neighbourhood compared to another, all the while keeping the main questions in mind.



It is often helpful to have a visual of the selected neighbourhood with drawn boundaries, types of buildings, descriptors of the neighbourhood like socioeconomic status, and an estimate of the population. Photographs taken during the exploration can be used to orient team members who will join you for the gathering as well.

Team Orientation

Once a neighbourhood has been selected, it is the time of action! Develop an orientation to present to the FoN team, this should include a description of what a Spark is (for those who don't know), a description of the neighbourhood, a summarization of the gathered data based on initial exploration, instructions on how to perform a safe and effective door-to-door procedure, do's and don'ts of door-to-door, a list of what handouts will be provided during door-to-door, and finally an agreed upon itinerary and sign up sheet for those involved. This can be in a powerpoint presentation format to be more accessible to everyone in the team. It is recommended to answer all the big questions like "who, what, where, when, why, and how?" for staff that is new to the process.



The orientation is also a fantastic opportunity for team members to learn from each other and compare different perspectives of neighbourhood connection. The team should integrate their own personal narratives and come to a collective agreement of the purpose of a Spark. This process can foster inspiration and allow the team to bounce ideas around to make these neighbourhood gatherings the best they can be. Based on group discussion throughout the orientation, questions can be collectively asked/answered to shape what the gathering will involve. This is the time to ask the "big" questions before leaping to finer details. The process itself can also be tweaked based on the fact collecting from exploration. How door-to-door will be conducted can be discussed during orientation. Orientation allows the team to determine if there is a need to be mindful of any elements such as language, culture, mobility, sizes of teams, or different building types and be prepared for these challenges before setting out.

Questions to spark group discussion during orientation could be…

- Are we being sensitive/embracing cultural, language, mobility elements?
- Besides invitations, are we/how do we promote this event?
- How long is the event, can everyone come at a given point during the activity?
- How could we get the neighbourhood excited for the event?
- Could we get neighbours talking about it/sharing, even before the event?
- Are we asking/taking on too much?-what would be an inclusive event to everyone in the neighbourhood?
- What kind of activity would get people engaged and interacting?
- Where is this event happening?
- When would the activity take place, what day/time to be totally inclusive?

- Is the event accessible?
- Does the area of the activity accommodate the number of neighbours, while remaining intimate for neighbour interaction?

At this point, it may be helpful to create a package of documents to be prepared before the door-to-door portion of the Spark. This list could include:

- Instructions for partners
- Map of routes
- Full page Flyers to hang in neighbourhood
- Half page Flyers to give out as invitation
- Conversation Cards for the gathering
- FoN Action Cards
- FoN Brochures
- FoN Business cards
- NAT Brochures

Door-To-Door

During door-to-door, FoN team partners revisit the neighbourhood, introduce themselves, FoN and its mission to neighbours. This is a chance to continue deeper conversations with neighbours, and invite everyone to the neighbourhood gathering by giving every household within the designated boundary a flyer.

Basic Instructions of the door-to-door process (to be presented during orientation and to be printed and given to teams/partners during door-to-door) are as follows:

What you have:

-FON t-shirts

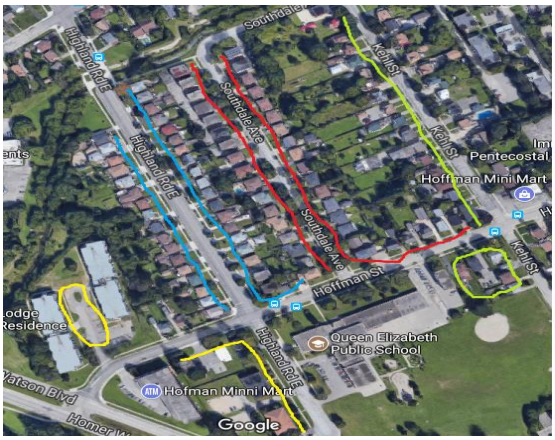
-package of printed full sized flyers

-package of printed half sized flyers

-map with highlighted streets/route you will follow

-paper, pencil, and clipboard

-contact numbers of your partner, FoN Community Animator, FoN Coordinator, and SDC



What you do:

If a neighbour opens their door for conversation:

-please introduce yourself and Festival of Neighbourhoods

-invite the neighbour to our neighbourhood gathering

-give the neighbour a half sized flyer, unless they would prefer a full sized flyer to see better

-ask questions to spark conversation. These types of questions could include:

- *Have you heard of the FON?*
- *How long have you been in the neighbourhood?*
- *What do you like about your neighbourhood?*
- *How well do you know your neighbours?*
- *Are people getting together? Are there activities happening?*
- *How do you get to know your neighbours?*

-invite neighbours to bring their own games if they show interest

-after leaving the house, take brief notes of what you found important

If a neighbour does not open their door for conversation, or no one is home:

-leave a flyer

-or simply record the street and house number on a list of houses for the next team to revisit in the evening

At every park entrance or public posting areas you see fit:

-tape a full sized flyer for all to see

DO!

-stay hydrated

-wear your FON t-shirt

-say your name clearly

-refer to FON

-prepare documents before knocking on the door

-stay close to your partner

-smile! Be friendly and professional!

DON'T!

-talk too fast!

-enter any house

-skip any house(use discretion)

-lose your partner

Questions you may ask neighbours during this process could be:

- Have you heard of the FON?
- How long have you been in the neighbourhood?
- What do you like about your neighbourhood?
- How well do you know your neighbours?
- Are people getting together? Are there activities happening?
- How do you get to know your neighbours?
- What are some benefits to getting to know your neighbours?
- What kinds of activities would you be interested in participating in during the gathering?

Preparation Before the Gathering

After collecting further information from door-to-door conversations and handing out all the invitations, the FoN team should debrief and discuss deeper impressions of the area. This is also the time to collectively brainstorm ideas for what neighbourhood gathering activities will be chosen related to the main objectives and specific necessities the neighbourhood!

Questions regarding gathering preparation to ask as a team could include...

- Do we have one common activity or many inviting activities?
- Do we have food? Is it inclusive to specific needs of everyone?
- Why should people come to the event? What's the actual vs. perceived incentive? OR why might people **not** come to this gathering? Any obstacles/challenges/turnoffs?
- Are we adaptable to change/ can we improvise to changes in the plans due to new info in the door to door?
- Does this event provide a chance for new/isolated neighbours to become a part of subgroups?
- How do children fit into our event, do most people come for their children?, if so...
- How do we engage them regardless of children or those who are childless?
- Does the area of the activity accommodate the number of neighbours?
- How do we show them how easy it is -/make them share how important connections are? Inspire neighbours? How could we make the event “challenging” but also rewarding (beyond prizes)? How can we plan something that initiates neighbours to continue with neighbourhood events, without being too involved and helicoptering?

A list of supplies needed for the gathering makes final preparation easier. Remember to take into consideration the number of staff involved, budget, and transportation/distance. Having everything ready to go the day before makes for a smooth transition from door-to-door into the final phase: the neighbourhood gathering.

Your list could look something like this:

To bring for Gathering:

Water jug with spout	NAT games
Cooler	Freezies
Water for dogs	Coffee/Tea & Supplies
Dog bowls	Brochures, business cards, etc.
Ice Packs	Chairs
Lawn signs	Cups
Conversation Cards, Action Cards, etc.	Clothesline

When have you felt lucky to live in this

Festival of Neighbourhoods
Kitchener

neighbourhood?

Neighbourhood Gathering

Every Spark will be different depending on the location, number of neighbours, demographic, resources, interests, etc. The main take away is to show enthusiasm for neighbours connecting, keep things simple and friendly. Some FON team members should encourage children and adults to play with NAT items or offer refreshments such as freezies or coffee and tea. Other should greet those who drop by and initiate natural conversation. Conversation facilitators should make a point to remember neighbours names and try to introduce neighbours to one another, point out neighbours similarities, and challenge (with guidance) neighbours to extend themselves out of their comfort zone for the purpose of getting to know one another. FoN has provided slightly more structured/organized activities to drive the point of Sparks for example, conversation cards or neighbourhood action cards can get neighbours thinking deeper about neighbourhood engagement. Finally, the most important thing to keep in mind is knowing when to take a **step back and allow neighbours to do it themselves**. Allow conversations between neighbours to evolve and flow naturally without interruption or obvious hand holding. FoN wants to see self supporting neighbourhoods with sustainability and independence, the Spark is just the initial flame to allow that to happen.

Previous Sparks have involved…

- Ladder Golf
- Horse shoes
- Skipping ropes
- Neighbourhood story clothesline
- Board games table
- Conversation cards
- Neighbourhood action cards

Neighbourhood Gathering Self Reflection/Team Debrief

The following day, gather your team to have a debrief session in order to workshop future Spark ideas based off of the pros/cons from the completed neighbourhood gathering. A debrief is a great way to come back to lingering questions/thoughts and reconnect the team to the larger purpose of a Spark after working on many minor details. Questions during a debrief could possibly be:

- What has worked within our Spark this time?
- Has your idea of what a Spark is changed/how?
- What challenges did we face?
- What were you surprised by?
- What did you learn?
- What was your greatest take away?
- If you could do it again, what would you do differently?
- Describe your time during the Spark within your specific task?
- What needs to be improved within our engagement in the past?
- Have we done enough? Could we have done more? Did we do too much?
- Did the Spark match our objectives?
- Did we reach our objectives?
- Did we reach the neighbourhood's objectives?
- Do we see the neighbourhood participating in future connections/activities?

Blog

It was important to share your experience with the FON community and those interested in future neighbourhood connections themselves. Who knows, your experience might inspire a neighbour to do the same! With help from the team, gather notes from your debriefing session and write a short article of your experience from start the end, show optimism while also being honest about expressing any challenges that were faced (this is an FON advertising element, but also a reflection piece). It is key to keep in mind the audience you are writing to. In order to make the blog as accessible as possible try to keep the vocabulary at a grade 5 reading level. The last thing we wish do to is discourage a neighbour from trying to be a better neighbour because they cannot relate to our language/message.

You can find example of past blogs at…

http://www.waterlooregion.org/neighbourhood-blitzes

Future Ideas

If you need a little more help, here are some references made by previous summer students…

Horizontal Blitz Checklist:

- ❏ Find at least one person to help you
- ❏ Decide on your objective
- ❏ Target your location
- ❏ Visit to explore suitable space and type of activity to host, get to meet people
- ❏ Decide on your activity, date and plan for it (flyer, supplies, refreshments, volunteers)
- ❏ Make posters and invitations for your event
- ❏ If new people will be joining the team, have an orientation meeting re objectives, place and the people, door to door knocking!
- ❏ Go door-to-door with a team to invite neighbours to come (leave flyers where no one is home)
- ❏ Prepare for your event (bring treats, drinks, music, and toys - conversation starters and Action Cards! Swag/prizes.)
- ❏ Engage with neighbours! Listen to their stories.
- ❏ Encourage them to stay in touch if they organize other neighbourhood gatherings!

Vertical Blitzes can be done similarly but can be more challenging still there are ways to engage:

1. There are no solicitors allowed, going door-to-door without permission is not permitted. - ...
2. Some high-rises may not have community spaces within the building for meeting places. - ...
3. Management may not want something that “brings together” tenants, especially because there is more power in numbers. - ...

4. Condominiums and Apartments may not respond to your emails and they are your key to getting in contact with others. We partnered up with the Kitchener BIA (Business Improvement Area) to get in contact with some apartments and start a dialogue. - ...

Vertical Blitz Checklist:

- ❏ Find one or two people to work with
- ❏ Plan a floor or building event
- ❏ Choose buildings where you know someone can be a “representative”. A “representative” can be someone who you know that is interested in the initiative or the building manager.
- ❏ “Networking” can mean joining and starting dialogue with community groups to exchange information/spread word. We did this with Trinity Church (who we are attached to) and came to realize that several members of the congregation knew people who lived in apartment buildings who were thoroughly engaged with community.
- ❏ Promote your event with posters and swag anywhere you can; on the building billboard, at the bank, the library, etc.
- ❏ Contact tenants associations, property managers, real estate agents, etc. to see if someone has something similar within their building or if they have interest for that type of thing.
- ❏ Assist your group of neighbours with planning and executing the event.
- ❏ Be sure to have treats, drinks and other things that will encourage engagement with depending on your demographic
- ❏ Encourage the group to continue working with you and engaging with one another.

Instant Spark

An Instant Spark maintains all of the fun steps of an original Spark by exploring a neighbourhood, getting to know the neighbours, and going door to door to extend invitations a neighbourhood gathering. An Instant Spark only emphasizes its spontaneous nature by condensing the process into a few hours instead of a few days! In the spur of the moment, team members demonstrate the simplicity of making connections and that neighbourliness can happen at anytime anywhere!The focus of past Instant Sparks has been the conversations made in the moment with neighbours.

Partial Sparks

Partial Sparks have been created in the past by Neighbourhood Champions. Neighbours have show interest in making further connections and use resources from FON to sprinkle some sparks into the neighbourhood without having to perform a Spark to its entirety. Signs encouraging neighbours to think about connections in their lives have been the perfect tool for some neighbourhoods without being to invasive on FON's part.

Gathering activities inspired by Partial Sparks can also demonstrate the simplicity of neighbourhood engagement. These activities can be centred around "making your mark" on the neighbourhood. Origami crafts such as paper hearts and fish can be taken home and sprinkled like tokens to be placed in and around the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood Action Cards can be placed in doorways and windows around the neighbourhood to spark conversation and connections.

Previous years have experienced huge breakthroughs in emerging middle class neighbourhoods that are seeking connections by playing scavenger hunts and games involving neighbours asking for simple/silly items from one another.

There is no one way to perform a Spark. Sparks are an ever evolving creation process! Depending on the neighbourhood, the summer FON team could find endless ideas to get neighbours meeting. Keep discovering new ways to connect neighbours and spark neighbourhood engagement!