

Block Party Checklist

In Philadelphia, where Hinge Collective is based, block parties are a part of the culture of the city. Not all block parties are the same but they all have the same essential ingredients, food, music, family, and friends. Almost every neighborhood in every city has its own tradition of block parties and they are often social highlights of the summer season. Block parties are always a celebration of community, which is why they can be an excellent venue for community engagement.





Key Reasons to Host a Block Party

- 1 CONNECT** with people where they are - make it easy to meet people and for people to meet you. Come together around a common cause.
- 2 BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL*** - neighbors that know each other are more likely to look out for one another. Having shared experiences builds and strengthens relationships between stakeholders, community members, and the consultant team.
- 3 SHARE** resources and information - provide multiple ways for people to contribute ideas, ask questions that promote conversation.
- 4 AMPLIFY COMMUNITY EXPERTISE** - block parties are a great way to galvanize local expertise that can effectively guide community-based projects.

DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN?

A block party or outdoor event is a great way to connect with people in the immediate community. In this guide, we will share a few key things you should be considering, resources to help you with planning, and a checklist to ensure you can get it done on time.

**Social Capital - noun, the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.*

Fundamentals:

Don't do it alone

An outdoor event's attendance, participation, and value will grow exponentially with each partner you incorporate into the planning and execution. These can be community organizations, local businesses, neighbors, youth, or stakeholders relevant to your project. Communicate expectations (event management, publicity, participation) and co-create the event with them, from determining the best date to identifying resources and sending invitations.

Make sure all feel welcome.

Feeling welcome means something different to every community. But you can start with the following things:

- Include familiar faces from the community as part of the event organizers and hosts.
- Have ample seating in the shade.
- Always have something for kids to do! Where there are kids, adults will follow.
- Be sure people with disabilities can participate in the activities.
- Make it fun! Consider a raffle as an incentive to have people visit all the tables (including those of your partners)
- Be the guest. Genuine engagement occurs in spaces where the community is the host and the consultant team are welcome guests. At a block party this is a natural dynamic.

Spread the word LOUDLY with OPEN ARMS

Knowing about an event and being invited to an event are very different. Take the time to invite as many people face-to-face as possible - knock on doors, call neighbors, hang flyers, and ask your community partners to do the same. People are more likely to come if invited by someone they know.

Food! Food! Food! Music! Music! Music!

Don't skimp on the food or music, and make sure both are free. Consider local businesses for catering; pre-paid food trucks or cart vendors are also a good option. Be sure to consider culturally appropriate food choices (it doesn't always have to be pizza), and if food is made during the event, pay community members to prepare and serve.

Stay local

For every item that needs to be purchased or rented, first, see if you can do it locally. Invite local vendors, businesses, and artists. Serve local food. Invite neighbors that would like to showcase talents such as music groups, drum lines, magicians, singers, or dancers.

Give everyone something to take home.

A successful event where people feel that they have participated and provided expertise deserves a souvenir. Gifts are not just a token of appreciation but a record of their involvement and commitment to the neighborhood. Popular giveaways and raffle items are t-shirts, board games, gift certificates to local businesses, and candy or toys.

Block Party Checklist

TWO MONTHS BEFORE:

- Connect with community partners to co-create the event.** An event can be an opportunity to connect and share resources beyond the original objective. Identify mutually beneficial collaborations to share resources and promote participation.
- Pick a date, time & location.** Mid-afternoon to evening works best. Check with crucial attendees to ensure the date doesn't overlap with other events. Include a rain date or location.
- Set a budget** This is a necessary first step in determining food, music, and entertainment possibilities.
- Determine equipment needs** Review the 'Equipment Checklist' to see if items need to be rented or borrowed.
- Check-in with adjacent residents and businesses** It is critically important that adjacent neighbors are aware of, and support the event. Be transparent about the nature of the event, the purpose, and the hosting organizations. If there are any concerns or opposition from nearby neighbors consider using an alternate location.

ONE MONTH BEFORE:

- Create a sketch of the event layout** Map out where each component of the party will be located and share with your partners.
- Apply for an event permit (if needed)** Check local regulations to determine if there are specific permits, licensing, or insurance requirements for the event.
- Send out invitations** Be sure the invitation includes: the date, time, location, reason for the event, and a contact for more details or specific accommodation requests.
- Plan the menu** Food is essential and can set the tone for the event. You should determine your menu, including drinks, and whether that involves hiring a caterer, finding the resident grill master, or asking people to bring a dish to share.
- Reserve vendors** The 'Equipment Checklist' has potential vendors to consider for the event. Hire locally whenever possible. Decide on music and/or entertainment and reserve professionals.
- Check the condition of the event site.** Visit the event location to assess any potential needs that may require advance attention. For example, you may consider including a site clean-up, but whether that is the day of or in advance will depend on existing conditions. If the event is on grass, you should consider checking the mowing schedule to ensure the site is useable for the event.
- Recruit Volunteers** Additional hands are always good to have on hand (especially if any needs arise during the site visit). Review the tasks to see where you may need assistance with set-up, event hosting, and clean-up. Community partners can help recruit volunteers. As a note, we say "volunteers," but we always recommend compensation.
- Order t-shirts for volunteers** Having shirts for people assisting with the event will help participants know who to ask for help.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE:

- Distribute flyers** In addition to having flyers at the event's location and the surrounding community, you should consider other public spaces in the community, such as libraries, recreation centers, schools, grocery stores, and laundromats.
- Promote on social & analog platforms** Work with your community partners to share information with relevant social networks and on nextdoor.com. Some communities may also have phone/text chains to spread word-of-mouth awareness with older residents effectively.
- Purchase party favors** Purchase any giveaways or supplies to make your own.

ONE WEEK BEFORE:

- Touch base with hired vendors + volunteers**
Confirm equipment availability, vendor delivery times, and coordinate any volunteer schedules. Be sure all deposits are paid, if applicable.
- Check the weather**
If your event will be outdoors, check the latest weather forecast and plan for a contingency if needed.
- Review the equipment checklist**
Double-check the 'Equipment Checklist' to make sure you have everything.

- Prepare an event timeline**
Prepare a timeline for both before and during the event (when volunteers, professionals, and deliveries should arrive, when items need to be picked up, when things need to cook, etc). Designate someone to complete each task.
- Make a playlist**
If providing your own music, create a playlist. If hiring a DJ, prepare a preferred song list as well as a "do not play" list.

ONE DAY BEFORE:

- Post road closure signs**
If using a public right of way (like a street), post signs reminding everyone that the road will be closed and move cars if necessary. Avoid closing any areas where neighbors need to move during the party.

- Post event information**
Refresh the flyers, if needed, and be sure to remind immediate neighbors. Flyers, postcards, and door hangers are all effective ways to spread the word.

DAY-OF TASKS**2 HOURS BEFORE:**

- Close the street and mark edges of the event**
If you are closing down a street or utilizing a public area, it can be helpful to identify the parameters of the event.
- Clean the site**
Make sure the area is clean and free of any hazards. This may include an organized clean-up or simply checking for and addressing potential hazards.
- Receive deliveries**
Someone should be available to assist with meeting vendors or participants. Be sure to have an updated site layout sketch to lead participants to the correct location and any remaining payments.

- Set up and decorate!**
The set-up will depend on your event. Tents, tables, chairs, power, audio equipment, and food stations should go into place. Decorations can include everything from balloons to signs to community-developed artwork. All elements are crucial to communicating that the event is open to the public and welcomes participation.

1 HOUR BEFORE:

- Prep food**
Ice the beverages and prepare food stations. Be sure the food is in a shady place.
- Place trash cans**
Have trash and recycling bins available throughout the party

EVENT TASKS:

- Hosts**
Welcome people to the event, share its reason, and point people to the food! (jk, to the engagement tables, obviously). Hosts can also distribute nametags, gather contacts with a sign-in sheet, and encourage conversations to set the tone for the event.
- Event MC**
A master of ceremonies should make sure that the event is running on time, and that everyone that would like to speak has an opportunity to hold the microphone. This may include project partners, and elected officials, An MC can also manage a raffle or other timed giveaways.
- Tabling**
Individuals that are knowledgeable about the purpose of the block party should position themselves at all engagement table opportunities. The quantity of these tables and the nature of each will be determined by your unique project.
- Games and activities**
Have someone on hand to ensure that games are explained to all participants and are going smoothly.
- Set up game and activity stations**
Pull out gear for games, activities, and prizes (if applicable).
- Site liaison**
Someone with expertise in the site location or resident of the block should be responsible for any needs that may come up during the event. Needs may include access to power, bathrooms, locked gates, or emergencies. They can also ensure that all trash is picked up at the end of the event
- Food and beverages**
If you are preparing food at the event, be sure to have a designated "grill master" and support for stocking and managing food.
- Photographer**
Designate or hire someone to take photos during the event. Consider setting up a tripod and timer to take a group photo if desired.
- Event break-down**
All event equipment will need to be taken down and returned if borrowed. Be sure the site is clean and all remaining trash will be picked up.

After the event:

Thank everyone! Be sure to share photos with all project partners and participants. If you collected contacts, thank them as well.

Equipment Checklist

You will need to determine what equipment you will need and if it can be borrowed or rented. Depending on the time of year, some rentals can be hard to find, so plan accordingly. This list does not include any specific engagement-related equipment.

Block party essentials

- Trash cans
- Barricade to close street (cones, banner, etc,
- Access to power (extension cords as needed)
- Access to water (if applicable)
- Decorations
- First aid kit

Basic tabling set up

- Shade tents
- Tables
- Chairs
- Nametags & markers
- Sign-in sheet
- Other project specific engagement tools

Food set up

- Coolers & ice
- Grills (or vendor setup)
- Food and beverages (have plenty of water and keep perishables in the cooler)
- Plates, utensils, napkins
- To-go containers to distribute food to neighbors
- Hand sanitizer

Kids activities

- Sidewalk chalk
- Hula hoops
- Bubbles
- Bean bag toss
- Sprinkler & hose

Audio setup

- Speakers
- Microphone

Raffle items & giveaways

- Toys and games
- Candy
- Local gift cards
- Resources from partners

Potential vendors/rentals

- DJ or musicians
- Bounce house
- Face painting
- Portable bathroom
- Popcorn machine
- Snow cone machine/water ice/ice



FAQs:

Do I need permission to hold a block party?

Yes, most likely. Even if your city doesn't require it, make sure the neighbors are aware. Depending on the location of your party, you will likely need permission from the owner or a permit. Check with local regulatory agencies to determine how to apply for a special event or block closure permit.

How do I make sure I have enough food?

People come together for food, and in our opinion, there is no such thing as too much food. Estimate how many people you think will attend your event, and then add 20%. Be sure to have a plan for packing up leftovers to go so you can deliver them to neighbors that were not able to attend, or participants can bring some back home with them to share with family members.

Who should I invite in addition to neighbors?

Consider inviting a City council member, school principal, or city staff member to your block party. Consider asking police, fire, etc. Are there other neighborhood resources? Who would benefit from attending? Who would provide value to your neighbors?

What do we do about bathrooms?

Check-in with nearby businesses or residents to see if they

would be willing to share their bathroom during the event. If this is not possible, you will need to rent a portable toilet and handwashing station. These are typically inexpensive and can be delivered and picked up the same day as the event.

How do I make sure non or limited English speakers feel comfortable at the party?

It is essential to make everyone feel at ease and communicate your intentions. Use a translated description of what a block party is. If possible, knock on the door with someone who speaks their language. Remember, words like "barbecue," "face painting," and "potluck" may need to be explained. It may take more than one invitation to fully understand what a block party is, so make a point of following up in the weeks leading up to the party. Make activities accessible to those with limited English language skills. Ask about special cultural/religious diet or activity constraints.

What about respecting our neighbors who do not want to be involved?

Be sure they know they are invited. Plan the location of music or activities not to disturb neighbors. Offer to bring them food from the event. Leave space for them to move through the party (or move their car) safely. Thank them for accommodating and ask them to attend the next event.



Notes from the field....

Successful block parties work best when there are multiple ways to have fun and get involved, and local folks have a voice in the planning. Each of the projects below had a variety of activities, organizers and interests that gave the parties energy and currency in the community.

1



UNITY PARK

Hinge developed a neighborhood park with the community of West Baltimore and the help of a recruited and paid cohort of local residents. The Community Design Ambassadors participated in every step of the design process, including a series of highly attended “Park Jam” events, where friends and neighbors had an opportunity to share their ideas in a low-pressure, informal setting.

Highlights included:

- Interactive preference boards and maps, collage-making
- The Memory Wall - invited neighbors to share stories
- BBQ!, face painting, water play + local DJ
- Anyone with a side-hustle was invited to sell their wares

Organizing Tip: Provide more than one way for people to learn about and provide feedback on a project. Make the process fun. Incentivize stopping at all feedback stations with prizes, raffles or other goodies.

2



TUSCULUM SQUARE

To catalyze the strategic improvement of a vacant lot, Hinge and partners joined planned local events with a prototype of a community message board asking residents to share their memories of and wishes for their neighborhood. This led to the “Wish Gallery” installation, where messages were paired with portraits and arranged in an outdoor gallery.

Highlights included:

- an on-site photography and printing “lab” made the Wish Gallery immediately tangible, allowing participants to not only share ideas, but share in the installation process
- information tables featuring local organizations and services

Organizing Tip: Piggy-backing off of other local events can be an efficient way access to your audience, and build partnerships with other local organizations and neighbors.

3



NATIONAL STREET SERVICE

NSS was a pilot program to reframe the national conversation about streets and their potential as radically multi-modal places for people. Hinge lead 30 Philadelphia “ambassadors” in experiments with changing public perception of streets through tactical urbanism and unconventional community engagement techniques, culminating in 3 block parties across the city.

Highlights included:

- BBQ + Raffleing off the grills
- Philly Resource Fair - invited organizations to host info tables
- live music
- street games for kids

Organizing Tip: If you need local volunteers to invest in a project and/or events, respect their time by paying them.



Hinge Collective is a public interest design firm. We believe that the design of public spaces should be bottom-up and shaped by the community. We work with organizations that share a common interest in creating inclusive and equitable urban environments and prioritize robust engagement for our professional planning and design services. We are committed to meaningfully incorporating community leaders, advocates, local organizations, and residents into every aspect of the design process. We develop and implement various strategies and services specific to each project, to educate and empower communities to become a part of shaping their public space.

We offer the following services:

- Engagement strategy consulting
- Engagement facilitation
- Community-engaged landscape design
- Community-engaged planning

Need help creating a robust public engagement strategy for your next project? Contact us @ www.hinge-collective.com