



## GROVE HALL NEIGHBOR CIRCLE OVERVIEW

### WHAT IS A NEIGHBOR CIRCLE?

A Neighbor Circle is ‘a good conversation over dinner with neighbors.’ That’s pretty much it. Don’t we already know how to do that? Well, apparently not. If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that most of us don’t know our neighbors and they don’t know us. We are too busy, too shy, or too intimidated to make connections and build relationships with people on our street, our block, or in our building. The fact is, in this day and age, getting to know your neighbors can be hard and a bit scary. Why? We think there are a couple of reasons:

1. The people who live on our street (like us) ended up there by accident. On most blocks in our cities, people who live on a given street come from all walks of life and in many cases from all corners of the globe. We have all had a different journey to this one street. We are different from each other; our differences include: language, culture, habits, food, life patterns, religion, and the color of our skin. Once we arrive on our street, we go off to different jobs, churches, clubs, organizations, and our kids go to different schools. On the surface we share very little in common other than our proximity to each other’s homes.
2. We have forgotten how to communicate with each other in the public square. With cars, TV’s and now the internet and computer games, we simply don’t get a lot of practice in public discourse.

In our view, the costs of this neighbor to neighbor disconnection are enormous. Behind poor communication lurks distrust, bigotry and countless lost opportunities to improve our lives and our communities. Some believe that the days of neighbors knowing each other and looking after each other’s children are over. We think that we all just need more practice to get started.

A Neighbor Circle is one way of starting up the long-interrupted, neighbor-to-neighbor conversation once again. With Neighbor Circles we are rebuilding the public square block by block by talking to one another over a shared meal; we’re starting with something that is easy, enjoyable, and that we all know how to do - eat and talk!

### HOW IT WORKS

Led by a Host from Grove Hall and a Facilitator, a group of six-eight neighbors, folks who live on the same street(s) or in the same building(s), commit to getting together for two-three dinners, each within seven-ten days of each other, over the course of six weeks.

The Host welcomes everyone into their home and provides something to eat and drink. The Facilitator helps guide the group conversation. Everyone else eats and talks - it sounds fun, filling, and easy right?

### THE HOST

Neighbor Circle Hosts are in many ways the boldest risk-takers in the community. They invite their neighbors, people that they really do not know into their homes! They do this because they believe that someone has to take the lead in opening the door to new relationships.

The Host agrees to hold the Circles at their house. The Host identifies, with the help of the Facilitator and the community organizer, a list of six-eight families that live on the same block or in the same building and that are not already connected; the idea is to make new connections and hopefully new friends through participation in the Neighbor Circle. The Host, the Facilitator and the Community Organizer then select a timeframe for the Circles to meet; the timeframe should be convenient and provide enough time to prepare well for the dinners.

The Host is responsible for providing a meal for each of the Circle dinners. These meals can be prepared at home or be purchased. In either case, the Host is reimbursed for the cost of the meals up to \$60 for the food and beverage provided at the each Circles; a total of \$120 for two Circles and \$180 for three Circles.

The Host will:

1. Help to develop a guest list, outreach to neighbors on the guest list, open their homes, and take on the tasks of preparing for and cleaning up after the meal.
2. Spend time making sure their home is clean, welcoming, and easy to find when the Circles get together.
3. Participate in debrief sessions after each dinner, contribute to the evaluation and attend the final debrief/celebration Neighbor Circle gathering.

## THE FACILITATOR

The Circle Facilitator is the person who guides the essential activity of the Neighbor Circle - the conversation. It is not an easy job. It's always hard to step into a room with people you might not know and lead a conversation.

Facilitators are resident volunteers who: (a) are committed to the Neighbor Circle concept, (b) have participated in a Neighbor Circle themselves, and (c) are interested in and committed to developing their leadership and facilitation skills.

The Facilitator will:

1. Work with the Host to develop a work list.
2. Help the Host make decisions about best use of space for the dinners.
3. Facilitate the conversation at each of the Circle dinners.
4. Participate in debrief sessions after each dinner, completing the evaluation and attend the Neighbor Circle gathering.

## TIME COMMITMENT

The time commitment of Circle Hosts and Facilitators includes:

1. Training: In order to be a Neighbor Circle Host or Facilitator, interested residents must complete a one day Lawrence Community Works Circle Training.
2. Two-Three Dinners: The Neighbor Circle Host and Facilitator must commit to having two-three dinners within seven-ten days of each other.
3. Evaluation and reflection: The Host and the Facilitator commit to debrief and reflect after each dinner and once the Circle "action" is complete (if the Circle chooses to organize a local action).

Neighbors participating in the dinner commit to attend a minimum of two dinners. If their Circle decides to engage in a community action project, they must commit to attend a third dinner as well.

### HOW CAN I START A NEIGHBOR CIRCLE?

For more information and an orientation on how to start a Neighbor Circles please contact:

Talia Rivera, Director for Connectivity & Learning

Boston Rising

711 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 102

Boston, MA 02110

Office: 617-236-0094

E-mail: [trivera@BostonRising.org](mailto:trivera@BostonRising.org)