

# **The Citizens Handbook**

## **A Guide to Community Building**

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*...from Introduction / Part 0-1*

#### **Why we need more active citizens**

The Citizens Handbook is meant to encourage the emergence of more active citizens - people motivated by an interest in public issues, and a desire to make a difference beyond their own private lives. Active citizens are a great untapped resource, and citizenship is a quality to be nurtured.

#### **A bridge to strong democracy**

When citizens get together at the neighbourhood level, they generate a number of remarkable side effects. One of these is strengthened democracy. In simple terms, democracy means that the people decide. Political scientists describe our system of voting every few years but otherwise leaving everything up to government as weak democracy. In weak democracy, citizens have no role, no real part in decision-making between elections. Experts assume responsibility for deciding how to deal with important public issues.

The great movement of the last decades of the twentieth century has been a drive toward stronger democracy in corporations, institutions and governments. In many cities this has resulted in the formal recognition of neighbourhood groups as a link between people and municipal government, and a venue for citizen participation in decision-making between elections.

#### **A way of rekindling community**

Active citizens can help to create a sense of community connected to place. We all live somewhere. As such we share a unique collection of problems and prospects in common with our neighbours. Participation in neighbourhood affairs builds on a recognition of here-we-are-together, and a yearning to recapture something of the tight-knit communities of the past. Neighbourhood groups can act as vehicles for making connections between people, forums for resolving local differences, and a means of looking after one another. Most important, they can create a positive social environment that can become one of the best features of a place.

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**Vancouver Citizens Committee**

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*'As far as we know, this is the best quick guide to community organizing on the web. We've separated out local information so it will be useful to people living in other places.'*

**Vancouver Citizens Committee**

*seeks to promote community building, citizen participation and local democracy.*

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<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/>