



Issaquah Highlands Block PARTY TOOLKIT

A HOW-TO GUIDE TO
PLAN A PARTY WITH
YOUR NEIGHBORS &
BUILD CONNECTIONS!

THROW A PARTY, LIVE LONGER

What if I told you there is fun way to reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, dementia and premature mortality that doesn't involve physical exercise? And that by doing so, you are also helping those around you to be healthier and live longer?

The answer is social connection. This toolkit will provide you with the resources you need to build these vital social connections in your neighborhood through a block party. Whether it's a summer barbecue, a progressive dinner for adults, an egg hunt for kids, or a potluck picnic, a neighborhood gathering is a great way to connect with those around you in a meaningful way while having a great time.

At Highlands Council, we work toward building a strong Issaquah Highlands community, but we can't do it alone. We want you to feel empowered to build or rebuild the connections within your own pocket neighborhood. Trust between neighbors is at an all-time low nationwide and technology is constantly pulling us further inward. Combined with the phenomenon of the "Seattle Freeze," we are experiencing a shortage of people knowing how to be "neighborly."

It sounds simple, but we understand connecting with others can be daunting. This toolkit is full of ideas for you to get started and we know if you take that step, your neighbors will thank you. In a world where, according to U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, "Lacking in social connections can harm a person's health as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day," can we really afford not to try?

"At its core, being neighborly means taking time to connect with the people who live nearby."

- David Burton, University of Missouri Community Development Specialist

I encourage you to find a neighbor to help, pick a party, and go for it!

Lindsey Pinkston
Highlands Council Executive Director

Neighbors Jessica Burles, Jodi Pickering, Karen Sperry, Gloriana Moraine and Teresa Cowan gather for a 24th Avenue block party.



HOW TO HOST A BLOCK PARTY

Hosting a block party is a great way to build social connections with your neighbors and create memories for years to come!

Whether it's your first time planning or you're a seasoned organizer, this toolkit will guide you through every step, from gathering interest to cleaning up after the event. With careful planning and a bit of teamwork, you can turn your neighborhood into the ultimate celebration hub.

Follow these steps to make sure your event is successful:



STEP 1: GAUGE INTEREST

1. Survey your neighbors to determine if they would be interested in a block party and ask what activities they want to see. Use social media groups, Survey Monkey or Google Forms to gather feedback.

Here are some questions you could ask:

- Would you attend a block party?
- What days/times are you most available?
- What activities would you like to see?
- Do you want to help with planning our block party?

2. Form a team or committee to help with planning, organization and execution. Hosting a block party can feel overwhelming if one person takes on the entire event. Involve teens and older kids, too!

Neighbors in West Highlands Park gather for coffee and pastries from Caffe Ladro for a Light Up the Lanes finalist celebration in 2022.

STEP 2: PLAN THE EVENT DETAILS

1. Set a date and time when most neighbors are likely to be available, such as a weekend or weeknight. Utilize the details you learned from surveying your neighbors when determining dates and timing.

While summer might seem like the most appropriate season, you can also get to know your neighbors in a variety of other ways, no matter the time of year.

View our list of party types on page 7.



2. Pick a location that is suitable for larger gatherings.

Parks – Most parks in Issaquah Highlands are available on a first-come, first-served basis as the IHCA does not have staff to manage use on weekends. Neighbors are encouraged to share space in the spirit of community. You can reserve the picnic shelters at Central Park through Issaquah Parks and Community Services. Parks in Issaquah Highlands close at dusk.

Streets – A special event permit from the City of Issaquah is required for street closures. There is a permit fee, plus the cost of required barricades to close the street if the permit is approved. The city and the Issaquah Highlands Community Association (IHCA) must be named on a certificate of insurance by the host.

Front yard, driveway, or garage – For smaller gatherings, a party at someone's home can work well. Consider factors like capacity and seating, ensuring there's enough space for everyone to relax comfortably. Pay attention to noise management to maintain good relations with neighbors, and plan for adequate lighting and general safety. Consider how you will use space for entertainment or activities while maintaining a welcoming environment for all.

Backup plan – Be sure to have alternative plan in case of rain or severe weather, like moving to a garage or gazebo.



5. Plan food and drinks for a large gathering.

Here are some ideas:

Potluck – Encourage neighbors to bring dishes that represent their favorite recipes or cultural backgrounds. Create a signup sheet to ensure a variety of appetizers, main dishes and desserts. Consider dividing the neighborhood into sections and designating who brings serving supplies, salads, sides and desserts (by street, by odd/even house number or by alphabetized last name).

BBQ – Set up communal grills with volunteers to cook burgers, hot dogs or veggie options. Assign neighbors to bring condiments, buns and sides like chips or salad.

Food truck – Bring in a food truck that offers diverse and crowd-pleasing options like tacos, burgers, ice cream or coffee. Ensure there's something for all dietary needs, including vegetarian and gluten-free choices. Most food trucks will want a guaranteed minimum purchase amount to show up, or a contracted catering menu that is paid in advance. SeattleFoodTruck.com is a great resource for locating a fun truck for your party.

Catering – Several businesses in Grand Ridge Plaza offer catering options at reasonable prices. Try Jimmy Johns for an arrangement of sandwiches or order in advance from BB's Teriyaki. Safeway also sells a variety of platters perfect for large gatherings.

Dessert – Keep it simple by hosting an ice cream social or dessert-only party.

Serving supplies – Provide ample disposable plates, cups, utensils and napkins. Encourage guests to bring their own reusable supplies to minimize waste.

Beverages – Provide plenty of bottled water to keep everyone hydrated, along with crowd favorites like soda, lemonade, iced tea and sparkling water. If the weather is cooler, set up a station with coffee, hot chocolate and tea.

***Top photo:** The Issaquah Ice Cream Trike serves neighbors at a Village Green gathering. **Middle photo:** A fun seating arrangement at a 24th Avenue block party. **Bottom photo:** A spring potluck party at Wisteria Park.*





Children compete in a sack race during our Global Grub & Groove celebration of Eid al-Adha in 2024.

3. Organize activities for all ages! Games provide an easy way for neighbors to meet and connect, especially for those who might not know each other well. Group activities and team-based games help build camaraderie and a sense of community. A variety of activities ensures there's something for everyone, from kids to seniors.

Keep kids engaging with some of the following options:

- Bubbles, sidewalk chalk, jump ropes, hula hoops and a craft table are all simple ways to entertain children.
- Teens can host a face painting activity.
- Ask everyone to bring a white t-shirt and tie-dye together.
- Kids love to be involved in planning. Allow kids to create a talent show, puppet show, magic show, pet parade or bike decorating contest to add fun to the afternoon.
- Everyone loves old-fashioned games, too! Three-legged races, sack races, limbo contests and piñatas are easy to organize.
- Water balloons are a great way to cool off in the warmer months. Be sure to clean up and discard broken balloons afterward.
- Add a DIY art table to keep children occupied with simple crafts like bracelet making, painting or other easy projects.



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4. (Optional) Choose a theme to help guide decorations and activities like a luau, carnival, retro, etc. Themes create excitement and a sense of novelty, encouraging more participation and making the event memorable for everyone involved.

PICK A PARTY!

*Looking for a different type of party?
Check out these ideas from Issaquah
Highlands neighbors!*



1. PORCH PARTY

Half of the neighborhood (odds or even addresses) stays on their porches while the other half walks around, stopping to chat and connect with them. Those on their porches can serve refreshments if they like. Next time, switch the odds and evens.

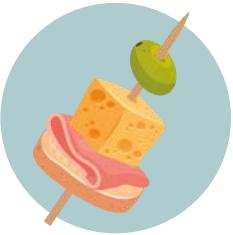
2. PROGRESSIVE DINNER

A group of neighbors each offer their home for one course of a meal – appetizers, main course, dessert. Neighbors migrate from home to home until they've completed a full meal! We find this works best for adults only and recommend designating one house for the kids with a couple of teens to babysit.



3. FIELD DAY

Team up with neighbors or compete as families in a series of basic yard games (sack race, water balloon toss, etc.), or try an Olympics theme! This type of social can be modified for board games or bunco during the winter months.



4. ICE CREAM SOCIAL

One family provides the ice cream, everyone else brings a topping or ice cream side (cones, sprinkles, hot fudge, etc.). Or make it easier by hiring Issaquah Ice Cream Trike or Ben & Jerry's.



5. ROCK THE BLOCK

Nothing builds up the energy of a gathering like music! Invite a neighbor to DJ, book live music (maybe a neighbor plays in a band or has a musical talent), or host a karaoke showdown.



6. GRILL MASTER CONTEST

Spice up your gathering with a friendly competition. Families can battle for the best chili, top grilled dish and more—get creative!



7. COOKIE EXCHANGE

Bring your favorite holiday cookies to share and leave with a variety! Everyone gets to fill a container of a variety of cookies just in time for holiday indulgences. Add another layer to this event by voting on the cookie that is best tasting, best looking, most unique, etc.



8. EGG HUNT

Schedule a time before the egg hunt for adults to hide eggs. Each adult hides 12 eggs (per child) filled with a treat or toy. Kids will then get to search for eggs, with the youngest kids getting a head start.

Everyone can bring a snack or drink to share while the kids open their eggs.



9. POTLUCK

Everyone brings a drink or food item to share with the neighborhood. A sign-up form works great for this so that you don't end up with 10 desserts or dips. Take it to the next level with a fun theme!

STEP 3: COORDINATE LOGISTICS

1. Find ways to offset expenses! While the Party Wagon comes with free resources, other components of your party may require funding. Some neighborhoods ask for a per-person or per-family contribution to cover the cost of certain supplies, collected in advance or on the day of the party. Involve your neighbors in the planning and save money. Who will donate the use of their grill, extra coolers, tables and chairs? Who has a volleyball net or other outdoor group games?

2. Invite special guests like Eastside Fire & Rescue or Issaquah Police Department. Depending on availability, police officers and firefighters will make appearances upon request. Issaquah City Council and other governing officials might appreciate meeting with constituents. Issaquah Highlands community leadership could be available to answer neighborhood or community-related questions.

3. Seating and shade are important factors to consider for any outdoor gathering. One option is asking neighbors to bring their own camping chairs or blankets for sitting on the ground. Another option is reserving the Party Wagon, which includes tables, chairs, canopy tents, games and more. Find more details on this free community resource on page 14.

4. Consider lighting and electricity when planning your block party. If your party is later in the evening, think about the timing of sunset and any lighting requirements after dark. Will you be using someone's speaker for music? Does it require a charging cord or power source? These are some factors to consider ahead of your event.

5. Plan for trash and recycling by providing bins to collect cans, bottles, food scraps, disposable plates and utensils, and all other garbage. Do not leave your trash outside or in the park following your event as it could attract wildlife.



Top photo:
Issaquah Police
Department officers visit Ben & Jerry's
to meet with residents every summer.

Bottom photo:
Neighbors gather at a block party
in Dahlia Park.



→

**Above
and below:**

A cover band performs for the community during a Global Grub & Groove celebration in 2022.

6. Music matters! Music sets the tone for your block party and can elevate the entire experience.

- Create a family-friendly playlist with upbeat classics and current hits. Streaming services like Spotify or Apple Music have ready-made playlists to suit different themes and tastes. Keep the volume at a level that allows for conversation and check local noise ordinances to avoid issues.
- If your budget allows, consider hiring a local band or DJ to add live energy to the event. Is there a garage band in your neighborhood or musicians next door who might play a set or two?
- Consider a neighborhood jam-session, sing-along, or karaoke contest.

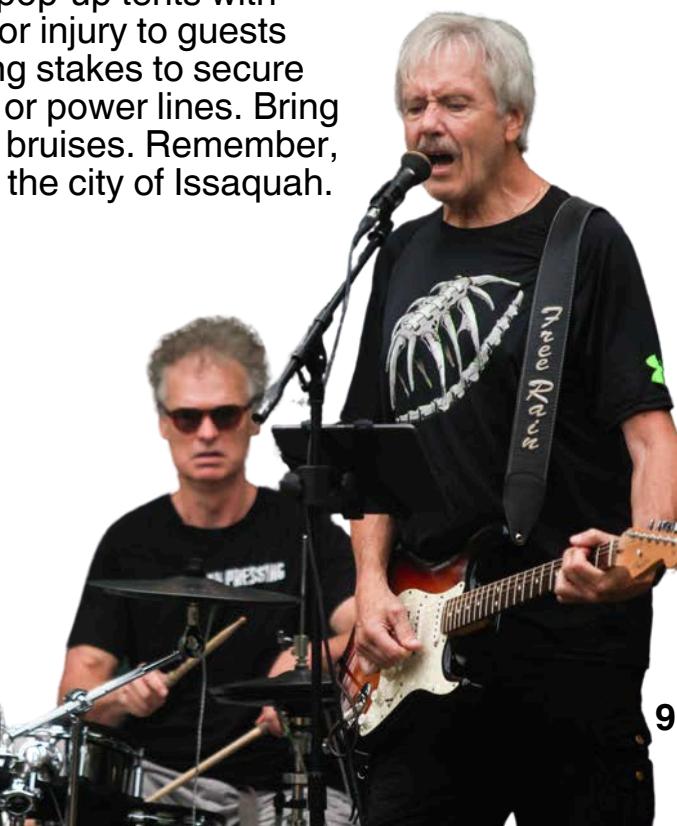
7. Be aware of quiet hours! Issaquah Highlands follows Issaquah Municipal Code that states quiet hours are 11 p.m.-7 a.m. The IHCA Use Rules and Restrictions state activities that disturb the peace are prohibited. If the police are called to your event, they can shut your party down.

8. Ensure access to restrooms in nearby homes or public parks such as Central Park or Grand View Park. Not all community parks in Issaquah Highlands have access to bathrooms. For larger neighborhoods, allocate a few homes for guest bathroom use.

8. Think about safety precautions for all party attendees, especially children. When selecting a location, pick an area that does not have heavy vehicle traffic adjacent to where guests will gather. Make sure to properly supervise children if a pond or water feature is nearby to avoid accidental drowning. Arrange games and activities away from grills, generators and extension cords. Secure pop-up tents with weights or stakes to avoid damage to property or injury to guests from wind gusts. Pro tip: Be cautious when using stakes to secure tents or volleyball nets to not damage irrigation or power lines. Bring a first aid kit to the party for scraped knees and bruises. Remember, fireworks (including sparklers) are prohibited in the city of Issaquah.

9. Get organized by mapping out all event details! Create a map to designate areas for food and beverages, determine the flow of the food line, and identify spaces for games and activities.

For visual planners, drafting a layout of the event can help reduce risks and enhance efficiency.



STEP 4: PROMOTE

1. Word of mouth is one of the most effective ways to share details for your block party. When neighbors hear about the event directly from someone they know, they are more likely to feel welcomed and excited to join. Take opportunities during casual conversations, like chatting while walking the dog or during school pickups, to mention the party. Additionally, enlist the help of outgoing or well-connected individuals in the neighborhood to act as event ambassadors who can help spread enthusiasm. Don't underestimate the power of creating a buzz through genuine, enthusiastic conversations.



Dahlia
Park neighbors
chat during a Light Up the Lanes winner party in 2023.

2. Distribute flyers or invitations door-to-door or leave them in mailboxes. Utilize our free customizable invite templates on page 10. Evite is a useful resource for sharing party details with neighbors via email and sending reminders closer to the event. The more advanced notice, the better.

 *Sample door hangers for your next block party.*



3. Use social media to create a neighborhood group or event page. Most neighborhoods already have groups on Facebook. Spread the word by posting often or use the online space for planning event details such as food and activities.

4. Utilize sign-up forms to gauge attendance and gather additional information. Online platforms like Google Forms, Evite or SignupGenius make it easy for neighbors to RSVP and volunteer for specific tasks such as bringing food or setting up. Include clear instructions in your promotion materials, along with a QR code or direct link to the form. Consider providing a space for attendees to share dietary preferences or suggest activities, ensuring their input shapes the event. Track your RSVPs per household (adults and kids) to best plan for those in attendance.

FLYER TEMPLATES

Download customizable templates at issaquahhighlands.com/socials.



STEP 5: EXECUTE

1. Set up early and allow enough time to arrange decorations, activities and food stations. The process of setting up — rolling out grills, arranging garbage cans, popping up tents, tables and chairs — goes much faster with lots of help. If you plan to reserve the Party Wagon, be sure to communicate drop off and pick up times for the trailer far in advance. *Pro tip: Have someone walk the party area in advance and pick up dog waste to avoid a mess during the event.*

2. Welcome guests by designating a greeter to make everyone feel included. Encourage guests to wear name tags for easier introductions.

3. Emphasize inclusivity and encourage mingling by organizing icebreakers or group games. View our list of themed parties on page 7. Ask guests where they are from originally or how long they have lived in your neighborhood as a way to spark conversation. Ensure all age groups and abilities are considered by providing a variety of activities and accessible seating arrangements.

Kids play together at Wisteria Park while parents mingle during a block party several years ago. These small neighbors are teenagers now!



4. Capture the moment (like the photo below) by designating a photographer or encouraging attendees to share their photos on a shared platform. You could even set up a fun photo booth with props to commemorate the event.





Residents set up canopies, grills, camping chairs, tables and coolers for a block party in Dahlia Park.

STEP 6: CLEAN UP & FOLLOW UP

1. Plan ahead for cleanup as this task can feel daunting if left to just a few people. Assign dedicated cleanup teams before the event begins and divide responsibilities such as taking down decorations, collecting trash, returning borrowed items and cleaning communal areas. Be sure to leave the party area in better condition than you found it. This includes picking up broken water balloon pieces, confetti and streamers from the grass.

- *A note about trash:* Do not leave trash bags or overflowing garbage in or around public park trash cans. Carry home your waste and dispose of it in your home cans. This is a sanitary and safety issue. Leaving leftover garbage is not only inconsiderate of other park users, but encourages rodents, bears and other wildlife to tear through the bags and make a horrible mess.

2. Thank attendees for coming to your party by sending thank you notes or emails to everyone who contributed. Include a link to a shared album for neighbors to add and/or view photos from the event. A small token of appreciation can go a long way.

3. Gather feedback by creating a simple survey to ask neighbors what they enjoyed and what could be improved for next time. This feedback will help shape future events and build on your successes.

4. Plan for next time! Use feedback to start brainstorming for future events. Consider hosting a small committee meeting or informal gathering to discuss next steps and keep the momentum going.

THROW THE ULTIMATE BLOCK PARTY WITH THE ISSAQAH HIGHLANDS PARTY WAGON!

Summer in Issaquah Highlands is all about community, connection and fun. The neighborhoods here were thoughtfully designed to foster a sense of togetherness, with parks, courtyards and alleys providing the perfect spaces for neighbors to gather. And what better way to celebrate than with a block party?

To make planning easy, Highlands Council offers the Party Wagon—a trailer stocked with everything you need for an unforgettable outdoor event. Best of all, it's FREE to reserve when your block party is open to all your neighbors!



What's Inside the Party Wagon?

The Party Wagon comes fully equipped to host a fantastic neighborhood gathering, including:

- Tables
- Chairs
- Canopy tents
- Lawn games
- Signage
- BBQ

With these essentials at your fingertips, you can create a welcoming space for food, games and conversations that bring everyone closer.

"We loved how easy it was to book the Party Wagon and have access to all the supplies we wouldn't normally have. The chairs, tables, lawn games, signage and BBQ were such a great addition and truly elevated our block party! The Party Wagon was a key factor in making our event a big success." - Ben Armlin, Huckleberry Circle resident

Westridge residents gather for a block party with help from the Party Wagon.



How to Reserve the Party Wagon

The Party Wagon is available on a first-come, first-served basis. To reserve it, simply fill out the online form (scan the QR code) at least two weeks in advance. Early planning ensures we can schedule delivery and make your party a success!

Important Details:

- The Party Wagon is available for neighborhood block parties only (not private events).
- Delivery requires a legal parking spot; it cannot be parked in alleys, inside parks or block streets without a street closure permit.
- Highlands Council may prioritize its use for community events.

Don't let the summer slip by without hosting a block party in your neighborhood! Reserve the Party Wagon, gather your neighbors, and create memories that will last a lifetime.

Ready to plan your event?
Scan the QR code or visit
issaquahhighlands.com/party-wagon today!



Get a Grant for Your Next Block Party

If you're interested in hosting a block party in your neighborhood, we're committed to helping you!

Our Block Party Grant offers up to \$250 for your party, whether it goes towards food, an ice cream vendor, entertainment, games, prizes or marketing.

Your gathering must be open to everyone in your neighborhood. We will select up to five parties to receive a grant.

To be eligible, please submit the application at issaquahhighlands.com/socials at least four weeks before your event.



FIND MORE RESOURCES AT
ISSAQAHIGHLANDS.COM/BLOCK-PARTY-TOOLKIT.

10 Reasons TO HOST A NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL

- 1 To be **HEALTHIER** & live longer!
- 2 To stay **INFORMED**.
- 3 To **CONNECT** with others.
- 4 To **CREATE** a sense of belonging.
- 5 To **CELEBRATE** your great neighborhood.
- 6 To **INCREASE** your neighborhood safety & security.
- 7 To **HELP** others connect with each other.
- 8 To **BUILD** friendships.
- 9 To get to **KNOW** your neighbors.
- 10 To have **FUN**!