

MIRANET RA TOOLKIT
TEN STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING
NEW RATEPAYER / RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS
(or renewing existing ones)

1. Triggers for starting a new RA

- 1.1 Typically the trigger is an issue that affects a particular neighborhood or local community, such as a new building development, by-law changes that may affect property values, air quality and power plants, tree removal, roads and transportation, etc., where there is no existing RA to take on the issue.

2. Who starts new RAs? Leaders and start-up supporters

- 2.1 Usually, a local resident (“founder”) or small group of residents in a local community becomes sufficiently concerned about and engaged with the “trigger” issue in question that they decide to seek out other like-minded residents to attend a small local meeting to discuss what may be done and whether formation of a residents’ association will help mobilize support to get action on the issue.
- 2.2 A typical outcome of such a meeting is a decision to form a new ratepayers’ association (or revive an existing one that has been inactive). A number of steps flow from such a decision.
- 2.3 The initial exploratory meeting typically ends with the formation of a small committed, self-selected group who agree to do what is needed to establish a new ratepayers’ group or revive an existing one. Below, this is referred to as “the Founding Group”.

3. First steps in forming a new RA

- 3.1 The Founding Group will typically hold several meetings over several months to test out the extent of local interest in the trigger issues and the resolve to address them. Members of the Founding Group may find it helpful to seek invitations to attend meetings of the Board (Executive) of other nearby RAs. Details of these can be found on the City website under the web page for most Wards, or on MIRANET’s website.
- 3.2 Founding Group meetings may take place at the home of a resident, or at a local church or community centre. There may be a small cost for using church or community facilities.
- 3.3 A notice in the local newspaper or a notice on a bulletin board in a local store or supermarket may attract interested residents to attend one of the Founding Group’s initial exploratory meetings.
- 3.4 These early meetings may benefit from inviting local elected officials, City staff or other “experts” along to speak about the issue(s) and provide relevant factual information.

- 3.5 At a certain point, the Founding Group will re-affirm its intention to go ahead and hold a first neighborhood meeting to form a new RA, and will then plan that start-up meeting.
- 3.6 The Founding Group may need to pool resources in order to raise “seed money” to pay for meeting room costs, printing or photocopying etc. before the new RA is formally established.

4. Key building blocks for a new RA: boundaries, constitution, dues, etc.

The Founding Group has to make several decisions before it can convene a first general start-up meeting of area residents to formally establish a new RA. For example:

- 4.1 A new RA has to decide and declare from the outset what its geographical boundaries will be, taking into account the boundaries of existing, neighboring RAs.
- 4.2 A constitution document needs to be drafted for the new RA for approval at the first (start-up) meeting of residents within the designated boundary. Examples of typical RA Constitution documents are attached that can be used as the basis for drafting the Constitution for a new RA. Procedures for handling possible conflicts of interest within Board members will be an important clause for inclusion in a draft Constitution.
- 4.3 An appropriate level of annual dues per household needs to be proposed (for incorporation or reference within the Constitution document).
- 4.4 A slate for an initial board of directors needs to be developed by the Founding Group for approval at the start-up meeting. This may include several members of the Founding Group.
- 4.5 It may be decided that the Constitution should provide for nominations to be accepted from the floor at the start-up meeting. The initial slate typically includes a proposed president, secretary and treasurer, as set out in the Constitution document that has been drafted for approval at the first general meeting.
- 4.6 A date must be decided for holding the start-up meeting to formally establish the new RA. Given the incidence of holidays, summer and other events etc., care is needed to select an optimal date for this meeting so as to attract and be convenient to area residents.

5. First meeting for a new RA

Once it has been decided when to hold the first general meeting of residents to establish the new RA, a number of other steps need to be taken, including:

- 5.1 Selecting and procuring a convenient, suitable and cheap (or, if possible, free) location preferably within the boundaries chosen for the new RA.

- 5.2 Ensuring suitable room set up (tables, chairs, etc.) that is conducive to business-like discussion and meeting dynamics.
- 5.3 Developing an agenda for the meeting. The agenda should include time for open discussion about key issues of concern within the RA, especially if the local City Councillor is willing to attend.
- 5.4 Getting the local City Councillor to attend the start-up meeting (and advertising this fact in advance notices – see below) is often effective in attracting resident turn-out for the start-up meeting.
- 5.5 Providing a printed agenda, membership sign-up form, slate of proposed directors, draft constitution, etc.
- 5.6 Effective chairing of the meeting and collection of membership forms, dues, etc. are important roles to be decided ahead of time among the Founding Group.

6. Promoting and attracting members for a new RA

- 6.1 Delivery of flyers by Founding Group members into household mail boxes (and, where possible, holding doorstep dialogues) for residences within the new RA boundary is often the most effective way of promoting the new RA and getting residents out to attend the start-up meeting.
- 6.2 Local media (newspaper) notices and notices posted on area stores' bulletin boards are other effective devices.
- 6.3 Mention in local business newsletters (such as those of Real estate agents) is another possibility.

7. What next? Wider recognition, affiliations, etc.

- 7.1 As soon as possible after the start up meeting, it is best to find ways to communicate to residents within the new RA boundary about the success and outcomes of the start-up meeting.
- 7.2 It will be desirable to register the new RA with the City, following the prescribed procedure and forms.
- 7.3 The local Councillor for the RA needs to be advised about the meeting and details of the elected slate of directors (to be posted on the City website for the Ward in question)
- 7.4 The new RA will want to consider liaising with / joining MIRANET. See flyer about MIRANET for information about this organization. Joining MIRANET (for a small fee) can be valuable for networking with other RAs and dealing with issues that may be common to other RAs.

8. Practical essentials: bank accounts, newsletters

- 8.1 The new RA will need to open a (low cost) bank account, which the Treasurer will manage.
- 8.2 One of the RA's board members should undertake specific responsibility for maintaining membership records and receiving applications for membership.
- 8.3 Periodic communications with signed-up RA members about local issues and events are important; emails are a useful tool for such communications. A website for the RA may also be considered, as well as periodic newsletters.
- 8.4 It is important to keep minutes from AGMs and RA Board (executive) meetings.

9. Working with elected officials and City staff

- 9.1 Developing working relationships with elected officials (City Councillor and MPP in particular) and maintaining same through periodic face to face meetings with RA presidents is healthy and useful. Providing input to officials' newsletters is also useful. Working relationships with key City staff are also useful to develop over time.
- 9.2 Elected officials can be valuable sources of guidance and contact-providers to city or region officials and departments regarding specific issues.
- 9.3 City staff as well as elected officials are usually willing, given suitable advance notice, to meet with RA boards (executives) and to attend RA meetings to discuss specific issues.

10. Keeping in touch with community issues

- 10.1 RA Boards need to constantly find ways to keep in touch with issues of interest or concern to area residents.
- 10.2 Membership in MIRANET (see Step 7 above) is one way for RA executives to be alerted to city wide issues that may be of particular interest to their members and communities.
- 10.3 Contact with neighbouring RAs is another good way to keep in touch with local issues.