



RESOURCE GUIDE

BLOCK CONNECTORS



**ABUNDANT
COMMUNITY**

Edmonton

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land, on which our great city resides, is Treaty 6 Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as: Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux and Blackfoot peoples. We also acknowledge this as Metis' homeland and the home of the largest concentration of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as home.

The Abundant Community Edmonton Resource Guide (Edition 1, 2 and 3) were developed and produced by The City of Edmonton's Citizen Services Department with contributions from Abundant Community Initiative (ACI), the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, and in collaboration with dedicated Neighbourhood Connectors and Block Connectors throughout Edmonton.

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FOREWORD



Message from His Worship Mayor Don Iveson

At the core of any great city is a series of connected neighbourhoods and communities – places where residents interact, share interests and support one another. As Edmontonians, we're fortunate to live in a city of passionate, active and engaged citizens who are working to build stronger communities and create a better future together.

When we take part in activities together as neighbours – from hosting or attending a block party to starting a book club or shoveling each other's walks – we weave vibrant and resilient threads into the social fabric of our city. Through Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE), Edmontonians are embracing the ideal of neighbourliness and helping to restore a once-cherished and vital bond between citizens living together as a community. Through ACE, Block Connectors help Edmontonians breathe new life into their own neighbourhoods by simply getting to know one another.

I thank the many generous community-minded volunteers who have taken on the role of ACE Block Connector. By fostering the development of neighbour relationships you create a stronger sense of security and belonging in our city, making it a more inclusive, supportive and uplifting home for all.



Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Don Iveson'.

Don Iveson
Mayor

INTRODUCTION

What is Abundant Community Edmonton?

Across the world, cities and communities are recognizing the importance and need for caring and connected neighbourhood life. The City of Edmonton believes that more neighbourliness on every block in the city will contribute towards this culture of care and connection, increasing sense of belonging and inclusion, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and livable city.

Utilizing the strengths and input of local citizens, the Neighbourhood Services Section of The City of Edmonton has co-developed *Abundant Community Edmonton*. This comprehensive framework for neighbourhood engagement and organization facilitates community building beginning at the block level.

The name of this framework was derived from the book *The Abundant Community* written by John McKnight and Peter Block, published in 2012. Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE) puts the philosophies of McKnight and Block's book into practice.

The intent of the *Abundant Community Edmonton Resource Guide* is to provide you—a community-minded member of your neighbourhood—with a simple framework that enables and supports you to organize your neighbourhood around the strengths and potential of the people who live there to take action and achieve shared community goals.

For more information about Abundant Community Edmonton please contact City staff by calling **311**, visit edmonton.ca/AbundantCommunity or email abundantcommunity@edmonton.ca.

For more information on John McKnight and Peter Block's work, visit abundantcommunity.com.

OVERVIEW

The Vision

Neighbours connected at the block level and in the neighbourhood. Together we form a strong, caring and supportive blocks and neighbourhoods where we look out for one another, share our talents, skills and resources with one another, recreate together, and collectively create the neighbourhoods we desire. The village is reinvigorated in our imaginations and in our city neighbourhoods.

Key Roles

NEIGHBOURHOOD LEADERSHIP

Any neighbour or group of neighbours that are wanting to strengthen their neighbourhood can initiate ACE. Within Edmonton neighbourhoods, it is generally the Community Leagues through which neighbours provide formal leadership in these efforts to build community. ACE extends the reach of the Community League and neighborhood groups down to the block level.

SUPPORT TEAM

Neighbours have formed a group who are passionate about building community in our neighbourhood. They are representatives of the initiative to the Neighbourhood Leadership. They are also the ones who support and oversee the work of the Neighbourhood Connector.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTORS

The Neighbourhood Connectors primary role is to identify and support Block Connectors. In some neighbourhoods, the Neighbourhood Connector role is a temporary part-time paid position, coordinated by the Support Team and supported through Neighbourhood Leadership (i.e., the Community League board).

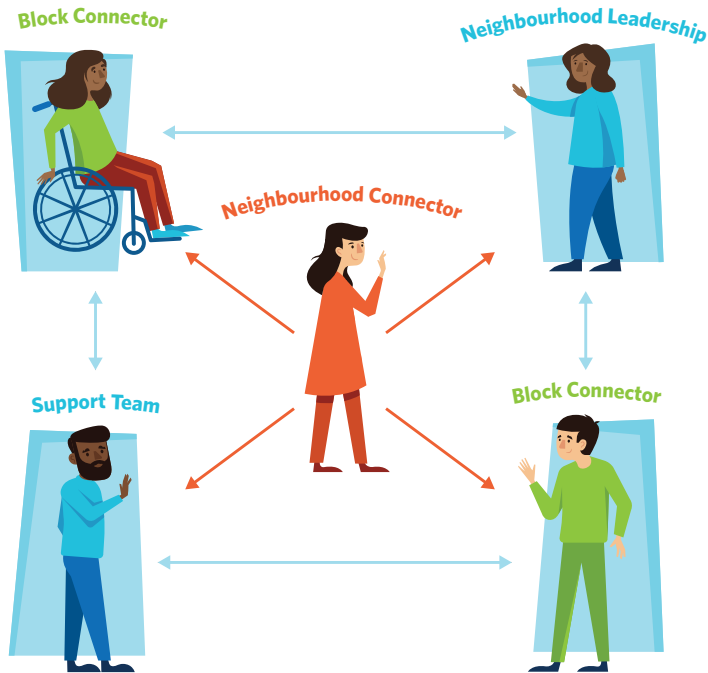
The Process

BLOCK CONNECTORS

Block Connectors connect with the neighbours that live around them (approximately 20 households). They introduce themselves and their three key roles: **Point Person**, **Party Person** and **Listener**. This introduction is often paired with an invitation to a block social (e.g., block party, bbq, etc.). Over time neighbours get to know one another through the initiative taken by the Block Connector. An important dimension of that initiative is that the Block Connector listens to their neighbours by asking good questions about them.

Block Connectors use the Connector Card to facilitate conversations and to document what their neighbours share with them.

Content from the conversation is collected into a neighbourhood inventory and used to build community and a sense of belonging. The information in the neighbourhood inventory is not confidential but is safe-guarded in the same way that Community League membership information is. See page 8 for more information about the Connector Card.



THE ROLE OF THE BLOCK CONNECTOR

Great neighbourhoods have always required that a few neighbours initiate friendly connections. Research and experience confirm what we have known from the past, that making introductions, hosting social gatherings and listening to each other, form the basis of healthy neighbourhood relationships. From this, the role of the Block Connector was formed.

AS A BLOCK CONNECTOR YOU HAVE BEEN ASKED BY THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TO BE THE:

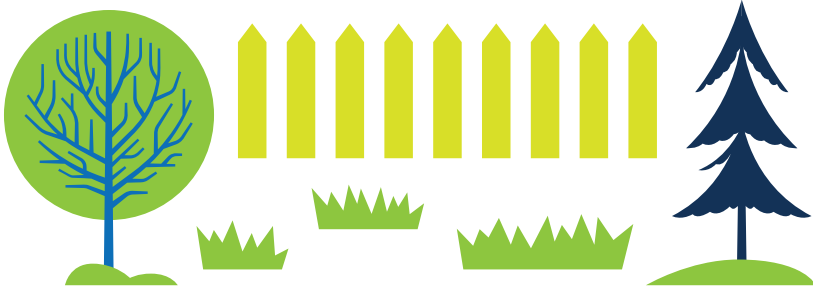
1. **Point Person** or the “go-to” person for your Block, keeping neighbours updated about block and neighbourhood life. You might put together a block contact list to help neighbours get connected.
2. **Party Person** for the block, initiating block social gatherings such as BBQs and block parties once or twice a year.
3. **Listener** for each neighbour on the block, hopefully hearing from every neighbour. You'll be asking for their ideas for the neighbourhood, what pastimes they would enjoy doing with neighbours and the skills and gifts they would be willing to share with the block or with the neighbourhood.



KEY CONVERSATION TOPICS

DESIRED OUTCOME

| | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|---|
| ONE | Vision | This helps the neighbourhood, the Community League and other neighbourhood leaders, to determine the wishes of the residents of the neighbourhood. This may inform decision making around programs, services and projects at the neighbourhood level. |
| TWO | Activities & Interests | An invitation to join existing neighbourhood groups or form new neighbourhood groups based on common interests and pastimes. The local element often removes existing barriers and has the potential to increase sense of belonging at the block and neighbourhood level. |
| THREE | Skills, Abilities & Experiences | Neighbours helping neighbours. Everyone is valuable and has something to offer neighbourhood life. The discovery of the skills, abilities and experiences of neighbours—the community assets—leads to a more engaged, connected and supportive community life in the neighbourhood. |



Connecting with your block using the Connector Card

THE CONNECTOR CARD PROVIDES:

- * A point of focus for you and your neighbour that looks somewhat official yet neighbourly.
- * A comfortable way to introduce yourself and your role to your neighbours.
- * Clear information for your neighbour to keep:
 - ♦ A short description of the role the neighbourhood has asked you to take on.
 - ♦ Your contact information.
 - ♦ A Block Social date.
 - ♦ Links that give them the opportunity to see the larger picture through The City of Edmonton's ACE website.
- * Something to record your neighbours' contact information on.
- * A script so you don't have to worry about the basics of what to say.
- * Meaningful questions that will create neighbourly relationships and connections on the block and in the neighbourhood.

The order of the Connector Card is significant. The card helps establish your three roles: **Point Person**, **Party Person**, and **Listener**.

GET NEIGHBOURING

Address: _____ Family Name(s): _____

| First Name | Email | Phone Number | Birth Year |
|------------|-------|--------------|------------|
| 1. _____ | | | |
| 2. _____ | | | |
| 3. _____ | | | |
| 4. _____ | | | |
| 5. _____ | | | |

Comments: _____

Hi Neighbour!

My name is: _____
 I live nearby at: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone: _____
 Our next block social is on: _____

Our neighbourhood has asked if I would be our block's **Point Person**, **Party Person**, and **Listener** and I'd like to chat with you!

For more information please contact:
 City staff by calling 911
 visit edmonton.ca/AbundantCommunity
 email abundantcommunity@edmonton.ca

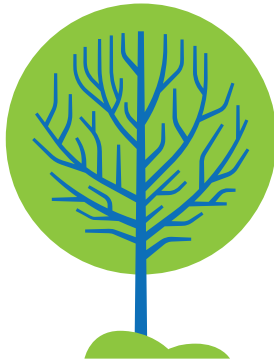
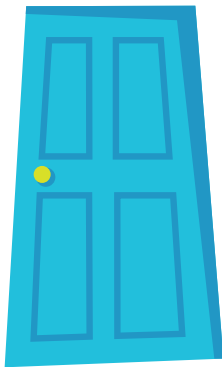
ABUNDANT COMMUNITY **Connector**

1. Vision for our neighbourhood:
2. Activities and Interests you would enjoy with neighbours:
(Would you want to assist with any of these?)
3. Skills, abilities or experiences you would be willing to share with other members of our neighbourhood:

POINT PERSON

Below are the elements that make you the **"Point Person"**. i.e., You are welcoming them to be in touch with you.

1. **"HI NEIGHBOUR..."** we want to be clear that we are neighbours.
2. **"MY NAME IS..."** As the Block Connector, you reach out early in an act of hospitality and share your contact info.
3. **"I LIVE NEARBY AT..."** This really introduces the neighbouring relationship.
4. **"MY EMAIL IS/MY PHONE NUMBER IS..."** Just easy ways to be in touch.





PARTY PERSON

Next is the **"Party Person"** part of your role. Here you get to connect people through simple social gatherings.

1. **"OUR NEXT BLOCK SOCIAL IS ON..."** Having introduced yourself, you can now introduce the idea of a block social.
 - ♦ These are small social gatherings which allow neighbours to connect together.
 - ♦ They can be simple get togethers in a neighbour's yard, a game of cards at a picnic table in the local park, etc. Be creative.
 - ♦ We avoid calling it a block party because that sounds like a big deal and may feel a bit overwhelming. "Block Socials" are small and should feel welcoming.
 - ♦ People like being invited and included. Most people think block socials are a great idea whether they plan to show up or not.
 - ♦ The tearaway portion of the card is also an invite to your block's next social. It offers a very tangible, easily understood reason for your visit.
 - ♦ Set a tentative date and write it on the card. You can always change the date if you have to. Having a date written on the card helps the person feel the block is already active and connected even if you are just starting.
 - ♦ If you are needing ideas for block socials, connect with other Block Connectors in the area or talk to your Neighbourhood Connector. They can point you toward other resources that can help.
2. **"OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD HAS ASKED IF I WOULD..."** This bold and large font statement says that this is not your idea, but the idea of the Neighbourhood Leadership. You are the person who said yes to the request. By the way, we thank you for saying yes.
3. **"...BE OUR BLOCK'S POINT PERSON, PARTY PERSON, LISTENER"** the job is clear and simple. *Who doesn't want to have a Block Connector for their Block?!*
4. At this point you may want to get your neighbour's contact information so that you can be in touch around block social plans and neighbourhood updates. This information will also be gathered into the neighbourhood inventory. As more information comes in you will begin to

notice common interests and natural connections that could be made. Flip the Connector Card over and have them fill in their information.

Categories include:

- ◆ Address
- ◆ Family Name(s)
- ◆ First Name
- ◆ Email
- ◆ Phone Number
- ◆ Birth Year
- ◆ Comments (this can include anything that may not be covered by the three upcoming questions; you could ask the person to revisit the Comments box at the end of your visit to capture any last thoughts)



5. While you are on the backside you can point out the fact that the city has a web address and a video about block connecting that they can check out.
6. Tear the card and give your neighbour the small card...
7. So by now as you work down the card you have, done a point person role by giving your neighbour your contact info and said "be in touch". You have also done a Party Person role by initiating a block social and inviting neighbours. Now on the tear-away portion of the Connector Card, you have the opportunity to be a **Listener**.
8. Let your neighbour know the neighbourhood wants to hear from them and you are there to listen. Point to the questions on the Connector Card and briefly review them.
9. An opportunity to have this intentional conversation with your neighbour on the first visit is great! But if they are not home, or busy, or would like more time, leaving a copy of the Connector Card is an option. But we recommend you exchange contact information so that you can be in touch. Use one Connector Card to get contact information and leave one for them to look at and fill out.
10. As you do you can point out the questions on the card and ask "if this would be a good time to hear from them regarding the three questions".



LISTENER

Your final role is that of “Listener”. Here you will ask important questions about your neighbour to help you better understand them, their interests and their feelings about the neighbourhood where you both live.

The Listening Questions:

QUESTION ONE: WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD?

- * This question provides a starting point for your neighbours to talk about their lives and what is important to them. Most people love to give their opinion. We have always marveled at the number of people whose vision of a good neighbourhood is a friendly or neighbourly one!
- * There is always some room for improvement in the life of a neighbourhood. The “our” in this question is a step towards shared ownership of, and responsibility for, the greater good of our neighbourhood.
- * With this question, you are inviting participation in creating a better neighbourhood. Many neighbours are looking for a way to be more involved in neighbourhood life but have never been asked.
- * The vision information is valuable – it can guide neighbourhood decision making and provides a list of residents who care about particular issues. In one respect this is a comprehensive public consultation in that every neighbour can express their hopes and desires to Neighbourhood Leadership.
- * Share information from the Benefits of Neighbouring found on pages 18-20. They may spark a thought or prompt further discussion.

QUESTION TWO: THIS QUESTION HAS TWO PARTS

PART ONE: WHAT ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS WOULD YOU ENJOY WITH NEIGHBOURS?

- * The intent of this question is to gather information that can be used to form groups within the neighbourhood. We want to discover ways to bring people together so as to build lasting connections and perhaps even friendships in the neighbourhood.

- * Many neighbours are not familiar with possibilities for recreation and connection in the neighbourhood – you, as a Block Connector, can help connect your neighbours with local recreation and connection opportunities.

PART TWO: WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ASSIST WITH ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES?

- * With this follow up question we are looking to identify, leaders, teachers, organize, etc. to assist in the formation of neighbourhood groups.

QUESTION THREE: WHAT SKILLS, ABILITIES AND EXPERIENCES YOU ARE WILLING TO SHARE WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD?

- * The intent of this question is to discover, inventory and post the gifts and abilities of neighbours. We do this so that these can be expressed, celebrated and available for other neighbours who have a complementary need.
- * Another objective of this question is reciprocity. Although a neighbour may have a need, they also may have skills they wish to share with the rest of the neighbourhood, which contributes to a sense of equality.
- * As a Block Connector you will be a first line of connection to the needs of neighbours. Your own observations are valuable as you assess someone's abilities (e.g., someone who has difficulties shoveling their walk).
- * Many neighbours, particularly older individuals, value the opportunity to share some of their life experiences and stories with the Block Connector and potentially the neighbourhood. The discussion concerning life experiences will no doubt uncover gifts that these neighbours can offer to the neighbourhood and perhaps even interests to share in.





ONGOING TASKS & TIPS

Below you will find helpful information that will help you in your three roles.

POINT PERSON

- * Greeting neighbours and keeping an eye out for their well being.
- * Be aware of difficult life passages: the block can be an important social unit offering care and support.
- * Connect your neighbours with other neighbours according to the interests and experiences you have discovered.
- * Keep your neighbours updated on neighbourhood news and events: flyer drops, email or best of all, an in-person visit.
- * Check in when you can, especially on those who are most vulnerable. A good way to connect is by dropping off an invitation to a neighbourhood event or block social/gathering.
- * Invite your block to the major neighbourhood events as a way of staying in touch (request flyers from organisers so that you have something tangible to hand out).
- * Create a contact list of neighbours for your block. Get permission to provide print or email copies.
- * Drop off the neighbourhood newsletter to your block.



PARTY PERSON

- ✳ Identify the neighbours who are keen to help organize block socials with you.
- ✳ Use the interesting things you learned from your Listener role to create party games e.g., “Guess who is active in a choir?”
- ✳ Try initiating fall, winter and spring gatherings in addition to the common summer gatherings. Different seasons bring out different activities. This can lead to new people with different interests attending.
- ✳ Try block parties and Play Streets as ways to get neighbours together. Talk to your area’s Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator for details.
- ✳ Try a joint garage sale and conclude with a party.
- ✳ Connect with nearby Block Connectors and plan a joint block social.
- ✳ It helps to have at least one other household confirmed for your social gatherings before you invite the rest of the block.
- ✳ Ask your Support Team or Neighbourhood Connector for help and support in initiating a social.
- ✳ The invitation you extend to a neighbour may be as important as the event itself.
- ✳ Don’t over prepare. Low key hospitality works well and increases the likelihood that the event will actually happen.
- ✳ Use social events to create connections. Name tags, personal introduction, “get to know you” and “icebreaker” games can help.
- ✳ Use any excuse to initiate a party! Birthdays, new neighbours moving in, Canada Day celebrations, and the “big game” are some of the many great reasons to gather together.



LISTENER

- ✦ Continue listening to neighbours and inputting what you hear into the neighbourhood inventory.
- ✦ Welcoming new neighbours as they move onto your block: use the Connector Card to provide them with your contact information and to get theirs. Begin to weave them into the common life of the neighbourhood after listening to their story.
- ✦ There will be a small percentage of neighbours that will not be interested in having a conversation – this is to be expected and accepted. However, it is best not to presume this as we have been surprised many times by an underlying desire for neighbourliness.
- ✦ Invite other household members to join the conversation if they'd like. Don't miss the kids!
- ✦ Take notes while neighbours share – it's an act of listening and demonstrates that you take the conversation seriously.
- ✦ If neighbours start out hesitant, leave the demographic information questions until the end of the conversation (e.g., phone numbers and emails). Some neighbours need to better understand what you are doing before they are comfortable sharing personal information.
- ✦ If you haven't shared them yet, this is a great time to share the Benefits of Neighbouring (see pages 18–20). It is during the listening conversations that the benefits become most clear.
- ✦ In addition to name, phone number and email, the Connector Card asks for the general age group of members of the household. We include this because we recognize that among children in particular, and with seniors occasionally, it is helpful to be grouped by age rather than by activities and interests.



ONGOING BLOCK CONNECTOR SUPPORT

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTOR, SUPPORT TEAM AND NEIGHBOURHOOD LEADERSHIP ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU BY:

- * Orienting you as a Block Connector.
- * Explaining the ACE framework, process and resources.
- * Providing you with resources and the Connector Cards.
- * Engaging in a conversation with you using the Connector Card to demonstrate its use and to get to know you.
- * Helping out with the first couple of block connections.
- * Assisting you with organizing block socials.
- * Entering conversation information into the neighbourhood inventory.
- * Inviting you to a Block Connector group within the neighbourhood.
- * Attending with you if you choose to attend the monthly gatherings hosted by City of Edmonton staff.
- * Assisting you if you decide to transition out of the Block Connector role.

“When we discover the true richness of our neighbourhoods—the vast and amazing potential—it becomes clear that we could fill many lifetimes within the boundaries of a few blocks. And that is more than enough.”

JAMIE ARPIN-RICCI

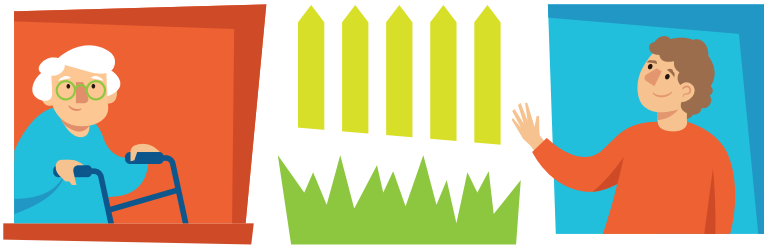
AUTHOR, *THE COST OF COMMUNITY*

THE BENEFITS OF NEIGHBOURING

There are so many benefits that result from increased connection and neighbourliness at the block and neighbourhood level. Some of them are listed here and many more will emerge as you build a more engaged and active neighbourhood!

INCREASED CARE OF NEIGHBOURS

- * Awareness and activation of the diverse needs, skills, and experiences of residents.
- * Neighbours helping neighbours; everyone contributing to neighbourhood life according to their interests and abilities.
- * Watching out for each other. Creating a village for children to grow and play; looking in on seniors and others who can use additional care.
- * Better overall mental and physical health through new opportunities for relationships and recreation.

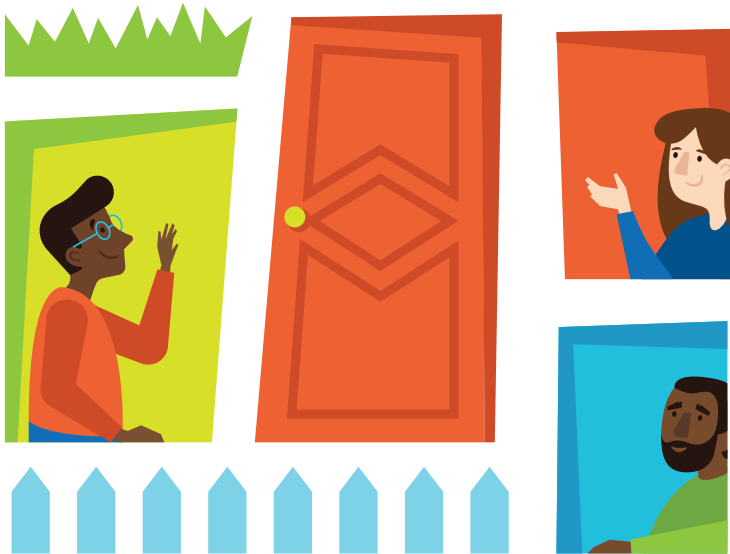


INCREASED CARE OF SHARED SPACES— THE ENVIRONMENTS WE CALL HOME

- * Increased block identity and pride.
- * Sense of shared ownership and responsibility for local infrastructure like open parkland, playgrounds, community gardens and public buildings.
- * Alignment with movement to 'Think Global - Act Local'; promoting local food, water and energy security - reducing environmental footprint.

INCREASED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

- * Connected citizens are more likely to engage with and influence community and its institutions. Opportunity to have a more engaged and representative voice in government affairs.
- * Enhanced opportunities for employment through relationships and connections in the neighbourhood.
- * Shared neighbourhood vision to build a strong local economy.



INCREASED SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WELLNESS

- * Increased sense of belonging to the block and neighbourhood.
- * Local and accessible companionship and friendship.
- * More groups to join for recreation, fun, education and social time within the neighbourhood.
- * Opportunity to know people from a wide variety of cultures, backgrounds, experiences and ages.
- * Opportunity for intergenerational relationships.

INCREASED SAFETY

- * Increased safety on the block and in the neighbourhood - quick help nearby when you really need it.
- * “Stranger Danger” decreases as children learn the names of neighbours and residents get to know more about each other.
- * Residents are able to watch out for each other with insights about each other’s needs and schedules.
- * Increased safety through the creation of a Block Connect list to be used in case of an emergency or disaster.



ACTIVATED AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

- * Collective wisdom, guidance, ideas and innovation from broad perspectives shared among neighbours.
- * Emergence of creative solutions to common problems by using the unique assets, perspectives and abilities of the neighbourhood.

RESOURCES

The City of Edmonton's Neighbourhood Resource Connectors (NRCs), Revitalization Coordinators, and the ACE Support Team are passionate about working with you to build stronger connections among your neighbours, and uncover the hidden strengths, skills and assets in your community.

ACE is a collaborative initiative. Each neighbourhood that becomes involved, creates resources that help them in their community building efforts. Examples have included yard signs, postcards, Block Letter Introduction letters, and more! We collect these in an online folder. If you are interested in viewing these resources, please contact City staff by calling **311** or visit edmonton.ca/AbundantCommunity or email abundantcommunity@edmonton.ca

THANK YOU

The City of Edmonton is excited to work with you and your neighbourhood in this building community program, and we hope you find this guide to be a useful tool.

Ultimately it is your enthusiasm for a connected and caring life in your neighbourhood that is making a real difference. Thank you for your commitment to community building in your neighbourhood!

"Vital to society, straightforward as a role and personally transforming."

TIM SENGER
BLOCK CONNECTOR



For more information about Abundant Community Edmonton please contact City staff by calling **311**, visit edmonton.ca/AbundantCommunity or email abundantcommunity@edmonton.ca.