

Creating Connected Communities

A GUIDE TO HOA MANAGEMENT.



KEYSTONE

HOA membership enthusiasm plays a key role in the success of every community. When homeowners are engaged and excited, the whole community can feel it. It makes the HOA a vibrant, bustling place to live. Not only does an engaged membership support high property values, close-knit homeowners are integral to creating a true sense of community.



In this guide to Creating Connected Communities, you'll find tips on:

- **Getting homeowners excited and engaged in your community**
- **How HOA management is evolving to create welcoming environments**
- **Determining if your current HOA management company is the right fit**

Read on to learn how to focus on fostering a sense of community in your HOA.

How to Get Homeowners Excited About Your Community

How do you inspire homeowners in your HOA to love the community?

How do you encourage them to take the time to get more involved?

Below we share tips on how to get homeowners to deepen their interest in the place you all call home.



Looking good, feeling good

The easiest way to get homeowners more excited about the community is to make sure that the grounds themselves look great. The HOA plays a major role in maintaining the community's appearance because the HOA's rules & regulations are what establish the standard of living. It goes without saying that any eyesores or major repairs should be handled as quickly as possible.

Keeping up an eye-catching aesthetic is a great way to instill pride of ownership among members. That means not just making sure that the front gate and office look great, but ensuring that homes, lawns, streets, parking areas, amenities, walkways, parks, storage areas, garbage/recycling zones and every other nook and cranny of the community are clean, well-lit, and impeccably maintained.

Keep homeowners in the loop

Create a sense of inclusivity by putting a solid communication network in place. Make sure the information members need is available as quickly and conveniently as possible, and that everyone knows whom to contact with questions. Because your community's membership has diverse needs, be sure to put in place a lot of communication methods so everyone can stay in the know in the way that's most comfortable for them. Use community websites, phone calls, emails, eNewsletters, an HOA Twitter account, written notices, printed community newsletters, and common area message boards to share information with the membership.

In addition, set up password-protected board- and membership portals that make it easy for members to serve themselves. These digital tools can include billing statements, maintenance requests, board meeting minutes and other important information that your HOA wants to share with the membership, but not with the general public.

Finally, go the extra mile to facilitate communication between members themselves. Large-scale communities have lots of success with Facebook and NextDoor groups that allow members to communicate directly.



Hold more community events

One of the most fun ways to make people feel more invested in the community is to simply invite them to get to know one another in person. It might seem old-school but chatting over food and drinks strengthens relationships in as little as a few hours.

Community social events work best when they're driven by the membership. Form a social committee to brainstorm a calendar of annual events that makes sense for your community. Once you have your ideas, solicit additional volunteers from the community to help bring the events to life. You'd be surprised how much bonding goes into planning events, as well as attending them.

The best way to build a lasting sense of community through events is to iterate on your ideas, not just host a "one-and-done" event. Remember that not everyone will be able to attend every event, so creating repeating seasonal or annual events will enable more homeowners to get involved.

Articulate a clear vision for your community

Putting a well-developed strategic plan in place for your HOA helps define the type of environment the membership wants the community to be. Your association's strategic plan should contain a clear general statement about what you're trying to accomplish as a community, which should, in turn, support property values.

Communicate this vision to the membership. It doesn't have to be complicated. Create a one-pager that outlines the vision for the community, upcoming initiatives that support the vision and the positive impact these initiatives will have on the community.

How HOA Management Is Evolving

In today's world you can rent a movie, order a meal and make a stock trade with a few clicks—so why does HOA management seem to be stuck in the past? Some management companies have tried to address this question by piling more technology into their processes. However, we believe in a more holistic approach.



Here are four ways HOA management is evolving to better serve homeowners living in a community:

The right match isn't just for dating

At its core, property management is a people and relationship-focused business. When dealing with something as personal and important as one's home, it's crucial that a management company understand the human drivers and emotions involved. We believe that this is most apparent when it comes to manager/HOA fit.

There are plenty of qualified individuals who have the experience to manage an HOA. However, the manager/board/membership relationship is so crucial to the smooth functioning of the association that extreme care must be taken when determining the best manager for the job. At Keystone, we explore this fit from multiple angles before making a recommendation. We evaluate the experience, certifications and personality of a manager, then carefully consider whether these things align with what we know the HOA is seeking. Manager fit is not a "numbers game"—it's about finding the perfect match.



Innovation is more than technology—it's thoughtful decision-making

“Innovation” doesn’t mean launching unnecessary new technologies or arbitrarily reinventing the wheel. It’s a constant commitment to remaining flexible in order to respond to the unique needs of each individual association. HOAs have an obligation to fulfill a parliamentary procedure and many of these processes are governed by strict state laws. As such, HOAs are burdened by paperwork and slow processes. Tracking and documenting every action, decision, budget allocation (and more) takes a lot of time.

While still operating under state and local regulations, innovative property management companies are constantly on the lookout for ways to increase property values, streamline communications, strengthen member relationships and improve community enjoyment—all slotting seamlessly into the way an HOA already operates. Thoughtful management companies demonstrate proactive problem-solving, active listening and ongoing training to propel associations to the next level without disrupting current operations.

In an age of instant gratification, your HOA relationship should be long-term.

In property management, like many other industries, you get what you pay for. While it may be tempting to choose the property management company with the lowest fee structure, the difference between bottom-of-the-barrel management companies and top-tier companies is exponential. That is, the high level of service delivered by reputable companies and the lack of headaches associated with low-level service providers will quickly reveal itself to be worth the investment. Reputable companies perform a multitude of services—some quite obvious, others crucial but less noticeable—that ultimately net out to be a fantastic value.

The problem is, plenty of not-so-great management companies are more than happy to charge premium rates while delivering lackluster service. We always recommend performing due diligence on any management company under consideration. This means taking your time in evaluating their proposal, asking detailed questions about issues that relate specifically to your HOA, and carefully checking all references. As your community moves toward the future, you need a property management company that will keep up and grow with you.

The extra mile is more important than ever

Property managers are tasked with helping the HOA's board of directors in many important ways. However, these days it's not enough for a property management company to provide administrative support, business advice, and accounting services. These are crucial, but they're just the basics.

Today's managers should understand the long-term objectives of the community and provide insight and guidance that builds stronger communities, both financially and socially. HOA managers are called upon to suggest ideas that help each homeowner get even more enjoyment out of the place they call home. Quality managers provide creative ideas to build deeper community engagement.

Old habits tend to die hard and some management companies are still stuck in the past. However, there are positive disruptions in every industry: transportation, banking, shopping, and more. HOA management is evolving too, and it's exciting to see what the future holds.



5 Signs Your Management Company May Not Be the Right Fit

Switching your management company may seem like a lot of work, but the success of your HOA is worth it. When the association/management company relationship is working well, it makes life easier for everyone involved. On the other hand, when the relationship is faltering, it can create problems when trying to achieve even the smallest of community goals.

How can you tell if it's time to move on from your management company? Here are five signs that it's time to find a new HOA management partner.

Sign #1: Your manager is changing often

As with any profession, people move on, so there is likely to be some turnover over the course of any long-term professional engagement with your management company. However, if you have multiple managers occupying the position within a year or so, that can indicate that there is serious instability at your HOA management company. A revolving door of managers can cause a lack of continuity that may interrupt your community's forward momentum in accomplishing important goals.



Sign #2: Routine and pervasive lack of communication

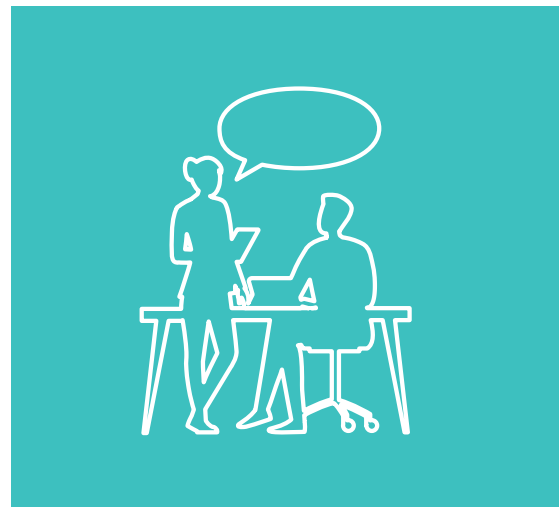
Quality homeowners association management is heavily dependent on communication. Clear and open communication between manager and association is an integral part of the service provided by your HOA management company. Managers may not be able to answer your question immediately, but a great manager will respond to your message within at least 24 hours to let you know that they received your inquiry and are looking into it.

Sign #3: Failure to follow up or follow through

It's the manager's job to bring all of the board's decisions to fruition. This means setting a clear plan of action that includes next steps, action items, ongoing status and final wrap-up. The board should know the status of every project at all times, without having to track each step themselves.

Sign #4: Poor financial transparency

As an association member, you have the right to know the status of your HOA's finances at all times. Your manager should provide the board with detailed, updated financials that clearly demonstrate how much cash is on hand and how much is in the reserves. For community improvement projects, your manager should make sure that vendors stick to their bids and deliver on their promises. If your manager has to scramble to put together your financial statements, or you haven't seen a statement in months, it means they're obscuring your records, either intentionally or inadvertently.



Sign #5: No real guidance or advice

Your HOA manager should be able to guide you through the details of state code, your community's CC&Rs and rules & regulations, and provide thoughtful business guidance for your HOA. While it falls on the board's shoulders to make all decisions for the community, a quality manager should provide vital support. This involves things like comparing vendor bids and making recommendations, guiding the board through compliance violation processes and communicating with the membership to build a stronger sense of community. HOA managers that simply act on the board's directives without providing any proactive advice or input are not delivering top-notch service.

A great HOA/manager relationship provides a huge benefit to the association. The members and board know what's best for their community, while the management company provides expertise in best practices and regulation. At its best, this partnership supports strong, smart decision-making that is in the best interest of the HOA. However, if you feel like your association is struggling because your management company is falling short on any of the above, don't be afraid to start shopping around.





Looking for an HOA partner that will turn your neighborhood into a connected community?

Contact us today for a custom proposal from our HOA experts.

Phone (949) 833-2600

Fax (949) 777-1723

www.keystonepacific.com

Corporate Office

16775 Von Karman, Ste. 100
Irvine, CA 92606

Rancho Santa Margarita

30211 Avenida De Las Banderas, Suite 120
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688

Temecula

41593 Winchester Road, Suite 113
Temecula, CA 92590

Ontario

3155-D Sedona Court, Suite 150
Ontario, CA 91764