

# Neighborhood support organizations

*Brief report*

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## 1 Purpose and implementation of the research project

### ***Neighborhood support organizations as a model for enhancing tenant bonding***

Given changing demand structures in the rented apartment market, housing companies need to develop new models aimed at heightening customer/tenant bonding. In this connection, favorable experience has been gained with the supplementary establishment of neighborhood associations and foundations.

The “Neighborhood Support Organizations” study seeks to leverage the success of these neighborhood support organizations for a greater range of housing companies. This document describes the results of a research project conducted by F+B Forschung und Beratung für Wohnen, Immobilien und Umwelt GmbH for the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Bonn, with the support of VNW Verband norddeutscher Wohnungsunternehmen e.V..

### ***Review of the current situation and recommendations for practice-oriented activities***

The research project seeks to evaluate existing neighborhood help associations and foundations as well as their effect on ensuring sustained occupancy rates in residential regions in the context of their origin, administrative structures and offerings. The aim of the research project is to provide housing companies considering the possibility of establishing such associations or foundations with an overview of the existing organizations as well as practical recommendations for creating such organizations and the tasks which they can perform in the form of a catalog of criteria.

This is based on a structural analysis of existing models with a description of selected examples of best practice and expert conversations with the protagonists of the various models.

## 2 Summary of results

### ***Relatively new social management instrument for housing companies***

Neighborhood support organizations are a relatively new social management instrument used by housing companies. They were pioneered by the cooperatives in particular, which are committed to the fundamental cooperative principle of mutual support.

The most common (legal) form of such organizations is the neighborhood help association, which is normally organized as a non-profit charity. The foundation is an alternative model.

### ***Heightened bonding with residential region and tenancy stabilization***

These organizations primarily seek to encourage a neighborhood environment in residential areas and thus to heighten bonding with the residential region and contribute to tenancy stabilization. The underlying principle is to “help others to help themselves” to unlock the potential for solidarity in the residential areas as well as to safeguard and reinforce the self-initiative and responsibility of the residents.

### ***Broad range of offerings for neighborhood communications and encounters as well as advisory, information and service offerings***

Old-age citizens are the largest target group for neighborhood support organizations. However, children and young people also comprise an important target group. The offerings and activities of these organizations vary according to their nature and size. However, the wide range of different offerings concentrate on creating scope for neighborhood communications and encounters as well as providing advice, information and services.

### ***Sustained success hinges on the activation of voluntary social commitment on the part of residents***

For the most part, neighborhood support organizations are linked to a housing company in terms of content as well as for administrative and personnel purposes. As a result, there is a close link between the company’s internal activities and external social management in day-to-day activities. This link is reflected in the combined professional/voluntary structure which typifies most organizations. The sustained work of such neighborhood support organizations hinges on the successful activation of voluntary social commitment on the part of the residents in question.

### ***Mixed financing as the economic basis***

The neighborhood support organizations generally receive basic funding from the housing company, which is supplemented with a mixture of membership fees, donations, public funding, utilization fees and capital gains (in the case of foundations).

### ***Variable and simultaneously effective social management instrument for housing companies***

In spite of the difficulty of quantifying the success of a neighborhood support organization, all the companies interviewed were very positive in their assessment of the work performed by these organizations. The following benefits in particular are seen:

- Heightened bonding with the residential area and tenancy stabilization, i.e. reduced fluctuation and vacancies
- Encouragement of a sense of belonging to a neighborhood and emergence of informal help structures, avoidance of alienation
- Heightened satisfaction with living conditions
- Enhancement of the quality of the residential area, the appeal of the location and its image

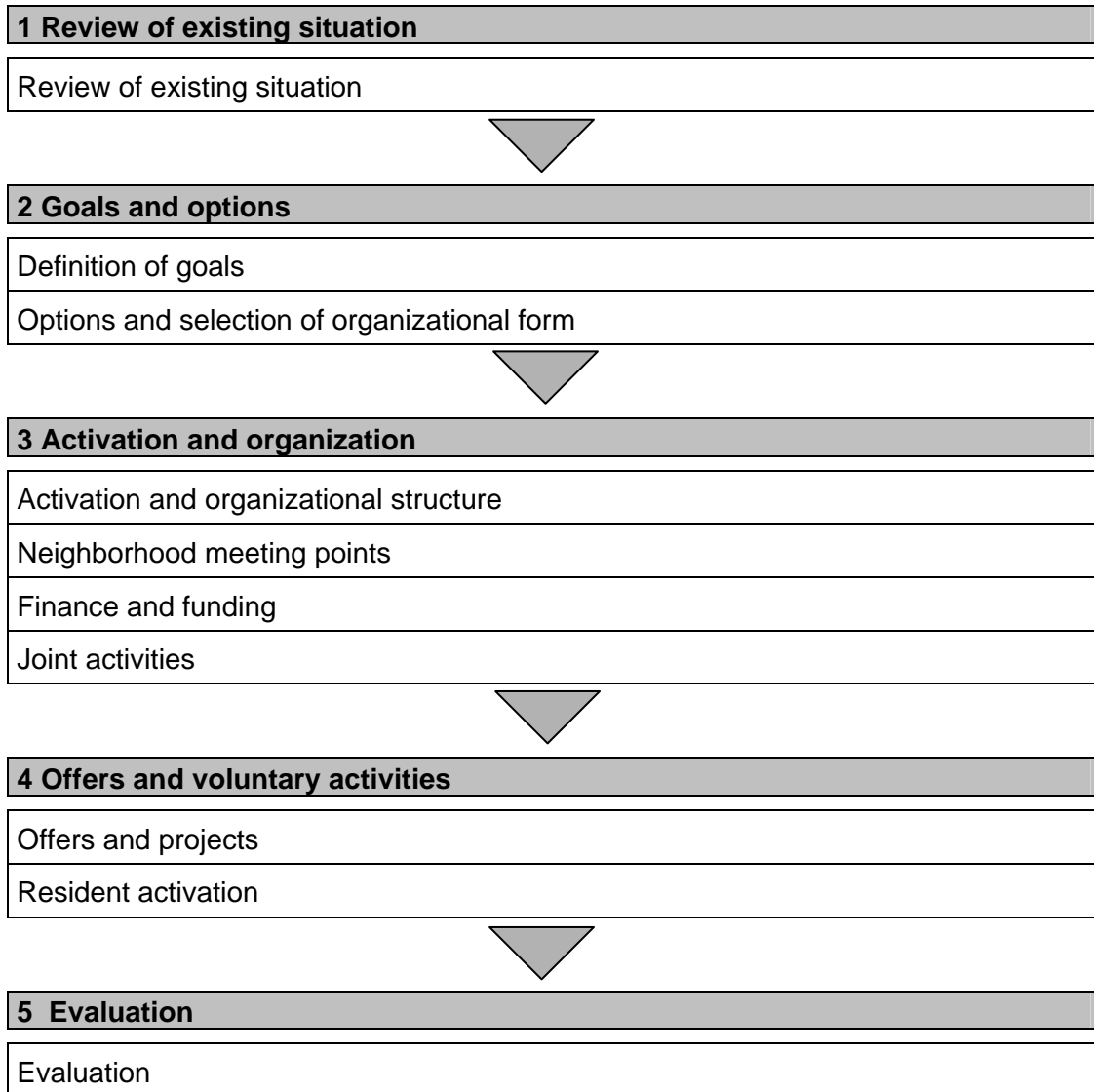
In addition, the neighborhood support organizations allow considerable cost-cutting potential to be unlocked (reduced fluctuation, lower maintenance costs) and generate additional finance (public funding, donations).

All told, neighborhood support organizations thus constitute a variable and simultaneously effective social management instrument for housing companies which can be adjusted to meet the specific social conditions and living conditions of the individual residential areas as well as the individual financial and organizational resources of the housing companies. At the same time, it is able to activate residents' voluntary social commitment.

### ***Five-phase model as the basis for project planning***

A model dividing the process into five general phases has been created to structure the implementation of neighborhood support organizations:

**Fig. 1 Five-phase model for the establishment of neighborhood support organizations and the definition of their activities**



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### 3 Practical implementation

The research report including the catalog of criteria offers small and mid-size housing companies in particular a practical guide to the implementation of neighborhood support organizations and the provision of support. It contains valuable information and ideas for the entire development process from preliminary considerations through to the activation and structuring of the organizational as well as project evaluation. The discussion and evaluation of the experience gained by different companies testifies to the range of options available in the individual phases of the process. The report also serves as a reference and a guide for developing individual solutions by the housing company in the light of the specific conditions in which it operates.