Canopy Connection: Oak Park Neighborhood Registry

Where Oak Park Neighborhoods Grow Together

Program Guidelines

Purpose

The Canopy Connection recognizes and supports Oak Park's neighborhood groups that are actively working to strengthen local engagement, build community pride, create neighborhood identity, and collaborate with the Village.

Registered neighborhoods gain access to tools, resources, and learning opportunities that help them organize, communicate, and connect with Village staff and one another.

Participation is voluntary and open to all Oak Park neighborhoods that meet the requirements listed below. The program includes three tiers—**Acorn**, **Sapling**, and **Mighty Oak**—representing a group's scale and level of engagement.

Program Administration

The *Canopy Connection* is administered by the Village of Oak Park Neighborhood Services Department through the Neighborhood Partnerships Division. Staff provide technical assistance, training, and facilitation support to help neighborhoods build capacity and foster collaboration.

Program Structure

The Canopy Connection includes three tiers: Acorn, Sapling, and Mighty Oak. Each tier is designed to reflect a neighborhood's organizational capacity and level of engagement. While neighborhood size may inform tier placement, tiers primarily reflect leadership structure, participation depth, and program readiness.

Tier	Organizational Stage	Typical Neighborhood Scope
Tier 1: Acorn	Emerging / Building Structure	10–20 grouped blocks (~120–300 households)
Tier 2: Sapling	Established / Growing Participation	20–30 grouped blocks (~300–450 households)
Tier 3: Mighty Oak	Mature / High Engagement Capacity	30+ grouped blocks (450+ households)

Eligibility

Neighborhood groups may apply to register under one of three tiers that reflect organizational capacity and level of engagement. While neighborhood size may inform tier placement, it does not solely determine it.

Interested groups are encouraged to consult with Neighborhood Partnerships staff prior to applying to determine the most appropriate tier. If an application is submitted without prior consultation, staff will review the submission and work collaboratively with the group to confirm tier placement before formal approval.

Registration must be renewed annually to maintain active status and eligibility for program benefits.

Neighborhood boundaries may reflect school districts, historically recognized neighborhood identities, or organically developed group areas. Staff will work collaboratively with groups to confirm appropriate boundaries.

Requirements by Tier

Tier 1 – Acorn

- At least 2 Group Leaders representing different blocks
- Group Leaders must reside in separate households
- Each represented block must demonstrate engagement from at least five separate households
- Group Leaders must complete Oak Park University Local Government 101
    - This requirement is not annual but does apply to any new Group Leaders
    - If the curriculum is significantly updated, previously trained Leaders may be asked to attend relevant sessions to remain current
- Group Leaders must participate in quarterly check-ins with Neighborhood Partnerships staff to support planning, connection to Village resources, and shared learning
- Host at least 2 neighborhood meetings per year
- Annual renewal/certification

Tier 2 – Sapling – *Must meet all Tier 1 – Acorn requirements, plus:*

- At least 3 Group Leaders representing different blocks

Tier 3 – Mighty Oak – *Must meet all Tier 1 – Acorn requirements, plus:*

- At least 4 Group Leaders representing different blocks

- Leaders should represent multiple areas of the neighborhood geography to ensure broad participation.

Benefits by Tier

Tier 1 – Acorn

- Neighborhood Registry Toolkit (templates, best practices, and key Village contacts)

- One Village-sponsored mailing per year to neighborhood households

- Recognition across Village platforms (website, E-News, social media)

- Early access to Oak Park University Local Government 101 registration

- Canopy Development Grant eligibility up to $750

- Access to SPARK Grants for neighborhood events[i]

Tier 2 – Sapling

Includes all Tier 1 benefits, plus:

- One Marketing & Communications consultation per year[ii]

- One facilitated Neighborhood Engagement Session per year focused on community-identified priorities (e.g., traffic calming, pedestrian safety, sustainability, infrastructure, or other local concerns). Staff will coordinate cross-department participation when appropriate[iii]

- Canopy Activation Grant eligibility up to $1,500[iv]

Tier 3 – Mighty Oak

Includes all Tier 1 and 2 benefits, plus:

- One additional Village-sponsored mailing per year

- One additional Marketing & Communications consultation per year

- Up to two facilitated Neighborhood Engagement Sessions annually

- Canopy Impact Grant eligibility up to $2,500

  - Matching funds required for awards exceeding $1,500

Canopy Grants

Registered neighborhoods are eligible for tier-based grant funding to support initiatives that strengthen community identity and increase resident engagement.

Tier 1 – Canopy Development Grant

- Up to **$750** per fiscal year.

Tier 2 – Canopy Activation Grant

- Up to **$1,500** per fiscal year.

Tier 3 – Canopy Impact Grant

- Up to **$2,500** per fiscal year.
- Matching funds are required for award amounts exceeding $1,500.

General Grant Provisions

- Each registered neighborhood may receive **one Canopy Grant per fiscal year.**

- Grant awards are subject to available funding and staff review.

- Additional application procedures and requirements will be outlined in the Canopy Grant Guidelines.

Annual Renewal Process

Registered neighborhoods renew annually to maintain active status and eligibility for program benefits. Renewal is done by submitting:

1. Updated Group Leader and membership roster

2. Confirmation of required meetings held

3. Summary of neighborhood activities and outcomes

4. Certification of Oak Park University completion

Renewed groups remain eligible for benefits, resources, and recognition under their current tier. Groups may apply to advance to a higher tier as their membership and activities expand.

How to Apply

Step 1: Confirm Eligibility
Review the tier descriptions and consult with Neighborhood Partnerships staff to determine the appropriate tier based on your group's structure, engagement level, and goals.

Step 2: Complete the Application
Applications can be completed online at TBD.

Applicants will need to provide:

- Neighborhood boundaries and contact information for Group Leaders

- Membership list (minimum required per block)

- Summary of recent or planned neighborhood activities

- Preferred tier of registration

- Acknowledgment of the annual renewal requirement

Step 3: Staff Review and Approval
Neighborhood Services staff will review applications for eligibility and completeness. Groups may be

contacted for clarifications or additional information. Once approved, neighborhoods will receive a confirmation letter, welcome packet, and access to available resources.

Step 4: Annual Renewal
Each registered neighborhood must renew its registration annually by submitting updated contact information, activity summaries, and any supporting documentation to maintain benefits and eligibility.

Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborConnect@oak-park.us
708.358.5410

---

[i] **SPARK Grant Program**

- Supports **registered neighborhood groups**, nonprofits, businesses, and associations in hosting safe, vibrant community events.

- Includes three grant types: **NEW Spark** (first-time/early-stage events), **RE Spark** (long-standing events aligned with Village Board goals), and **SAFE Spark** (public safety and traffic control support).

- Provides **reimbursement** for eligible expenses such as marketing, permit fees, sustainability initiatives, neighborhood engagement activities, and safety services.

- Applicants may qualify for more than one SPARK grant type in the same fiscal year, subject to program eligibility and funding availability.

- **Maximum award per grant type**: Up to $3,000.

- **SAFE Spark** awards may only be received once every three years.

[ii] **Marketing & Communications Consultation**

This one-on-one or small-group session helps neighborhood Leaders develop effective communication strategies to increase participation, strengthen outreach, and build a recognizable neighborhood identity.

Topics may include:

- **Communication Strategy:** Building buy-in from neighbors and sustaining engagement throughout the year
- **Messaging and Branding:** Creating consistent and inclusive messaging that reflects the neighborhood's character
- **Digital Tools:** Using Canva and other free or low-cost design tools to create flyers, newsletters, and social media posts
- **Social Media Best Practices:** Managing group pages, posting schedules, and content moderation
- **Event Promotion:** Crafting outreach materials to boost turnout for cleanups, block parties, and meetings

Consultations are led by Village Communications staff or approved partners and are tailored to each group's needs and communication platforms. Follow-up materials and design templates may be provided after each session.

iii Neighborhood Engagement Sessions

Registered neighborhoods will have the opportunity to participate in structured **Engagement Sessions**. These interactive discussions will be designed to elevate resident voices in shaping neighborhood priorities and informing Village initiatives.

These sessions will serve as an alternative to traditional petition processes, offering a more inclusive, data-driven approach for identifying and addressing local needs.

Through small-group or focus-group-style conversations facilitated by Village staff, neighborhood representatives can share insights, challenges, and ideas related to:

- Traffic calming and pedestrian safety

- Infrastructure and mobility improvements

- Public realm enhancements and placemaking

- Other special projects identified through **Vision Zero** or departmental planning efforts

Feedback collected through these sessions will be documented and reviewed collaboratively by Village staff to:

- Inform equitable prioritization of projects across neighborhoods

- Support cross-departmental coordination and resource allocation

- Strengthen trust and transparency between residents and Village departments

This approach aligns with IAP2 principles by ensuring residents are **involved early in the process**, their perspectives **inform outcomes**, and **feedback loops** are maintained through ongoing communication.