

Neighborhood Courts Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is Neighborhood Court?

Neighborhood Court is an alternative to the traditional Criminal Justice system. Instead of prosecuting the case in Criminal Court, the District Attorney's Office refers appropriate low-level misdemeanor cases to Neighborhood Court. At Neighborhood Court, panelists—qualified residents who live and work in the community where the incident occurred—hear the case in what is called a conference. There are no judges, juries or attorneys. Neighborhood Courts do not determine the guilt or innocence of a participant as all participants have acknowledged or taken responsibility for their actions. Conferences are held at various community locations throughout the County. The panelists use restorative justice principles to problem-solve and address harm caused to the victim and community by the incident. All Neighborhood Court hearings are voluntary and confidential.

2. How do cases get referred to Neighborhood Courts?

If a misdemeanor case is appropriate for Neighborhood Court, the District Attorney's Office will reach out to the person cited. If the person declines to participate, or would like to dispute the incident in question, or there is no contact, the case will proceed to the criminal court system.

3. What happens at Neighborhood Court?

A panel of 3 volunteer residents meet with the participant and victim (if applicable) to discuss the case. The panelist and participant address the harms caused by the criminal violation. Together, the panelists and participants may issue one or more "directives," or actions that repair the harm caused by the incident. Directives can include, but are not limited to: community service, restitution, a letter of apology, research project, or a counseling program.

4. What qualifications do I need?

We ask that volunteers meet a few requirements to ensure that they are familiar with the community and appropriate for this program:

- Reside or work in the community for a minimum of three years and be familiar with different neighborhoods. One year for students.
- Ability to work with others to solve problems.
- Complete a Live-Scan prior to participation and must have no felony convictions or recent misdemeanor convictions. Immigration status will not exclude any volunteer.

- Ability to commit to participation in the program for two years (students one year).

5. What is the time commitment for Neighborhood Court volunteers?

Training is the largest time commitment for Neighborhood Court. Volunteers will be asked to attend a 12 hour training course on Restorative Justice Concepts and the Neighborhood Court process and observe two Neighborhood Court conferences. A conference can take from 30-40 minutes. We ask that volunteers commit to at least 1 conference a month.

- Conferences will be held both during the day and at night.

6. How can I find out more or apply to volunteer?

To find out more, visit our website at <https://datinternet.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/> , email neighborhoodcourts@santacruzcounty.us or call 831.454.2534 and speak to the Neighborhood Court Program Coordinator