

# *Small Budgets & Big Ideas—*

## 10 Tips for Engaging Lifestyle Programming on a Budget





In community management, “lifestyle” is often mistaken for a calendar full of expensive events. But at CCMC, a community management partner serving master planned communities for over 50 years, lifestyle is “the heartbeat of a community”—a way to bring people out of their homes, connect them with their neighbors, and build a sense of belonging that lasts long after the event is over.

Recently Jamie Flores, CMCA and vice president of resident experience, and Lisa Lundskow, CMCA, LSM, PCAM, CAAM, and vice president of community operations, shared practical strategies for building vibrant, engaging lifestyle programs without breaking the bank. Their advice shows how even modest budgets can create meaningful impact when creativity, partnership, and communication come together.

## 1. Understand What “Lifestyle Really Means

Lifestyle programming isn’t just about parties and Pilates. It’s about engagement—creating opportunities for connection between neighbors, residents, and the association itself.

Flores likens lifestyle to a “toolbox” filled with resources: events, clubs, communications, sponsorships, and partnerships that help neighbors connect with one another and with their community. When communities invest in lifestyle, they’re investing in relationships; and those relationships drive pride of ownership, volunteerism, and ultimately, property value.



## 2. Know When It's Time for a Lifestyle Boost

How do you know if your community needs a lifestyle reboot? According to Flores and Lundskow, the clues are easy to spot.

- ▲ **Low engagement**—Few residents attending events, using amenities, or volunteering.
- ▲ **Negativity**—Complaints or conflict dominating social media or board meetings.
- ▲ **Declining appearance**—More violations and less pride of ownership.

When residents stop engaging, the solution isn't more enforcement—it's more connection. Lifestyle programming can reignite pride and positivity in ways that rules and reminders never could.

## 3. Shift from Compliance to Connection

Communities struggling with maintenance or appearance issues often rely on fines and notices to motivate compliance. But Flores recommends flipping the script by turning compliance into community engagement.

**For example, consider the following:**

- ▲ **Yard beautification contests** with small prizes or recognition encourage pride of ownership.
- ▲ **A "Yard of the Month" program** or a "parade of homes" showcases well-kept properties and inspires others.
- ▲ **Educational events**, like landscaping demonstrations or painting workshops, give residents practical tools to improve their homes.

"Compliance shouldn't feel like punishment," Flores explained. "It should feel like partnership."

## 4. Start Small—Creativity over Cost

Great lifestyle programs don't require big budgets; they require creativity.

Some of the most successful CCMC communities build engagement through low-cost, high-impact events:

- ▲ **Stuffed Animal Sleepover**—Kids drop off a favorite toy for a “sleepover” at the clubhouse. Staff snap photos of the stuffed animals “playing” overnight and share them in newsletters the next day. The result? Smiling children, delighted parents, and priceless goodwill—all for almost no cost.
- ▲ **Plant Bingo**—Residents win community-approved plants instead of prizes. It reinforces landscaping standards while adding fun and color to the neighborhood.
- ▲ **Trail or Park Ribbon Cuttings**—Celebrate newly renovated spaces with simple grand reopenings. Include balloons and refreshments and provide a chance for neighbors to gather.

“It’s about creating moments that make people feel connected,” said Lundskow.  
“Even the simplest ideas can have lasting impact.”



## 5. Partner with Local Businesses and Organizations

A tight budget doesn't have to limit creativity when you leverage partnerships. Local businesses love the exposure that comes from sponsoring events or donating prizes. Landscapers might provide plants, restaurants might offer gift cards, or fitness instructors might lead a free demo class.

Municipal partners such as police departments or fire stations can participate in community events. One CCMC community hosts an annual "Nerf Gun War" between police officers and kids—a huge hit that costs little more than a few boxes of foam darts.

Schools and youth programs can also be great collaborators. In one community, students from local art and drama classes help produce an annual "HallowScream" haunted house that draws over 1,000 residents and guests each year.

"Don't be afraid to ask," Lundskow emphasized. "When you invite others in, they feel invested in your success."

## 6. Engage Residents as Co-Creators

Boards don't have to shoulder the creative burden alone. Resident-driven committees are a powerful way to generate ideas, recruit volunteers, and keep programming relevant.

If a permanent committee feels like too much, start with ad hoc groups or focus sessions for specific events. Surveys can also help, but Flores cautions boards to keep them realistic. "Ask questions about things you can actually deliver," she said. "You want to build trust by following through."



## 7. Communicate Consistently

Even the best lifestyle ideas fall flat if no one knows about them. Consistent, upbeat communication builds excitement and anticipation.

- ▲ **Regular e-newsletters** sent on the same day each week help residents know when to expect updates.
- ▲ **Resident spotlights** or contests (like photo-of-the-month) make the newsletter feel personal and engaging.
- ▲ **Event recaps** not only celebrate success but also create FOMO (fear of missing out) for those who missed out, boosting attendance next time.

“Every recap is a chance to remind residents what they’re part of,” Flores said. “You’re not just sharing pictures—you’re telling the story of community.”

## 8. Measure Small Wins and Build Momentum

Building engagement takes time. Early events may draw small crowds, but persistence pays off. Track progress through open rates, attendance counts, volunteer sign-ups, or even social media comments. Share successes with your board and residents to build enthusiasm and justify continued investment.

“As you see more people showing up, more smiles, more volunteers—that’s your proof it’s working,” Lundskow said. “And as that energy grows, boards become more willing to expand the lifestyle budget.”



## 9. Empower Your Management Team

Lifestyle thrives when management and the board operate as partners. Boards can set vision and goals while managers and lifestyle directors handle the execution and logistics.

At CCMC, lifestyle directors build annual calendars and budgets in advance, review them with boards, and adjust quarterly based on feedback. This planning ensures transparency, control, and steady momentum.

For communities without dedicated lifestyle staff, community managers can still integrate engagement through small events, communications, or vendor collaborations. The key is teamwork and open dialogue.

## 10. Focus on the Bigger Picture

Lifestyle is a strategic investment that builds trust, strengthens community identity, and protects home values.

Engaged residents are more likely to maintain their homes, volunteer for committees, and treat neighbors with respect. Boards spend less time managing conflict and more time shaping the community's future.

As Flores summarized: "When residents see their association investing in them, they start investing back. That's when a neighborhood becomes a community."





## *A Little Creativity Goes a Long Way*

Engaging lifestyle programming doesn't require an unlimited budget—it requires imagination, intention, and heart. Whether through a creative partnership or a kid-friendly event that costs next to nothing, the goal is always the same: help residents connect, belong, and feel proud of where they live.

Because when people feel that sense of connection, everything else—compliance, participation, even property values—starts to take care of itself.

At CCMC, that's the power of people-first community management. We don't just manage communities—we bring them to life.



### *Learn more*

Learn more about CCMC's award winning community management and read other valuable educational resources at [ccmcnet.com/life](https://ccmcnet.com/life) or call **239-492-8140**.

