

The background features a warm gradient from light yellow at the top to deep red at the bottom. Stylized botanical illustrations are placed around the edges: top left shows blue and yellow leaves; top right shows purple and yellow leaves; bottom left shows a large purple leaf with yellow and blue patterns; bottom center shows blue and yellow leaves.

Design for the Commons

A TOOLKIT FOR BEAUTIFULLY
INTELLIGENT NEIGHBORHOODS

September 2020
1st Edition

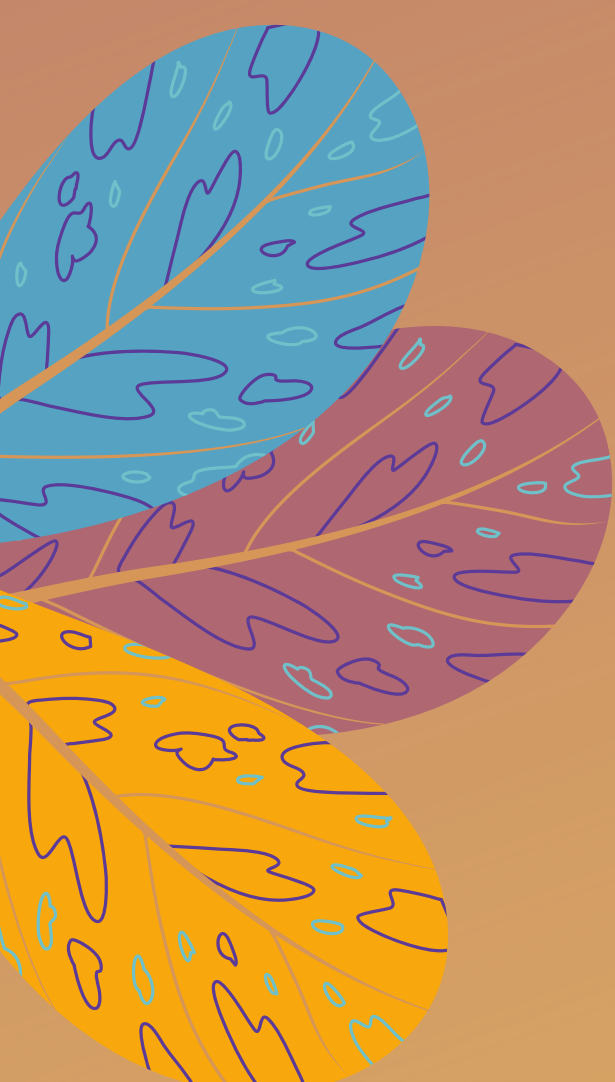


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About this Project

Our mission is to create beautifully intelligent neighborhoods. This means we offer tools that are functional in getting the neighborhood's needs met while being filled with possibility. We find and offer systems where deepening trust and care is a predictable outcome. We do this because we believe that neighborhoods are the fulcrum for meaningful lives. For this end, we have created a zero waste, low cost neighborhood toolkit to empower people to foster care, by design, in their communities.

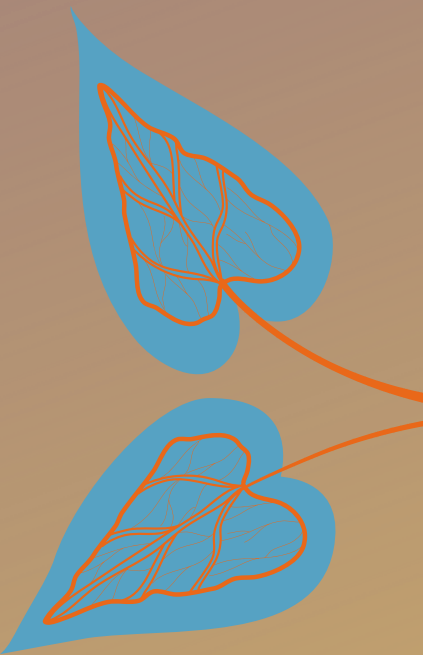
Vibrant communities and cities start with knowing your neighbors. The systems offered in this toolkit result in strengthened community networks and relationships. We offer age-old tools such as neighborhood time banks and savings clubs and new systems such as the Green Chair Initiative to provide a door to an ideal world where care does not lack texture or dynamism.



What are the Commons?



The commons are a set of resources and places that are accessible to all members of society (parks, libraries, air). When we say 'the commons' we are referring to things and places that are held collectively, not owned privately. These are places that foster cooperation, curiosity, and interdependence.

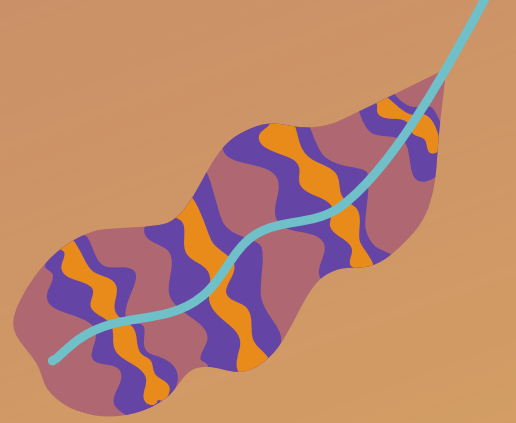


How to Use This Toolkit

The tools presented in this kit are intended to serve as introductory templates for neighborhoods to shape to their needs. Each tool can be adapted to different spaces and scales- from one block to multiple streets. When choosing tools, we ensured there are a range of options that can be used by neighbors new and old or familiar and very unfamiliar. The goal is to offer simple and approachable choices that allow community members to determine which tools are the best match for their budget and capacity.

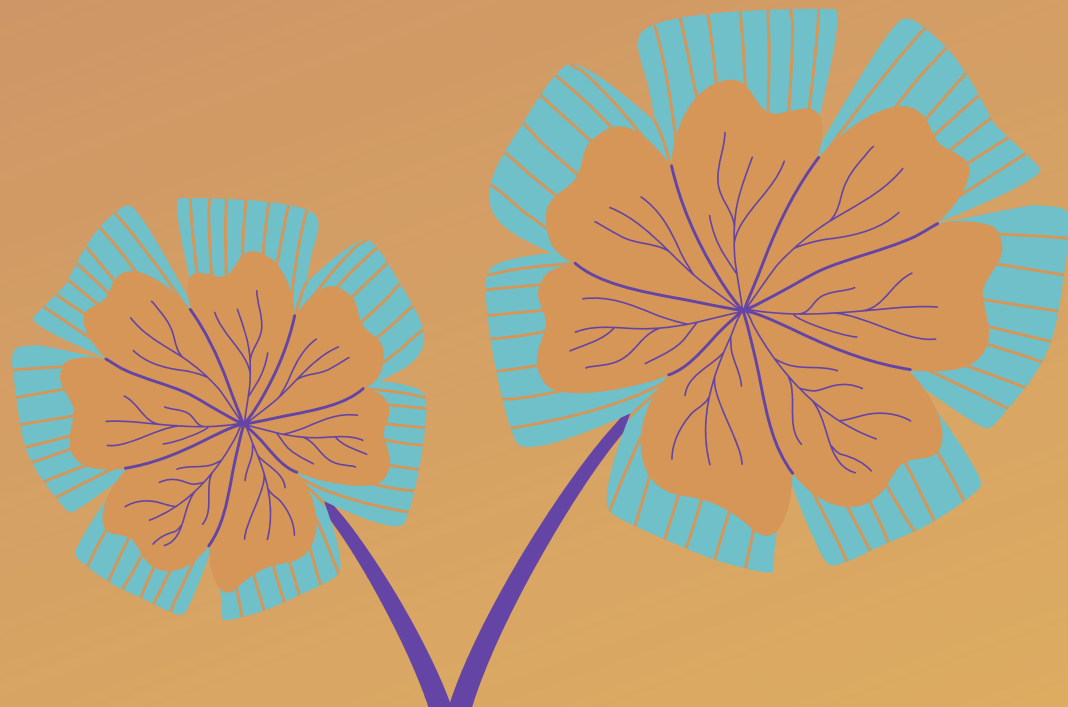
Included in each description is a list of key materials, cost, maintenance, and trust estimates that would be required for each tool. You'll see levels represented by graphic scales, with one dollar sign and a paint bucket indicating the lowest investment and four indicating the highest investment.

Guidelines for Tools

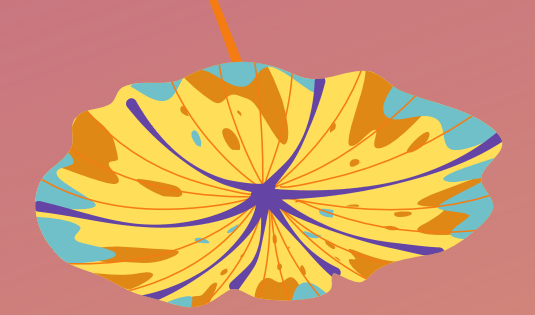


- Reflect and amplify the existing character of the surrounding neighborhood
- Reflect vibrance and intelligence
- Center the everyday neighbor
- Surprise, delight, and reimagine
- Executable in a short time frame

- Consider a range of communities (young children to seniors, single person to large family).
- Unique, Engaging, Safe
- Help neighbors experience joy and ease with each other



Keys to Neighborhood Organizing



Each of these tools will require people who want to make this happen. Here are a few tips for having conversations with your neighbors especially when it gets difficult. For more details on how to facilitate group meetings visit Laird Schaub's detailed and amazing guide on [Key Facilitation Skills](#).

When hosting a meeting:

- Make sure there is an agenda.
- Create clear objectives for the meeting.
- Make sure there is a note taker so everyone can remember what was decided.
- Be present (put away phones and distractions as much as possible).

When dealing with group dynamics:

- Ensure enough time for everyone to add input.
- Try to focus on the connections in everyone's viewpoint rather than the differences.
- Treat emotional reactions as a normal occurrence rather than something to be feared or prevented (we are people, no need to hide it).
- Don't leave anyone behind. There is enough wisdom in any group to reach a solution that works for everyone.

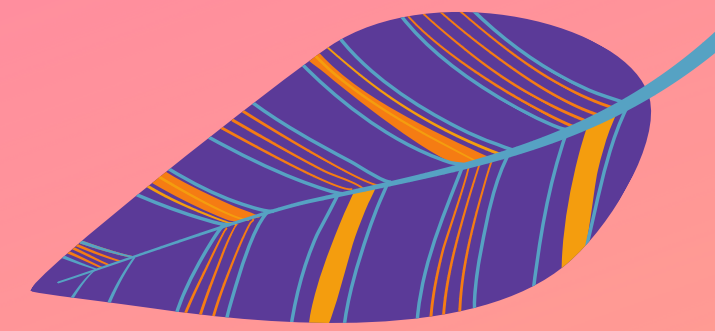




COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES



Guerrilla Gardening



WHAT IS IT

Does your neighborhood have abandoned lots or land that is not being cared for? Often vacant land can be found and cultivated to grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers. (This is especially relevant for neighbors that live in apartment buildings and don't have their own yards). It can be as simple as finding a small patch of land, digging a couple of holes, and planting seeds or a budding plant. This can be a weekly activity to do with a group of neighbors to rediscover the neighborhood and learn more about each other. Also consider planting edible or aromatic plants in front of apartment buildings or in sidewalk islands.

WHAT DO YOU NEED

Seeds. Land. Neighbors. Watering Schedule. That's It!

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

This type of gardening is full of serendipity and completely transforms a walk in the neighborhood.

Cost



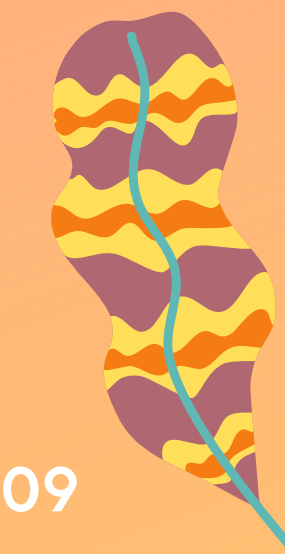
Maintenance



Materials

→ Local Seeds

Trust



A Word from the Neighborhood



Smiling Hogshead Ranch (Queens, NY):

A group of Long Island City neighbors created a “guerrilla garden” on a set of abandoned railroad tracks. It is an agriculture farm and community garden by day, and a social club and cultural venue by night.



Neighborhood Skill Share



WHAT IS IT

Neighborhood gardens and centers can be used as a space for skill sharing on a weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly basis (whatever the neighborhood decides). Neighborhood members can sign up to present their skill to their community. The more practical skills a neighborhood has, the more resilient it can be. This is a chance to learn more about each other, update each other on your lives, and share the things that each of you do well. Make sure to allow children and teenagers to present too!

WHAT DO YOU NEED

A space (the park, a home, an apartment). Food. Neighbors.

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

A simple way to get to know your neighbors with purpose, on purpose.

Cost

\$\$\$\$

Maintenance



Materials

→ Food

Trust





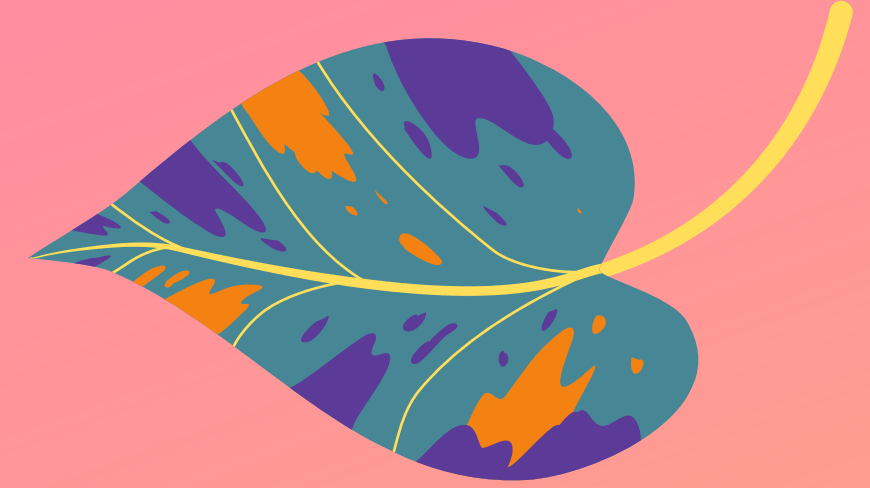
A Word from the Neighborhood

Susquehanna SkillShare (Harrisburg, PA)

A space where Central PA locals can
connect with each other, to share their
knowledge, talents and skills.



Pay It Forward Cabinet



WHAT IS IT

A cabinet or shed to leave items, books, games, or electronics that you no longer need or want to offer to the neighborhood. If you are in an apartment you could use a common area if you get permission from your building. In either case a neighbor should be in charge of donating items that have been there for over one week to the thrift store. Make sure to paint or decorate the structure so that it reflects the neighborhood.

WHAT DO YOU NEED

A cabinet or structure to hold the pay it forward items.

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

This tool continues the circle of giving and reminds us how easily we can fulfill each others needs.

Cost



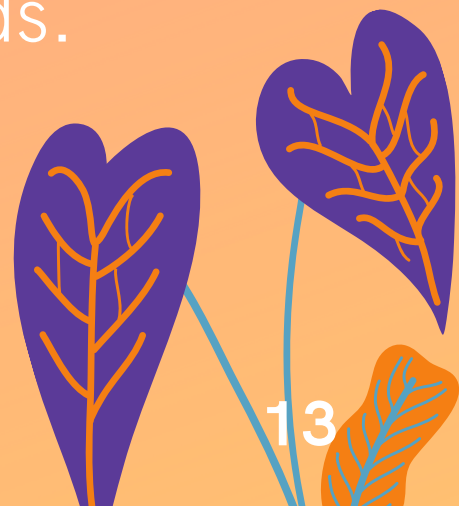
Maintenance



Materials

→ Cabinet/Shed

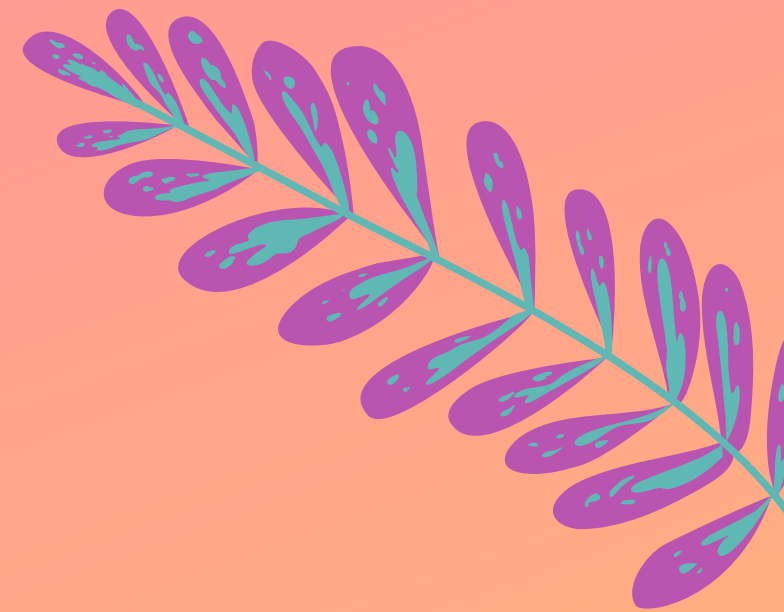
Trust



A Word from the Neighborhood

Little Free Community Cupboard
(Hyattsville, MD)

The University Park's Church of the Brethren started this box so that local neighbors could benefit from the donations of others.





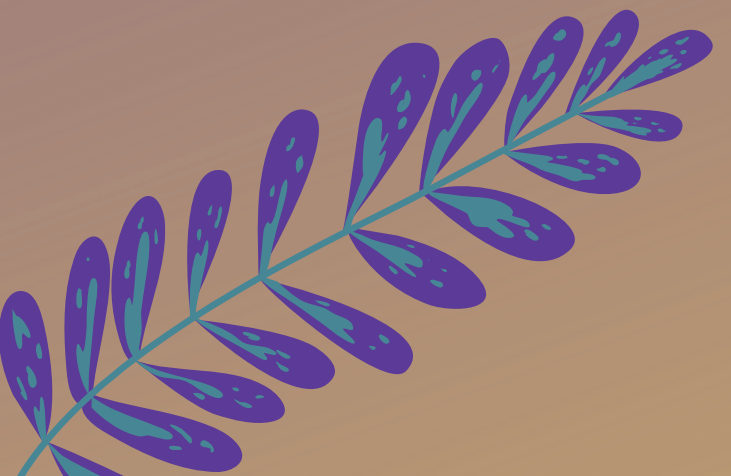

MUTUAL AID TOOLS





What is Mutual Aid?

Mutual aid is a system where people voluntarily offer and exchange resources for mutual benefit. They are controlled solely by the people that benefit from them. For more information on mutual aid visit the [Mutual Aid Network](#).



Time Banking

WHAT IS IT

A support system of neighbors using the exchange of services and skills where the currency is an hour of time for everyone. It serves as an alternative to getting your desires and needs met outside of money. One member of the neighborhood provides a friendly favor to another and records the time they spent doing so. They now have an hour 'to spend' with another neighbor who does a favor for them. And the process continues like so. As each 'transaction' is made, you all can record it in a group online (ex. neighborhood facebook group) or create 'time credits' which can be decorated cowrie shells, decorated cards, or anything the neighborhood can think of that can be easily made or obtained in bulk and reused. Try suggesting this activity with a special group of people like at the neighborhood potluck, or a neighborhood book club before expanding to more people.

Visit [TimeBanksUSA](https://TimeBanksUSA.org) to find out if there is a group near you or learn more about how to start your own.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Analog Credits
→ Online Database

Trust



Time Banking

WHAT DO YOU NEED (CONT.)

This system requires a list of everyone's skills (even teenager's) that they are willing to offer. This information can be held online or a physical album that everyone can decorate and fill in. It can be held in a central location like a trusted neighbors porch, or even taped and updated on a telephone pole. Choose whatever option works for your neighborhood. You'll also need to decide how the neighborhood will keep track of the transactions. If it's an online platform make sure everyone has an account. Or if it's an analog system (like the album) make sure everyone has each other's numbers. Lastly, you could come together and have the children help to decorate the credits that everyone uses. The credit is any material that the neighborhood decides on that can represent time spent.

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

The possibilities for interactions between elders, teenagers, and parents are really what make this system come alive. This system allows for the passing down of crafts and the exchange of joy in brilliant ways.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Analog Credits
→ Online Database

Trust



A Word from the Neighborhood



Kola Nut Collaborative (Chicago, IL)

Mutual support network of people engaged in reciprocal exchange of services, skills, and goods through a timebank where the currency is an hour of time for everyone.



Neighborhood Tool Library

WHAT IS IT

A neighborhood tool library is similar to an actual library in which anything the community chooses (ex. laptops, bikes, lawn mowers) is made available for shared use to individuals on a short term basis for free. A digital or analog calendar can be created and shared within the neighborhood to keep track of booking times.

WHAT DO YOU NEED

You only need agreed upon times that neighbors can share the items, a public calendar to book the items, and the exchange of contact information for neighbors to gain access to the item as needed. Further needs may be necessary depending on what items you choose to share.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Structure to hold items
→ Calendar

Trust



Neighborhood Tool Library

WHAT DO YOU NEED (CONT.)

There will also need to be an agreement or contracts about what happens in the case of damage or when something isn't returned on time. This will vary based on the item and how difficult it may be to get another. We suggest creating agreements on some baseline ways of treating the item to prevent damage as much as possible. If something isn't returned on time it could result in loss of privileges for a week or what the neighborhood decides. For more information about how to develop contracts for community endeavors visit the [Share Starter Document Library](#).

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

This system puts the agency and the care back into our neighborhoods by harnessing the resources that are already available. It's a tool that saves you money and reduces waste all at the same time.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Structure to hold items
→ Calendar

Trust



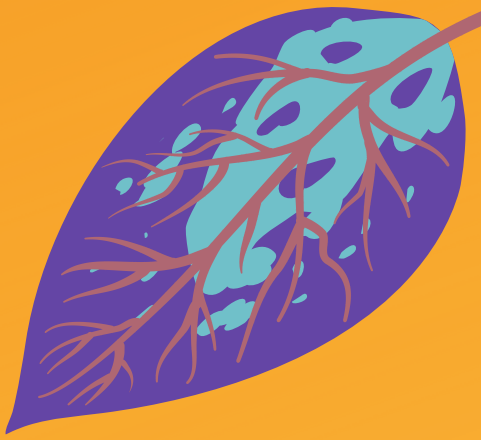
A Word from the Neighborhood

West Philadelphia Tool Library.
(Philadelphia, PA)

The West Philly Tool Library loans tools to community members so they can perform simple home maintenance, tend their yards and gardens, build furniture, start projects, and learn new skills in a safe and affordable manner.



Neighborhood Emergency Fund



WHAT IS IT

This is a fund that neighbors can contribute to to help when any neighbor is in a time of need. The fund could be in a physical container kept by someone the neighborhood trusts or in a credit union account that has signers that the neighborhood trusts. Depending on the needs of the neighborhood you could contribute bi-weekly, monthly, or every three months with an agreed upon amount. Together you all can decide the circumstances that someone can ask to use the fund and how much each is allowed.

WHAT DO YOU NEED

This system requires an agreement between neighbors about the guidelines for when money should be taken out, how much money should be given, and what happens if multiple neighbors need it at the same time. It also requires a safe space to hold the money while it is accruing.

Cost



Maintenance



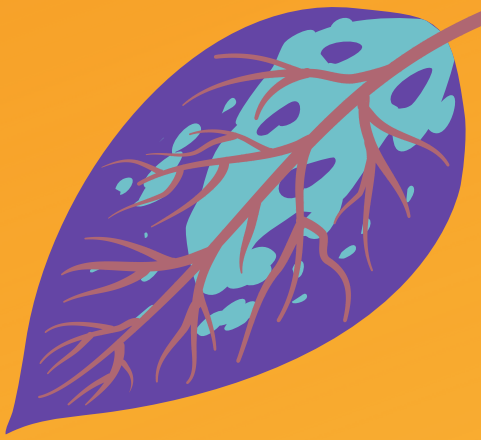
Materials

→ Credit Union account
→ Physical Jar

Trust



Neighborhood Emergency Fund



WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

This is a system that plans for future care. Each time neighbors give, they are reminded that through a little planning it's possible to ensure care permeates our lives. It reminds neighbors to expect the unexpected. Through this system neighbors realize adapting to the unexpected gets a lot easier when you have a group of people who are doing it with you.



Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Credit Union account
→ Physical Jar

Trust




A Word from the Neighborhood



Empire Area Community Emergency Fund
(Empire, MI)

This community center has created an emergency fund for people in the community that have fallen on hard times. While they are an organization you can still look to them for guidelines on how to decide who gets funding.





SAFETY SYSTEMS

Neighborhood Street Medics



WHAT IS IT

A team of neighbors pool resources together to get local first-aid and self-defense training. They become a group of people that the neighborhood can count on and can call in times of need. Find a one size fits all vest or identifiable piece of clothing so that neighbors can recognize the crew throughout the neighborhood and the crew can return the item after their shift. Create a schedule for the crew to be on call in the evenings and on the weekends. Train young people to be a part of the crew as early as you deem appropriate to make the crew regenerative. Allow children to help in creating the identifiable piece of clothing. If possible, allow creating the clothing to be a neighborhood gathering filled with food and good times.

Visit the Paper Revolution [Street Medic Guide](#) for more information about how to get started and find a street medic collective near you.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

- Bright Piece of Clothing
- First Aid Kit

Trust



Neighborhood Street Medics



WHAT DO YOU NEED

Find a local medic collective or Red Cross Training near you that's giving first aid medical training.

Download and follow the self-defense training with the Home Alive curriculum. Pool resources together to acquire a neighborhood first aid kit that is available to multiple homes or enough first aid kits for every home. Most importantly, find a group of people (at least two) who are committed to investing in the safety of the neighborhood and working on a schedule that neighbors can count on. Lastly, find a way for people to contact the medics in times of need. This could be as simple as an exchange of personal numbers or a special line that the neighborhood invests in and can call in times of emergency.

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

Neighborhoods no longer need to solely put their fate in the hands of outside systems to arrive in a timely manner. Instead, they can call on someone in their community for help and count on them to act with urgency and care.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Bright Piece of Clothing
→ First Aid Kit

Trust



A Word from the Neighborhood



Ujimaa Medics (Chicago, IL)

Ujimaa Medics offer trainings in urban emergency first aid response. They teach people how to be the heroes of their neighborhoods and even train them in how to treat bullet wounds.



Green Chair Initiative

WHAT IS IT

The Green Chair Initiative is a project that started in Detroit, MI as a way of increasing safety and community in your neighborhood. The idea is to put brightly colored chairs in your neighborhood to invite people to sit on their porch to look after their neighbors. Another positive outcome, if lots of your neighbors are outside, others might be less inclined to commit crimes. As a neighborhood you can come together to create the chairs and offer the chairs to other neighbors who can agree to sit out on their porch at needed times (ex. when children are walking to and from school). This system invites neighbors to be committed to each other's safety and offers them a way to get involved easily.

Find out more at [Riverwise magazine](#) who did a feature on the system of care in Detroit's Manistique neighborhood.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→ Lawn Chairs
→ Paint

Trust



Green Chair Initiative

WHAT DO YOU NEED

Gather some children in the neighborhood and take them to the hardware store to collect painting supplies. Choose a color that makes sense for your neighborhood and paint the chairs. Tell other neighbors about what you are doing and ask if they would be willing to participate. It is recommended to use lawn chairs that you already have access to. Check with other neighbors to see if they have excess paint before buying new cans.

WHAT MAKES IT BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT

This system is multifunctional because it increases safety in the neighborhood and builds community relationships at the same time. It combines art, laughter, community building, and fun all in one activity. It invites us to use materials found in the house and honors the ability we have to solve our own problems. It reminds us to look out for one another and that we are each other's business.

Cost



Maintenance



Materials

→Lawn Chairs
→Paint

Trust



A Word from the Neighborhood

Green Chairs not Green Lights (Detroit, MI)

The Green Chairs, Not Green Lights Campaign takes seriously the need to end the conflation between surveillance/security and safety. They are asking neighbors to come back to their front porches and to look out for one another.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Conversation Template

This conversation can also be a note in the mailbox where you leave your number or email. Do whatever works for you!


[Access our full neighborhood conversation template here.](#)

USE THIS TEMPLATE TO CONFIDENTLY INVITE YOUR NEIGHBORS TO THESE COMMUNITY BUILDING TOOLS. YOU CAN ALSO USE THIS AS AN ICEBREAKER TO TAKE NOTES OF SKILLS AND OFFERS/NEEDS FROM NEIGHBORS. DESIGNATE A NOTEBOOK FOR A CONTINUOUS LOG OF THE COMMUNITY'S ASSETS.

"Hello. My name is..... I'm your neighbor just down the street (give details so the person gets to know who you are.) I am trying to get some folks together to share skills with each other (or insert whatever you are trying to do.) By working together as neighbors we will be able to improve the place we live and offer help when we can. If you're interested in that I'd love to ask you about some things you like to do and some skills that you like to give to others."

"I'm going to read off this list which is kind of long so bear with me. I'll read the skills and you can just say 'yes' when I get to one that you have. Be sure to include skills you learned from an organization, work, personal hobbies and share any that you think may be useful but is not listed."

Inspiration and Resources

A decorative graphic of two stylized leaves with orange, yellow, and teal stripes, located on the left side of the slide.A decorative graphic of a branch with yellow leaves, located in the top right corner of the slide.

Many thanks to the team at designfordistancing.org for inspiring this project.

TOOLKIT RESOURCES

[Asset Based Community Development Institute Toolkit](#)

[Big Door Brigade Mutual Aid Toolbox](#)

[Find more of these tools being used around the world and possibly near you!](#)

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Public Health Recommendations



We encourage organizing with neighbors with everyone's safety in mind. Please wear masks if gathering at a local park or common space and maintain a six foot distance apart. Ensure any shared items are properly disinfected.

We also encourage creating notes that can be slipped into mailboxes or doors explaining who you are, what you want to do and leaving your contact information to further coordinate between neighbors.

More tips for organizing effective online community meetings can be found [here!](#)

Even more tips about how to organize safely for mutual aid projects can be found [here.](#)



DID YOU USE ANYTHING IN THIS TOOLKIT?

CONTACT US!

WE'D LOVE TO SEE HOW YOU'RE CREATING VIBRANT
COMMONS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

DESIGNFORTHECOMMONS@GMAIL.COM



Design for the Commons

BUILDING BEAUTIFULLY INTELLIGENT NEIGHBORHOODS

