

## How to Start a Community Swap Event

*A simple guide for neighborhoods, libraries, nonprofits, and local governments*

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### What Is a Community Swap?

A swap event is a free gathering where people bring gently used items they no longer need and exchange them for items others have brought. Swaps help extend the life of useful goods, save residents money, and build community connections.

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### 1. Pick a Swap Theme

Start with **one category of items** to keep the event manageable.

Good established types of swaps:

- Clothing
- Books or puzzles
- Toys
- Accessories (jewelry, scarves, bags)
- Art supplies (specific type or medium)

Starting small makes sorting easier and helps volunteers manage inventory.

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### 2. Plan for Leftover Items

Before you finalize the event details, decide **what will happen to items that remain at the end of the swap**. Planning this early prevents last-minute scrambling and helps ensure everything is handled responsibly.

Common options:

- Partner with a **local nonprofit or thrift store** for donations
- Save items for a **future swap event**
- Send textiles to a **textile recycling program**
- Offer a **“last chance free table”** at the end of the event

Having a partner organization lined up ahead of time makes cleanup much easier.

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### 3. Choose a Location

Look for a **space that is easy to access and flexible, with public transportation** and/or parking.

Good options include:

- Libraries
- Community centers
- Schools
- Faith community halls
- Park buildings

Make sure there is room for tables, browsing, and sorting items. It is best practice if the building already have tables/chairs available for use.

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### 4. Set Clear Guidelines

Clear expectations keep the event fair and organized.

Typical swap rules:

- Items must be **clean and in good condition**
- No broken, stained, or incomplete items
- Limit how many items people can bring (ex: **5–15 items**) or one bag

Post guidelines in advance and display them at the event entrance.

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### 5. Recruit Volunteers

Swaps run smoothly with a substantial volunteer team.

Suggested roles:

- **Check-in table:** accept and review items
- **Sorting volunteers:** organize items by category

- **Floor helpers:** restock tables and assist attendees
- **Cleanup crew:** pack leftover items for donation
- **People counters:** best for those that can't walk around a lot

A helpful rule: **1 volunteer per 20–30 attendees.**

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## 6. Organize the Space

Set up simple stations:

- Welcome / check-in table
- Sorting area (behind the scenes)
- Clearly labeled browsing tables
- Donation or leftovers area

Use signs to make categories easy to find.

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## 7. Promote the Event

Promote the swap **2–3 weeks in advance.**

Helpful outreach channels:

- Community newsletters
- Social media (FB event pages)
- Libraries and schools
- Neighborhood groups
- Flyers at community hubs

Messaging tip: emphasize **free, community and open to everyone.**

Example:

*“Refresh your fashion flair! Come the Bling It On Swap...great style doesn't have to mean something brand new. Sometimes the perfect accessory is already in our community, just waiting for its next moment.”*

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## 8. Run the Event

Typical event flow:

1. Volunteers set up tables and signage (night before or 2 hours before event)
  2. Participants check in and drop off items (on the dot)
  3. Volunteers sort items onto display tables
  4. Browsing begins
  5. Volunteers restock tables throughout the event
  6. Volunteers condense items and break down table as the event goes on.
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## 9. Measure Success

Tracking a few simple metrics can help improve future events:

- Number of attendees
- Number of volunteers
- Number of items swapped
- Lbs of items swapped in/out

Ask participants what type of swaps they would like to see next. Everyone will ask for a plant swap...

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## Quick Tips for First-Time Hosts

- ✓ Start small and simple
  - ✓ Have clear guidelines
  - ✓ Recruit enough volunteers
  - ✓ Plan ahead for leftover items
  - ✓ Focus on **sharing and community—not perfection**
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