



PLANNING A COMMUNITY SWAP DAY: A HOW-TO GUIDE

2026

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide provides a seven-step process for community members or organizations interested in hosting a community swap day. The guide was created to help provide ideas and suggest actions - but it's not a one-size-fits-all process, so feel free to get creative and choose the suggestions that work best for your event.

The recommendations provided in this guide are based on the experience of the City of Ann Arbor's Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI) and non-profit ZeroWaste.Org hosting A²ZERO Community Swaps in an effort to build a circular economy and move towards community-wide carbon neutrality. Learn more about a Circular Economy and A²ZERO [here](#).

A shortened version of this guide is included at the end of the document for quick reference.

Please contact sustainability@a2gov.org with any questions or concerns. Happy swapping!



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01. WHAT IS A SWAP DAY?

Swap days provide opportunities for community members to come together and exchange goods for free. Think clothes, books, decor, small appliances, etc. It's a perfect way to give things you no longer need a new home, instead of sending them to the landfill. A swap is also a great way to find something you've been looking for, without having to buy it new!

At a community swap, anyone is welcome - and there is no need to bring something in order to take something. Leftover items are generally donated to local social service organizations.

Each month, OSI and ZeroWaste.Org host an A²ZERO Community Swap Day with a focus on clothing and other textiles. Additional swaps are held throughout the year in collaboration with other organizations. Learn more about City-led swaps [here](#).

02. WHY HOST A SWAP DAY?

In addition to the environmental and climate benefits associated with reduced production and disposal of goods, swap days:

- **Broaden access** to items for those who might need them
- **Reduce the financial burden** associated with these items
- Help **create more living space** within homes
- **Support** local non-profits
- Foster **social connections** within communities and neighborhoods
- Create a **supportive setting** where community members can learn about the local circular economy



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 1: PICK WHAT TYPE OF SWAP YOU'RE HOSTING

Before you plan the logistics of your swap, it's helpful to figure out the parameters of what you'd like to swap. You can focus on 1-2 types of items, on a general category of items, or have a general swap for any type of item. Here are some options to consider:

General & Household

- Furniture
- Household items and home decor
- Plants, cuttings, and seeds
- Kitchen items and recipe books
- **Holiday decor and gift swap:**
Regifiable items like candles, books, mugs
- **Pet gear:** Toys, beds, leashes, treats (unused/sealed)
- **Mutual aid:** Prioritize needs (diapers, menstrual products, pantry food)

Clothing

- General clothing
- Gender-affirming clothing
- Professional clothing
- Baby and maternity clothing
- Kid's clothing
- Shoes & bags
- Costumes
- Jewelry and accessories



Books, Games, & Office

- Books
- Board games and puzzles
- Toys
- **Office supplies:** Binders, stationery, folders, pens
- **Back-to-school supplies:** Books, clothes, backpacks, pens, notebooks, calculators
- **Teacher:** Books, classroom supplies, decorations
- Art supplies

Zero Waste & Creative

- **Zero-waste starter:** Jars, cloth bags, utensils, lunch containers
- **Upcycle:** Items that have been altered or upcycled
- **Crafting:** Yarn, sewing supplies, craft paper, beads
- **Mystery:** Items are wrapped or bagged; people draw blind picks.
- **Color-themed:** Green for St. Patrick's Day, school colors, rainbow for pride, etc.



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 2: PICK A LOCATION

Confirming a location is a critical step to planning your swap.

The ideal location:

- Has a space where people can drop off items
- Has space to display items
- Is wheelchair accessible

Optional, but nice to have:

- A space to sort items (important for larger swaps)
- Access to bathrooms
- Access to water

For community-led swaps, we recommend a centralized model, where residents drop off items at a set location before and/or during the event. If your swap is held outside, consider selecting a rain date and make sure not to leave items behind in accordance with [City ordinances](#) (Ch. 26, section 2:11). For instance, household items can be placed near the curb once per week for no more than 48 continuous hours and can not create a visual or physical obstruction or danger for pedestrians, vehicle operators, or bicyclists. Items must be clearly labeled as for donation/reuse. The City has the right to remove any items that are in the right of way or have been left out for 48+ hours.



Some Great Locations Include:

- Public parks (book one [here](#))
- Community centers
- School cafeterias or classrooms
- Houses of Worship
- Library meeting rooms (book one through AADL [here](#))
- University student centers or rooms
 - [U of M Room Reservations](#)
 - [WCC Room Reservations](#)
- Thrift stores or coffee shops
- Art galleries or studios
- Local nonprofits
- Apartment complex lounges or courtyards
- Office breakrooms
- A home or backyard (if you're hosting a swap for friends and family)
- As part of a larger event (street festival, flea market, block party, farmers market, etc.)



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 3: PICK A DATE & TIME

Pick a date that you think will work best for your target audience:

Families	Co-workers	University Students
Consider weekday evenings or midday on weekends (10 am - 1 pm or 11 am - 2 pm work well)	Try hosting it during lunchtime on a day when the maximum number of people are working in the office	Go for times between classes in high-traffic areas, or later times on weekends (starting at 12 pm earliest)

Usually, around 3 hours is an ideal length to host a swap, but this will depend on volunteer and location availability. You can also add an hour before the event for donation drop-off only.

Other things to consider:

- Check local event calendars such as the Ann Arbor Observer and the [A²ZERO Swap Day calendar](#) to avoid conflicting with other events.
- Check for national holidays, school breaks, and exam schedules to avoid picking a time when your target audience will be out of town or unavailable.
- Combine with other events happening already (e.g., parties, festivals, fairs, potlucks, athletic events).



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

Ahead of your swap, make a plan for volunteer recruitment and for what to do with leftover items.



Recruit Volunteers:

Depending on how large you want your swap to be, it may be helpful to recruit some helping hands. We recommend using [Sign Up Genius](#) or a similar platform to simplify volunteer sign-up and tracking. **Volunteers can fill several key roles:**

Before the event:

- Setting up the space

Leading up to the event:

- Helping spread the word about your event
- Signing up to bring the needed materials

During the event:

- Intake and sorting of donated items
- Transferring items to the display area
- Tracking simple metrics (# of attendees, # of items swapped) to share with your audience and with OSI

After the event:

- Cleaning up
- Taking extra items to social service organizations or thrift stores if needed



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

If you do not have the capacity to recruit volunteers, consider using a format where people bring back home any of their items that remain at the end of the swap. This could look like:

- A swap in a park where people bring their own picnic blankets to display their items
- A table for each person to display what they've brought

If you're struggling to find enough volunteers, OSI may be able to assist you. Reach out to the Office of Sustainability and Innovations at sustainability@a2gov.org, and/or the Circular Economy Sustainability Coordinator ([find here](#)) with a request for volunteers for a specific day and time. If possible, please provide a volunteer sign-up link that can be shared and a brief description of the event. OSI cannot guarantee that we will be able to find volunteers, but we can help spread the word.



Plan for Leftovers:

Most swaps have items left over. These items can be either donated or picked up by local social service organizations. A list of some of these organizations is on the next four pages. **Be sure to check in advance when these organizations accept donations, what they accept, and whether they offer pick-ups or require volunteer drop-offs.**

If your organization takes donations and would like to be added to the list below, please email sustainability@a2gov.org.



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

****Note that some organizations require you to fill out a form or contact them before donating.****

Organization	What they Accept	Pickup	Drop-Off Location & Hours
Alpha House	☒ Only new items from their Wish List (shelter use: dishes, kitchen supplies, hygiene, etc.)	☒ No	At the shelter (4290 Jackson Rd). Must provide new items—no donated used goods accepted unless via House-N2-Home referrals
Ann Arbor PTO Thrift Shop	☒ Gently used clothing, housewares, furniture, collectibles (clean/dry, assembled furniture)	☒ No	2280 S Industrial Hwy. Donations: Wed 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Fri–Sun 10 a.m.–5 p.m. (weather permitting)
Ann Arbor Thrift Shop	☒ Used clothing , jewelry, books, household items, antiques, small appliances	☒ No	3500 Washtenaw Ave (Arborland). Donations: Mon–Sat 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Sat half-day per signage
Avalon Housing	☒ Accepts only new household supplies for welcome baskets (diapers, cleaning supplies, baby care, etc.). No used goods, furniture, clothing	☒ No	1327 Jones Drive, Suite 102. Supply drives or lists accessed via website or contact Shannon Canniff



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

****Note that some organizations require you to fill out a form or contact them before donating.****

Organization	What they Accept	Pickup	Drop-Off Location & Hours
Delonis Center / Shelter Assoc.	✓ Accepts new hygiene supplies, new socks, backpacks, linens; sometimes prepackaged food/snacks (e.g. tent kits).	✗ No	312W Huron St (Delonis Center). Drop off daily: 6 a.m.–10 p.m. including emergencies (check Amazon wishlist online).
Friends of AADL Bookshop	✓ Books (good condition), CDs (≤2 boxes), DVDs; no lobby drop-off. Donate at their bookshop location only	✗ No	265 Parkland Plaza. Donation hours: Wed–Sat 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Sun 1–4 p.m.
Goodwill Ypsilanti	✓ Gently used clothing, accessories, books, media, housewares, small furniture, electronics (working), toys	✗ Most locations do not pick up	3782 Carpenter Rd, Ypsilanti. Open for donations during store hours (~10 a.m.–7 p.m. Mon–Sat; 12–6 p.m. Sun). Call ahead for specifics
House by the Side of the Road	✓ Clothing , linens, small household items, toys, books, shoes, bedding (good condition)	✗ No	1327 Jones Drive, Suite 102. Supply drives or lists accessed via website or contact Shannon Canniff



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

****Note that some organizations require you to fill out a form or contact them before donating.****

Organization	What they Accept	Pickup	Drop-Off Location & Hours
House N2 Home	☒ Furniture , beds/mattresses, appliances, household goods, linens, toys, kitchenware, books (in good condition)	☒ Yes—free pickup for large items by arrangement (email donatefurniture@h ousen2home.org)	Arrange per email; typically at donor home but drop-off details via coordination
Jewish Family Services (JFS)	☒ Household goods , furniture, gift cards, hygiene supplies, classroom materials, new/used → supports refugee RISE program	☒ Free pickup by arrangement (furniture or household items) Email Patty Benson at pbenson@ comcast.net	JFS accepts In Kind donations, but you have to contact them first using their form.
Kiwanis Thrift Sale	Clothing , furniture, electronics, books, tools, housewares, sporting goods in good condition	☒ Free pickup by arrangement (large items)	100 N Staebler Rd, Ann Arbor — Drop-off Saturdays 9 am–1:30 pm (weather permitting)
Michigan Foster Care Closet	Clothing (preemie– teen), shoes, school supplies, hygiene products; no used stuffed animals, books, luggage, furniture	☒ No	Scio Township / Ann Arbor area — Donations accepted 2nd Saturday of each month ; no appointment needed



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 4: PLANNING & LOGISTICS

****Note that some organizations require you to fill out a form or contact them before donating.****

Organization	What they Accept	Pickup	Drop-Off Location & Hours
Purple Heart Foundation	Clothing , cars, cash—tax-deductible options; focuses on vehicle donations but also wardrobe items	☒ Yes—vehicle pickups scheduled online via towing service	Nationwide charity; local contact through online scheduling platform (not Ann Arbor-specific)
ReSupply	Furniture , appliances, clothing, boxes, bags—accepts nearly anything; handles logistics	☒ Yes—pickup within 24–48 hours, disassembly and hauling provided (fee-based)	Nationwide pickup service; items are delivered to charities in Ann Arbor area via Resupply
SCRAP Creative Reuse Ann Arbor	Craft & office supplies, fabric, paper, film canisters, corks; max 3 boxes per donation, no bags	☐ No	4567 Washtenaw Ave, Ann Arbor — Walk-in Thursdays 11 am–4 pm ; other days by appointment only
ShareHouse (Ann Arbor)	Furniture , décor, books, linens, housewares; rejects damaged items, TVs, car seats, stained clothes; no undergarments	☐ No	5161 Jackson Rd — Donations Mon–Fri 10 am–5 pm, Sat 9 am–4 pm ; no appointment needed



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 5: ADVERTISE YOUR EVENT



RSVP System:

We recommend collecting RSVP's ahead of your event to gauge interest and the effectiveness of your outreach strategy.

Here are some examples of RSVP systems you could use:

- [Luma](#)
- [Eventbrite](#)
- Facebook Events
- Instagram Events
- [Ticket Tailor](#)
- [Humanitix](#)



Flyer Creation:

Create a flyer for email and social media outreach. We recommend using Canva or a similar design tool.

Include the **date, time, and location** of the swap day, the **purpose of the event**, who is **organizing it**, any **volunteer or participant sign-up forms**, a **place to find more information**, and **contact information** for questions. Make sure to let people know **what is and is not accepted** at your swap in any outreach.



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 6: DAY-OF EVENT

Below is a list of things you might consider bringing to your swap. Don't be intimidated by this list! You can have a very simple, small-scale swap in your office breakroom or on picnic blankets in the park, so most of these items are optional.



Supply List:

For transport and setup of materials:

- Dolly and/or wagon
- Signs pointing people toward your swap

If you're doing sign-in:

- A tablet, computer, phone, or clipboard and paper for checking in guests and collecting metrics (if applicable)
- Information about your organization and upcoming events

If you have an intake table for items and want impact data:

- Luggage weighers to weigh items (such as clothing)
- A spreadsheet for tracking the types and numbers of items

For displaying donations:

- Clothing racks, shoe racks, and hangers
- Tables (if not available at the location)
- Starter items (it can be helpful to collect some items in advance, either leading up to the swap or in the hour before the swap starts, to ensure early attendees have items available to them).
- Pop-up changing tent and mirrors for trying on clothes
- Signage and table cloths for tables



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 6: DAY-OF EVENT



Supply List Continued:

If you're displaying data about environmental and/or social impact:

- Chalk and chalkboards
- Displays about environmental impact

For ambiance:

- Speaker and music playlist
- Food for volunteers and/or attendees

For safety and compliance:

- Fabric disinfectant spray
- Hand sanitizer
- Volunteer waiver forms



Event Flow:

Set Up:

Arrive at your location **at least one hour** prior to the event. Set up the following:

- A check-in area where you can greet and sign in participants (optional)
- An area for accepting and sorting donations
- The "floor" area where you will display donated items, ideally separated into categories



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 6: DAY-OF EVENT

During the event:

Greet participants as they arrive, directing those with items to the donation area and those who have come to swap to the floor area.

Sorting Area:

- Look through items while the person donating is present, in case there are any items you are unable to accept
- Keep an eye out for dangerous and unsanitary items such as hazardous waste or weapons
- Track what types of items are being donated and/or their weight (optional)
- Once items have been accepted, designate volunteers to take them to the floor area and put them in the correct category if needed (more applicable for larger swaps or clothing swaps)



03. HOW TO HOST A SWAP DAY

STEP 7: REPORTING

Reporting is optional, but can help you understand the impact of your event. A²ZERO would love to know about your swap! Please fill out [this form](#) so we can keep track of how many swaps our community is doing. If the form is completed before the event, we can help advertise. If you track data at your event, please reach out to sustainability@a2gov.org with this information so we can add it to our city-wide swap metrics.

Here are some metrics we recommend tracking:

- 1 Attendance Numbers
- 2 Amount/pounds/type of items collected
- 3 Amount/pounds/type of items taken
- 4 Participant Experience (through a post-event survey)
- 5 Volunteer Numbers and Hours



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

01

Does OSI help organize the swap and provide volunteers?

OSI can assist in event organization on different levels depending on the event. We can typically meet with you to answer questions, assist with advertising, and help find volunteers. We may also be able to connect you with specific resources or relevant people.

02

How can I prevent unwanted donations at my event?

Make sure to communicate clearly before the event what will and will not be accepted. During the event, have a volunteer/event organizer vet each donation that comes in. Be sure not to accept any items that you do not have a plan for (including hazardous materials, large items, and dangerous items).

03

What if no one RSVPs for my event?

To get a good turnout, you may want to consider posting to local Facebook groups such as Buy Nothing groups. You can also ask for your event to be posted and shared through the Office of Sustainability and Innovations channels. Make sure to share your event with your community, whether that is your neighborhood, place of worship, school, or another group.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

04

Do I have to advertise my event outside of my community?

Swap events can be successful whether they are open to the public or meant for a specific target audience. If your event is taking place somewhere that has a built-in community, such as a school or a neighborhood, it may not be necessary to promote your event to the broader community.

The further you advertise, the more likely you are to have a good turnout, but keeping the attendance within your community may give your event a more personal feel, and this could be a great chance to expand relationships within your established community. How you advertise is up to personal preference!

05

How far in advance do I need to plan my event?

You should begin planning your event at least three weeks in advance, but preferably six weeks in advance. If you are asking organizations like Kiwanis to pick up leftover items, they typically need at least three weeks advance notice. You also want to save enough time to get the word out and recruit volunteers!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



[A2ZERO Neighborhood Swap Day Page](#)



[Flyer Template](#)



[Notify us of Your Planned Swap Day](#)



[Give us Feedback on Your Planned Swap Day](#)

The Circular Economy is an economic system that generates value by promoting activities (e.g., reusing, repairing, sharing, and lending) that give goods and resources a new life or extend their useful life. Strategy 5 of the [A²ZERO Climate Action Plan](#) is to change how we use, reuse, and dispose of materials, moving Ann Arbor toward a more circular economy. To learn more about the circular economy in Ann Arbor, [click here](#).



