6 Ways to Start Sharing

What do you do when you want to start sharing resources, but your community's not into it?

by Stephanie Smith
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Neighbors in Lake Oswego, Oregon hold a potluck block party and swap meet.

Photo by [Sean Dreilinger](#)

Resource-sharing can be deeply fulfilling, but also frustratingly difficult, especially at the outset.

On a recent blog post, someone asked me, "What do you do if you live in a conservative Midwestern town, not a hip coastal city, where sharing is seen as a threat or a huge no-no? I've had Midwesterners tell me, oh, no, people will never [share cars](#). Or if you share tools, someone will steal them or break them. That's the mentality. How do you overcome this?"

Great question! How do you begin? If you happen not to be in one of those hotbeds of sharing innovation like Portland, Berkeley/Oakland, or Brooklyn, how do you start sharing (and with whom) in a way that gives you the most chance of success?

Here are a few ideas on getting started…

First, get in tune with the sharing that already happens around you. Sometimes we don't have to buck trends or pester neighbors in order to start sharing. Remember when you gave a friend a ride to the airport? Or shared oranges from your tree with a next-door neighbor? Or participated in a bake sale at your church? Or even checked a book out from the library? Not everyone formalizes it by calling it resource-sharing, but [we share informally all the time](#). Notice these sharing behaviors; champion them; build on them.

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Second, decide if you're a natural starter, or a joiner. To get resource-sharing beyond the 'borrow a cup of sugar from a neighbor' stage requires a bit of research, planning and oversight. Not to mention some cajoling. Are you the kind of person who enjoys spearheading this kind of effort? If so, dive in. If not, consider partnering with someone who is. But don't worry. Once a sharing group ([a childcare co-op](#), buying club, tool lending library) is up and running it needs less "starting" and more "tending." Many groups who reach this point choose to spread the ongoing management responsibilities among members.

Third, save time and start efforts with people and institutions that do not need to be convinced.

This idea makes sense especially for folks in rural areas. Many institutions like churches, schools, community centers, and libraries hold values—and have actual physical space—that supports sharing. Develop sharing programs inside these strongholds and work outwards.

Fourth, use saving money as a reason for getting started. Few can resist this practical excuse to start sharing. Show friends or neighbors, on paper, how much money you'll all save if you share.

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Fifth, sit down together and talk. Face time (especially over food) is the key to community-building and neighborhood-based resource-sharing. Have a potluck! Sit down with a few neighbors, extended family members or friends, share a meal, and simply talk about this topic. You'll likely be amazed by the ideas that come up, the feelings of goodwill that arise, and the sense of rightness that will emerge from this experience, as if everyone is taking a deep breath—ahhhhhhh. [We humans are communal by nature](#), and this may very well feel like coming home.

And finally, stay inspired. Creating a resource-sharing based society will take time. The more passionate we are about the benefits of resource-sharing and community-building, the more stamina we'll have.

Got more tips on getting started? Let us know!

Stephanie Smith is a contributor to [Shareable.net](#), an architectural designer, social entrepreneur, and author interested in alternative communities, radical economics, and post-digital design. She recently started a barn-raising group in her community.