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## How to Start a Neighborhood Bartering Club

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*Yes we can!*

**A great way to save money and create connections with neighbors is to start a neighborhood bartering club.**

*A **How-to Guide** for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek*



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## How to Start a Neighborhood Bartering Club

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A great way to save money and create connections with neighbors is to start a neighborhood bartering club. You and your neighbors can trade things that everyone needs, create a close-knit community, and come out ahead at the end of the month!



**W**e already barter everyday — when we take our turn in a carpool, baby-sit the kids of the woman who sometimes baby-sits ours, even trade baseball cards. Bartering is simply trading for goods and services rather than exchanging money. If you have something that I want or need and I have something that you want or need, we can barter through a bartering club instead of going to a store or a service provider and using cash.

There are many types of bartering clubs. Some are simply set up for “one to one” exchanges in which people trade directly with one another to get things they need. Other bartering clubs actually use a “special money” that people exchange for good and services. One national program called “Time Dollars” allows people to earn “dollars” for every hour of service they perform. They can then use these “dollars” to “buy” services for themselves and their families — all the while, no real cash has been exchanged.

### What Types of Things Can We Barter?

As long as someone needs it, any item in your home or any service you or your family can provide could be bartered. For example, you can swap “goods” like clothes, toys and furniture. Or you can swap “services” — things you can do for one another. If you need the tires replaced on your car and know that a certain person can do it and that person wants some after-school Spanish tutoring for his daughter, the two of you could trade services. Goods and services can also be changed with each other. For example, one person could fix a tire for someone who gives him or her a used computer.



### Example “goods” to barter

- Old clothes that are in good shape
- Toys and sports equipment
- Instruments, jewelry, artwork, and homemade crafts
- Furniture and computers
- Lumber or firewood
- Anything you might find in your attic or basement

### Example “services” to barter

- Making repairs
- Tutoring and other homework help
- Babysitting and childcare
- Food preparation and serving
- Gardening and yard work
- Entertainment
- Anything you or your family can do

## Starting a Bartering Club

### Finding members

First, find people who are interested in participating in a bartering club. Talk to neighbors and even local organizations and businesses about the idea. Find out what’s important to them — is it saving money on goods like kids clothes? Getting to know neighbors better? Finding services they can’t afford? This will help you decide whether a bartering club that focuses on goods, services, or both is best for your neighborhood.

You can start your bartering club with just a few people who are willing to exchange goods and services or as many as you wish. The more people involved, the greater the variety of goods and services that can be exchanged. Give people ideas about the kinds of things they could both give and receive through membership in the bartering club. This will help them understand the benefits of participating.

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## Holding an initial meeting

Once you have a core of people interested, explain bartering and hold a meeting to discuss what everyone would like to happen.

Once you've agreed on the structure (see one-to-one structure below) and roles, you're ready to start making a signup list. People who participate in your first meeting should write their names and contact information along with what they need and what they are offering to exchange. Everyone should be charged with finding more people to join the club so that your list can continue to grow.

Make sure that you have one or two people who have agreed to serve as list coordinators between the first and second meeting. You may want to make the club's next meeting a "general swap" as a way to continue to bring people into the club (see description of general swap in next section).

Before everyone leaves, agree on a time and date for your next meeting to discuss how things are going. Decide on how often you'd like to meet (once a month will probably be fine).

## One-to-One Bartering Structure

This is the simplest bartering structure and likely the one you will want to suggest to your group at the first meeting.

- The bartering club maintains a list of members that includes members' names, phone numbers, addresses and the goods or services they are both looking for and willing to exchange. When new members join, they are added to the list. This way, the club keeps up a "Goods and Services File" that can be checked when someone wants to make a trade.
- One or two contact people are responsible for maintaining the "Goods and Services File" and cross-checking the list regularly to see if there is a match: someone who wants something and someone else who has it to trade. One person should be a "go-between" that manages the trades. While members may want to rotate and share these responsibilities, it works best if there is one phone number that people can call to try to set up trades. If no one is comfortable using their home phone number as a central number, the club should consider whether a local community organization will help out and provide the number.

- Trades are made in the following ways:

- When someone wants something, he or she calls the contact person(s) and says what he or she is looking for and what he or she has to give away.
- The contact person will then check the "Goods and Skills File" and call someone on the list or wait for someone to call who could be a match. Then, they will contact the first caller, tell him or her what the possible deal is and ask if he or she is interested. If that person is not interested, the contact person hangs on to the request until he or she can find another match. If the person is interested, the contact person will then give out the phone number of their potential trade partner and let both people work it out for themselves.
- Some clubs also have a general "swap" once a month for goods only. The members decide on a theme (winter clothes, furniture, toys, etc.) and members are invited to bring their goods that fit into that theme to a central location and exchange directly with each other.

***"Don't assume anything. Agree on the details of exactly what services will be provided or what goods will be traded."***



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### Tips for Successful Bartering

The challenge of bartering is making the right exchanges. It can be difficult for people to determine the value of the goods and services to be traded and what makes for a “fair trade.” This can leave members with hurt feelings and sometimes discourage them from getting involved in the club. Most confusion or problems arise from trades of services. Here are some tips — mostly service-related — to share with members in order to make sure that everyone feels good about their trading and involvement in the bartering club:

- Don't assume anything. Agree on the details of exactly what services will be provided or what goods will be traded. Make sure you both have the same expectations. If you feel a need, create a written agreement.
- Protect trust within the bartering club by making sure the goods you trade are in good shape. If you are receiving an item, check it thoroughly to make sure you get what you were expecting.
- Don't take on tasks you know you aren't sure you can accomplish. Always keep the receiver of the service informed of your progress.
- If you are receiving a service, carefully explain and supervise the work that is to be done. Don't be caught with a completed job that is not what you expected.
- Make sure you are comfortable with the person providing the service. You may want to meet them ahead of time to make sure.

### A Bartering Club in Battle Creek

Teresa had three teenage daughters who loved to dance. That meant a closet full of beautiful — and expensive — prom dresses, and three young ladies who thought they needed something new to wear to each event. As a member of the board of her local community house, Teresa shared her passing frustration with other parents on the committee and discovered they all shared this frustration. The group hit upon the idea of using some empty space at the community house as a “community closet” where neighbors could bring their lightly worn prom dresses and other clothing and exchange them for clothing items growing kids and families might need. Now, when her daughters need a new gown they have a huge selection (and not an older sister's hand-me-down!) and feel good that their “old rags” are being loved and enjoyed by someone new.

*Starting a bartering club can make life better for your family, your neighbors, and your community.*

### National Resources

*The Bartering News* — a quarterly newsletter for bartering clubs that has a lot of information and advice. Order by writing to Bartering News, PO Box 3024, Mission Viejo, CA 92690

**Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.**

*Source: Bartering with James Harvey Stout*



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*Yes we can! is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. Yes we can! is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.*

*For general questions about Yes we can!, call 269-969-2228 or visit [www.wkkf.org/yeswecan](http://www.wkkf.org/yeswecan). To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.*

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