

# Mutual Aid: How to Build a Network in Your Neighborhood

Thank you for being open to creating a mutual aid network in your region. We need each other a lot in this moment. Here is a template for what we are up to in Medford and Somerville, Massachusetts, USA. Of course, do what suits your neighborhood and take this with a grain of salt! We've been building this plane as we fly it and are learning a lot along the way. We are especially interested in connecting with other folks who are running mutual aid networks: this is a moment of experimentation where we can learn a lot about setting up the systems that we need.

**Curious about what other places are doing this! We are making a slack for mutual aid network organizers, [join here](#), we'd love to have you.**

This document includes:

- [Our Goals](#)
- [Structure](#)
  - [Needs Matching](#) (more one off connections)
  - [Google Groups](#) (for distributed, ongoing self-organizing)
  - [Neighborhood Pod Building](#) (growing infrastructure for neighbors to look out for one another)
- [Roles](#)
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***\*\*NOTE: This document is living and changing! Check back for updates as people ask questions and we keep figuring things out as we build it. Also feel free to reach out with questions or to talk one on one! Hotline: 339-545-1315 \*\****

## 1. Goals

Crises times can make us feel like each person has to look out only for themselves -- in reality, we know we have better chances if we stick together and support one another. Knowing that some of us may not be able to leave our homes much and certainly not go very far, we are working to build some structure locally - even block-by-block - to care for one another.

Our vision includes the following ([read the rest of it here](#)):

- Everyone has something to offer and everyone has things that they need
- Needing things is not a personal failure- we are living in a profoundly unequal society without safety nets. This is not your fault AND we believe in taking collective responsibility for getting everyone through times of crisis.
- This is an experiment- no one knows everything but together we know a lot
- All flourishing is mutual

We are inspired by groups like [Mutual Aid Disaster Relief](#), [Common Ground Collective](#), and [Occupy Sandy](#). We also believe that mutual aid will only get us so far, and are acting in

solidarity with emergent social movements demanding debt relief, rent strike, and freeing folks in prisons and detention centers.

## 2. Structure

We have three main structures we are working to build out:

### **Needs Matching:**

We have a [google form](#) that autofills a [spreadsheet](#)<sup>1</sup> where folks can make offers. We have made the spreadsheet public so that anyone who has a need can just reach out directly to people who have made that offer. This way, we minimize the situation where folks with needs are not stuck waiting around for someone to respond to them, and instead providing options for them to look through and reach out to. Our spreadsheet is hard to look through right now, check out [Tufts Mutual Aid](#) and [Western Mass Mutual Aid](#) for examples we love of how to build this in a way that is more easily searchable.

If someone has a need that isn't offered, they can put it on a [separate public sheet](#) for more specific needs matching, and the coordinators will work to advocate to meet those needs. If someone prefers, they can email us directly (we made a new gmail account for our mutual aid project) or call us (we set up a google voice [hotline](#)). We will make sure to match their needs from the offers listed, or do our best to advocate.

Lastly, we made a venmo (cash transfer app) account that we have been publicizing -- people who need cash can, of course, directly ask folks who've offered money, or they can reach out to coordinators and we will transfer \$\$ to them. We have been recording our [money transactions](#) for transparency. **If you have better ideas on how to transfer money, [please reach out!](#) We just hit our venmo limit and are exploring other options.**

### **Google Groups:**

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<sup>1</sup> Nerdy spreadsheet things here!

Here's what we did- the survey plugs out into a document that we named MAMAS Offerings \*\*\*BACKEND\*\*\*. This document is private, only editable and viewable by some core folks! Then I created a second document, publicly viewable and non-editable, and put into cell A4 this formula

```
=QUERY(IMPORTRANGE("https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/replace with your backend doc","B4:Z1600"), "Select Col1,Col2,Col8,Col9,Col10,Col11,Col12 ")
```

The url goes to your backend doc, and it is basically saying Import the range from cells B4 to Z600 from the url xyz and paste it here! The query part at the front and back says oh by the way, only import columns 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. You can change the columns that you import and you can change the order of them! Because this sheet is viewable but not editable, no one could go in and change the formula to get the other columns. It's working well so far :) Please email [mutualaidmamas@gmail.com](mailto:mutualaidmamas@gmail.com) if you have more spreadsheet questions or advice about spreadsheets and security.

Google Groups have been conceived of for themed self-organizing, folks getting together to meet larger needs. Members of the google groups post needs to each other, but also organizers triage requests or offers from the inbox to the google group to figure out how to handle them. People can join google groups (example: Childcare, Deliveries, Money) and then people can send their personal need or a need they saw somewhere to a group that has already offered their capacity with that thing! We created these google groups, set the settings to anyone on the web can see the group and anyone on the web can join the group and then posted the links to the google groups in the welcome document.

The screenshot shows the Google Groups interface for a group named "MAMAS Cooks". At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search for messages" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, the word "Groups" is displayed in red. To the left of the main content area is a sidebar with a list of options: "Members", "Messages", "Settings", "Permissions", "Basic permissions", "Posting permis...", "Moderation per...", "Access permissi...", and "Roles". The "Permissions" option is expanded, showing "Basic permissions" in red. The main content area is titled "Group visibility" and contains several settings: "Group visibility" is set to "Anyone on the web", "View topics" is set to "Select groups of users" with a checkmark and "All members of the group", "Post" is set to "Select groups of users" with a checkmark and "All members of the group", and "Join the group" is set to "Select who can join" with a checkmark and "Anyone on the web".

### *Coordinators need to:*

- Create the forms and sheets
- Check the email and responding to people
- Reach out to folks who have made offers to fill the needs of people who need more advocacy, for example those who have called in
- Publicize the forms / spreadsheets / email / hotline number widely - on social media, in neighborhood online groups, at local institutions like libraries / senior centers, where people might call for resources
- Create and administer the google groups
- Answer hotline
- Manage the money through venmo

### **Neighborhood Pod Building**

The idea is simple: facilitating neighbors being in contact with each other block-by-block, if they aren't already, so they have each other readily available as needs arise. We made a guide for people to open up the conversation on their blocks. The way it works is that a few people per area who volunteer will be Neighborhood Point People (NPPs) and they will coordinate on their block. The NPPs will be in communication with each other and with the overall coordinators via

text thread, to share questions, best practices, resources. NPPs can use the offer spreadsheet to get resources for folks on their blocks who may not be plugged into this online world being built.

We get neighborhood point people to mark on the offerings survey that they are comfortable with their name and email or phone number being shared on our map, and then we created a map on google maps with [all of the neighborhood pods](#). More documentation on the mapping [can be found here](#)! Highly recommend coordinating with your neighboring mutual aid networks on going in on a map together to conserve resources (We love you Mutual Aid Arlington, JP, Brookline, Cambridge, Eastie, Dorchester!!) We haven't been too careful with creating neighborhood boundaries, feeling better to double count people than to leave folks out. Shifting from redundancy to **super-abundance** <3

*Coordinators need to:*

- Edit the guide to suit your area, including local resources
- Recruit NPPs
- Publicize the guide and share with NPPs
- Reach out to, check in with, and coordinate the NPPs
- Map or somehow record the pods and share it out so new people can join their pods

### 3. Roles

Here are some of the things we have needed people to do:

- Create the initial documents, edit and update them
- Spread the word!
- Reach out to local orgs so as to not recreate the wheel, but rather coordinate and combine efforts
- Offer translation/interpretation
- Check the email / answer hotline
- Hold the finances / coordinate money
- Be neighborhood point people
- Coordinate the neighborhood point people and act as a support
- Map things, provide tech support, build a website, help people with whatsapp, help organize spreadsheets, etc etc etc.

We have had a small four person core coordination team and have been pulling people into roles as needed!

### 4. Links to editable copies of our docs

**\*\*PLEASE MAKE A COPY OF THESE COPIES FOR YOUR OWN COMMUNITY INSTEAD OF EDITING THESE COPIES DIRECTLY\*\*** (not sure if this is working- please email [mutualaidmamas@gmail.com](mailto:mutualaidmamas@gmail.com) if these docs below aren't working for you!)

[Welcome Page](#)  
[Neighborhood Pod How To](#)  
[Google Form](#)

### Things we are learning along the way

Linking to Mutual Aid Disaster Relief's excellent [Lessons Learned](#) from their work! We are taking notes, 📖📝💜

### Physical Safety + Sanitation Procedures

- We didn't and **should have had a super clear sanitation and safety protocol from the beginning**. It should be at the head of every document and google group and every neighborhood pod from the beginning. Having an informal infrastructure here was not a plus. We've learned a lot, and now share these resources for safe mutual aid distribution:
  - [Mutual Aid Brookline Community Delivery Toolkit](#) - a great toolkit developed by our friends in Brookline about how to do safe community deliveries!
  - [Mutual Aid Disaster Relief Safe Distribution Zine](#) - an awesome zine (print and pass on!) from our friends at Mutual Aid Disaster Relief about safe distribution of mutual aid supplies.
  - [Flying Protocol](#) - not sure who this comes from but we've been using it!
  - [Safe Deliveries to Vulnerable People](#) - GREAT one-pager

### Digital Security:

- Of course norms vary from place to place geographically, but we don't recommend passing out your full name, phone number, and full address to the internet. We are **making sure that we get consent** from neighborhood point people **before** publishing their names and phone numbers so that people can get in touch with them and only publishing the information that we need to.
- Mutual aid organizers **need** to be thinking about digital security and keeping the information that we collect secure. People in our communities are under threat from domestic violence, abuse, and DHS/ICE and we have the responsibility to protect them.
- Here's a [GREAT digital security guide](#) from the Electronic Frontier Foundation for mutual aid organizers.
- We are working on internal resources that support people that want to be using different phone numbers or otherwise keeping their information secure. More coming soon <3  
Digital security is community safety <3

### Values-based wealth redistribution:

- This whole network is built on trust. When someone asks you for money, trust them that they need it and give it to them as you are able to. If this is new for people in your group, it is an important point to talk through together. **Trust the people**.

Data collection:

- Our brilliant friends in Durham [Walltown Mutual Aid](#) included the super simple question on their survey: “will you be able to make rent April 1?” The point of this isn’t to spring into action or do anything necessarily with this info, but knowing an approximate percentage of folks who won’t be able to make rent in two weeks is good knowledge to have for planning ahead. **What kind of data collection would make your work easier later?**

Vision + Values:

- We started [this document](#) when we first got going, but I wish we had taken the time to really get clear and agree on our vision + values before launching everything. Of course you are welcome to use ours for inspiration, but **really think together with your co-organizers about what vision + values you all are setting out with and how you are going to remain accountable to them** as the pace of needs + offers picks up.