

"The irony of the modern market is that it can get a spare part from across the world, but a neighbor still might not know that the mechanic with the skills to fix the car is right next door." – Donnie Maclurcan

What's an Offers and Needs Market (OANM)?

An Offers and Needs Market is a way to discover what kinds of support you can provide to others and what help you might get within a specific community. Each exchange builds a connection, more connections create meaningful relationships, and the collective relationships strengthen existing communities – and maybe even create new ones.



General Context

The Offers and Needs Market (OANM), like [asset-mapping](#), is a way to bootstrap communities by focusing on what passions, skills, resources, and connections the group already has. It highlights what people can already do and provides a positive way to short-circuit the "But ... we don't have any resources!" narrative. The emphasis is on creating and sustaining a mindset of what you can do to help – and get helped – right now.

Examples:

- A local business has an incoming supply of extra pallets and a number of citizens need pallets to create furniture for a homeless shelter. Match!
- A woman knows how to juggle and you have five kids in your neighborhood who are desperate to learn how to juggle. Match!
- A spreadsheet enthusiast loves teaching people simple ways to use Microsoft Excel and another person needs to learn how to use Excel for work. Match!

[Click here to see anonymized examples](#) from OANMs I (Joel Zaslofsky) have run at various events and gatherings.

How an OANM Creates and Helps Communities

- **It reduces consumption.** By making the most of existing assets, people don't need to buy something that they can access when they need it.
- **It reduces waste.** When someone else's surplus or gift can become another's resource, fewer precious commodities like time go to waste.
- **It builds and enhances** personal connections and community. Knowing who's doing what, who has access to what, and who knows who are vital for getting things done.
- **It creates new possibilities** for co-created action that none of us can do alone.
- **It increases community ownership and commitment** since it requires active participation and shifts the group narrative from what's scarce to what's abundant.
- **It builds confidence** to ask for what you truly need and own the gifts you're meant to share.
- **It's a simple, fast, and inexpensive way to resource a movement** because it focuses on what already exists – people's hidden or intentionally public gifts – and is positive in nature.
- **It's mostly (or completely) non-commercial.** OANMs don't typically involve financial transactions.

The Prep and Prerequisites

There are [other great ways](#) to facilitate an OANM, but I typically practice a specific method.

Physical Supplies Needed

1. Pens, pencils, or something else for each person to write with.
2. Two colors of sticky notes (most often Post-it Notes) with up to 10 of each color per person.
3. One sign labeled "Offers" and another labeled "Needs" for each person to stick their Post-it Notes under.
4. Name tags (if everyone doesn't know everyone else and needs to match a person with a Post-it).
5. (Optional) Printed or digital instructions of the process section of this document for people who show up late or don't fully understand your verbal instructions as you give them.

Ideal Environment

- A large space that can be quiet when you need it to be (e.g., when people are silently writing) and interactive when you want it to be (e.g., when people are connecting about matches).
- A single large, flat surface (e.g., a wall) or multiple smaller, flat surfaces (e.g., tables) that Post-it Notes can easily stick to.
- Movable and/or circular tables for people to write on and chat around.

The Set Up

1. Create stacks of up to 10 Post-it Notes of two different colors (one for Offers and one for Needs) and place them on chairs or tables for each person to take.
2. Give each person something to write with.
3. [Visual examples](#) of completed Offers and Needs notes (physically or digitally with a projector).
4. 5-10 minutes for you to explain what an OANM is, how the general process works, and what you plan for them to get out of it.

Housekeeping Notes

Using these housekeeping notes makes for a better and more valuable experience for everyone:

- You only need to share what you're comfortable with.
- The OANM is both a community-building and trust-building exercise. Everything we do here assumes everyone has the best of intentions and that nobody's offering is available in unlimited quantities. In other words, *what we offer each other shouldn't and won't be exploited*.
- Go beyond what you think people might expect you to say are your gifts. The more random the gift, the more likely it will be unique ... and potentially of even greater value to the group.
- The contents of each Post-it Note can/will be put in a spreadsheet and made available to all participants at a future date. In other words, writing down an offer or need comes with implicit permission for participants to contact you about it. *Don't write it down if you don't want someone asking about it.*
- Ask for a volunteer (or multiple if you plan to have more than 100 notes) to put the contents of the Post-it Notes into a digital archive (e.g., spreadsheet) that participants can access at a later time.
- Tell participants – and continue to remind them – to stick their Post-it Notes on the designated surface once they're done (or think they're done) to avoid everyone placing their notes in a cramped area all at once. Additional notes can be added later if they think of more offers or needs.

The OANM Process

Creating Offers

We always begin with Offers because they're almost always easier for people to think off and symbolic that we've come together to be generous with our gifts (a.k.a. give first, receive second).

1. Take up to ten minutes to write up to ten offers for your fellow participants. These are typically things that come from your heart (caring about children or the environment), head (knowing creative writing), hands (cooking or carpentry), or connections (the groups or associations you and your family belong to).
 - **Heart examples:** "I am passionate about animal rescue centers and willing to volunteer to help animals in distress" or "I love raising chickens and giving away my surplus eggs."
 - **Head examples:** "I know a lot about tiny houses and will chat with people who want to know more" or "I can show you how to create an efficient podcasting workflow."
 - **Hands examples:** "I know how to do major plumbing jobs and often help people in my city with their smaller plumbing tasks" or "I can teach you how to properly carve a pineapple without the mess."
 - **Connections examples:** "I can introduce you to people in my permaculture club who live near you" or "I'll sponsor your membership in [insert desirable organization]."

Pro tip: Encourage participants to think as broadly as possible about what they might offer others – personal, professional, on behalf of an organization, or otherwise. From services (e.g., assisting with grocery shopping) to passions (e.g., tennis buddy) to knowledge (e.g., how to use Twitter) to physical resources (e.g., a used printer) to introductions or leads (e.g., connections with graphic designers), just about anything is fair game.

2. Write these things on each Offer Post-it Note:

Required

- **Your full name** (in the upper left).
- **Contact information** (in the upper right). This tells participants how you prefer to be contacted about the note contents (e.g., email, Twitter handle, phone number, or Skype ID).
- **The offer itself** (in the center). Use abbreviations if you have to and keep the description short.
- **How often your offer can be used** (in the lower left). Give participants an idea of how many times an offer can be used. For example, "First Person to Ask," "Three Times Total," or "Five Times per Week."

Optional

- **Expiration date** (in the lower middle). If you'd like your offer to expire after a certain amount of time, put a specific date on the note. Write nothing if your offer is good indefinitely.
- **Cost** (in the lower right). Write a currency sign (e.g., "\$") if you normally charge money for your offer. You can also include a flat fee or an hourly rate if you like.

Creating Needs

1. Take up to ten minutes to write up to ten needs that your fellow participants might help you with. For example, what are you working on, seeking, or what kind of support do you require *right now* that someone else might be able to provide?
 - **Heart example:** "I need a coach who can help me understand which passion to pursue first between meditation, business workflows, and slow travel."
 - **Head example:** "I want to self-publish my first book, but I have no idea where to start."
 - **Hands examples:** "I'd like to make classy, hand-made thank you cards, but I don't have access to the right tools" or "I want to build a shed in my backyard."
 - **Connection example:** "I play guitar and want to meet a local drummer and cellist to form a band."
2. Write these things on each Need Post-it Note:

Required

- **Your full name** (in the upper left).
- **Contact information** (in the upper right). This tells participants how you prefer to be contacted about the note contents (e.g., email, Twitter handle, phone number, or Skype ID).
- **The need itself** (in the center). Use abbreviations if you have to and keep the description short.
- **Urgency** (in the lower left). Use short-hand to tell others if your need is urgent (U), semi-urgent (SU), or not urgent (NU).

Optional

- **Expiration date** (in the lower middle). If your need becomes irrelevant or obsolete after a specific date, write it down. Write nothing if your need will be outstanding indefinitely.
- **Potential payment** (in the lower right). Write a currency sign (e.g., "\$") if you're willing to pay to have your need met. *Note:* Each person is responsible for their own negotiation if it occurs.

The Market Opens: Matching Offers with Needs

1. (Optional) Allow each participant to verbally pitch *one* of their Offers and/or Needs in 1-2 sentences (preferably using a microphone if you have a big space). For example, "I'm Joel and I'd like to offer teaching basic mindfulness principles to any of you."

Pro tip: Don't allow discussion or clarification during this step unless you have lots of time. It'll slow things down or allow extroverts to dominate the conversation.

2. If participants haven't put all their notes up on the wall, prompt them to do that.
3. Encourage participants to approach each other about the verbal offer or need they highlighted (if done) and start browsing the Offers and Needs notes placed on the designated surface. Conversations will organically happen and the facilitator can even connect people in real-time when they/you identify a potential match.

The Follow-Up

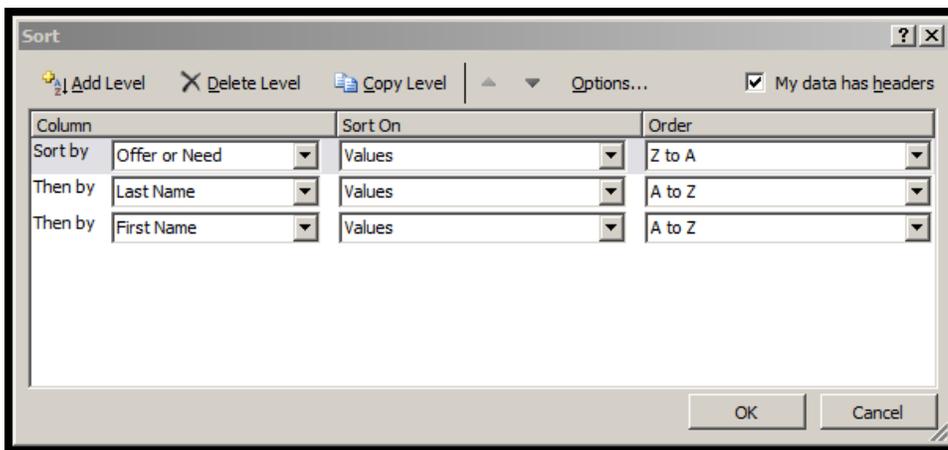
Depending on variables like your number of participants, how long they have to browse or discuss the posted notes, and whether they actually see all the notes or not, there are many matches that can be made after the OANM – by the facilitator or the participants.

If you want to extend the connection and matches between participants, I *highly* recommend you capture the information in the Post-it Notes and distribute it to the participants soon after the in-person gathering. There are plenty of ways to do this, but here's my favorite:

1. Get a volunteer (or multiple volunteers if you have more than 100 notes) to capture all the information on the competed notes. You can use a digital tool like the [Post-it Plus App](#) (iOS only), [Evernote Post-it Note camera](#), the [Microsoft OneNote app](#), or just grab them and physically take them home.
2. Have your volunteer(s) put the contents in a spreadsheet with the following columns so people can easily sort, filter, or search for a variety of relevant items:
 - Offer or Need
 - Category (e.g., Teaching, Financial, or Volunteering)
 - Sub-Category (e.g., Graphic Design, Audio Recording, Mindfulness)
 - Offer or Need Description (which contains the full or edited text of each note)
 - First Name (of person from the note)
 - Last Name (of person from the note)
 - Physical Location (If Relevant)
 - Expiration Date
 - Preferred Contact Method for This Specific Offer or Need (e.g., Email, Twitter, or Phone)
 - Contact Details for This Specific Offer or Need (e.g., joel@simplerev.com)
 - Offers Only: How Often Can People Contact You about Your Offer?
 - Offers Only: Free or Normally Charge to Provide Offer?
 - Needs Only: Urgency
 - Needs Only: Are You Willing to Pay to Meet Your Need?

Pro tip: [Here's a spreadsheet template](#) with each of these columns and examples for both Offers and Needs.

3. Add at least a category for each offer and need and, preferably, a sub-category, too.
4. Go back through the Category and Sub-Category columns and make sure the labels are consistent. For example, you might realize that "Health and Fitness" is too broad of a category and requires separating "Fitness" from "Health." Your "Health" label will also help you decide whether it's too big, even for a master category, or whether it should be divided into "Physical Health," "Mental Health," and "Environmental Health" sub-category labels. Another example is consolidating "Connections," "Connection," and "Connecting" into simply "Connections".
5. Edit offers or needs descriptions that are too long, imprecise, or confusing.
6. Remove extra spaces or correct poor formatting in the various spreadsheet columns.
7. Using the filter drop-down on each column, look for values that are inconsistent (e.g., typos of a person's last name or weird formatting of a phone number) and change them. This is important because any participant may need to sort or filter on any spreadsheet column and solid data integrity will help them do that well.
8. Run spell check on the spreadsheet.
9. Sort the spreadsheet by Offer or Need column first, Last Name second, and First Name third.



10. Distribute the completed spreadsheet however you see fit and remind people that the contents are intended only for people who actively participated in the OANM.
11. (Optional) Here's how to best [sort](#) and [filter](#) columns in Excel or [sort and filter](#) columns in a Google doc spreadsheet if your participants are going to use one of those tools to explore the captured information.

Visual Examples of an OANM



<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Show you how to authentically connect with people in-person.</p> <p>M Doesn't Expire</p>	<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Teach you how to podcast (complete with a ridiculous workflow document).</p> <p>M Doesn't Expire</p>	<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Give you one heck of a good, big hug!</p> <p>Any Doesn't Expire</p>
<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Someone to do one-off graphic design or document layout tasks.</p> <p>Any \$ SU</p>	<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Advise me on how to use the Elegant Themes Divi 2.4 WordPress Theme for a new website.</p> <p>W 09/15/2015 SU</p>	<p>Joel Zaslofsky jezaslof@gmail</p> <p>Teach me how to fall asleep fast.</p> <p>Any NU</p>



What Now?

Did you enjoy your OANM experience and want to have one happen for another community you belong to? Contact your facilitator for details or [send a note to me](#) so I can provide you with the resources you'll need.

And if you want to go even deeper, consider and answer some modified questions from Peter Block's book, *Community: A Structure of Belonging*.

- What gift have you received from another in our OANM? (Get specific)
- What has someone in your community done today that has moved you or been valuable to you?
- How did someone in your community engage you in a way that had meaning?
- What gift do you have that nobody knows about?
- What are you grateful for that has gone unspoken?
- What is the positive feedback you receive that still surprises you?
- What is the gift you have that you don't fully acknowledge?