"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, Offers and Needs Market Creator

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

The Offers and Needs Market (OANM) is a joyful, guided process where groups come together to discover and exchange their passions, knowledge, skills, resources, and needs. Whether for free, barter, or a set rate, people offer and need things like tech help, a place to live, or some extra produce.

The OANM unearths and shares the diverse forms of wealth we all have and reminds us that so much of what we need for a good life is already within our grasp.

Participants have found work, housing, new friends, a richer self-identity, and even a renewed trust in their community. Each exchange builds a connection, more connections create meaningful relationships, and the collective relationships strengthen communities – and maybe even create new ones.

General Context

The OANM, like asset-mapping, is a way to practice Asset-Based Community Development as you focus on what resources (a.k.a. “assets”) a group already has. It’s a simple, playful, and cheerful way to highlight 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 sustaining a mindset of what you can do to help and get helped right now.

A Few Examples:

- A local business has an incoming supply of extra pallets and some neighbors need wood to create furniture for a homeless shelter. Match!
- A person knows many people in creative agencies and a freelancer is looking for their latest work connection. 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!
How an OANM Creates and Helps Communities

- **It builds and enhances** personal or group connections. 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's just plain fun and useful.** Who couldn't use a new accountability buddy, creative pro, or ukulele player in their life? (All real examples among thousands more.)
- **It allows for rapid feedback on creative, business, or other projects.** Having a few folks give you sincere, real-time input on your offers can be life-changing.
- **It reduces waste.** When someone else’s surplus or gift can become another’s resource, fewer precious commodities like time go to waste.
- **It increases community ownership and commitment** since it requires active participation and shifts the group narrative to what's abundant from what's scarce.
- **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 underused gifts.
- **It’s honors the best of gift, barter, and commercial exchanges.** Why settle for only one type of market when you can have three in one?

"I love Offers and Needs Markets! It's so much bundled into one: community-building, vulnerability, sharing resources, owning up to our own depths, and the generous use of sticky notes. We all inherently want to help, so giving and receiving with an intentional, organized process allows us to contribute and gain without it feeling transactional. This is just genuine and heartfelt." – Aja Marsh, Offers and Needs Market participant

Housekeeping Notes

Acting upon 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 be and won’t be exploited.*
- There’s wisdom in the gift economy, bartering, pay what you can, conventional commercial market, and other forms of exchange. Why limit ourselves to one when we can have the best of each?
- Go beyond what you think people might expect you to say are your gifts. The more specific the gift, the more likely it will be unique … and potentially of even greater value to the group.
- The contents of each sticky note will be put in a spreadsheet and made available *exclusively* to only participants. In other words, writing down an offer or need comes with implicit permission for participants to contact you about it in-person or in the future. *Don’t write it down if you don’t want someone asking about it.*
• Write in your largest, most legible hand-writing. Even someone with poor eyesight should be able to read the contents of every note from at least six feet / two meters away.
• Place your sticky notes on the designated surface once you're done (or think you're done) to avoid everyone placing their notes in a cramped area all at once. Additional notes can be added later if you think of more offers or needs.
• If you have questions or need supplies during the quiet time when people are writing, non-verbally get a facilitator's attention and they'll come help you.
• Your facilitator(s) will be gently persistent in keeping the silence during writing time.
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'm passionate about animal rescue centers and willing to volunteer to help animals in distress" or "I nerd out about spreadsheets and would enjoy helping you craft yours."
- **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 design your own logo."
- **Connections examples:** "I can introduce you to people in the permaculture movement" or "I'll sponsor your membership in [insert desirable organization]."

*Pro tip:* Think as broadly as possible about what you 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 sticky 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, “Three Times Total” or “Five Times per Week.” If you want others to know how many times a limited quantity Offer has been redeemed, you can write “1 2 3” and have participants physically strikethrough a number when they take someone up on their offer (e.g., 1 2 3).
- **Method of exchange** (in the lower right). Use one of these five short-hand ways to indicate how or if you want an exchange for your offer: Free, Barter, Fixed Price (with your currency symbol, like $ or €, and the specific amount), Hourly Rate (with your currency symbol, like $ or €, and the specific hourly rate) or Negotiable.

*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. Leave blank if your offer is good indefinitely.
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 sticky 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). This designation might make the difference between someone helping you right away or never getting around to it.
   - **Method of Exchange** (in the lower right). Leave blank to indicate the default gift (a.k.a. free) option. Write a currency sign (e.g., "$" or "€") if you’re willing to pay to have your need met. Note: Each person is responsible for their own negotiation if it occurs.

   **Optional**
   - **Expiration date** (in the lower middle). If your need becomes irrelevant or obsolete after a specific date, write it down. Leave blank if your need will be outstanding indefinitely.

The Market Opens: Matching Offers with Needs

If you haven’t put all your notes up on the designated surface, do that now. Your OANM facilitator is here to answer any questions you have.

At this point, read other participants’ offers and needs, and approach your fellow participants about potential matches, things you’re curious about, or just because you think they’re worth talking to.

Your facilitator may take down all the sticky notes after a period of time and have someone put them in a spreadsheet so more matches can be made at a later time.
Visual Examples of an OANM

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Show you how to authentically connect with people in-person.
M Doesn’t Expire

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Teach you how to podcast (complete with a ridiculous workflow document).
M Doesn’t Expire

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Give you one heck of a good, big hug!
Any Doesn’t Expire

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Someone to do one-off graphic design or document layout tasks.
Any $ $ su

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Advise me on how to use the Elegant Themes Divi 2.4 WordPress Theme for a new website.
W 09/15/2015 $ su

Joel Zaslavsky jzaslavsky@gmail.com
Teach me how to fall asleep fast.
Any N/A
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, learn how to run one of your own at joelzaslofsky.com/oanm, or send a note to Joel Zaslofsky so he 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?