



Building Sustainability Together

A COMMUNITY TOOLKIT FOR CHANGE



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INTRODUCTION

In the movement to make our society more sustainable and resilient there is no one right approach, no silver bullet that will solve all our food and fuel problems. It's going to take changes big and small, from major food system shifts to individual choices. But in between lies an area full of potential to influence both ends of the spectrum: communities.

Person-to-person and neighbor-to-neighbor environmental actions can help positive behaviors ripple through a community. Working together toward positive changes also lifts our spirits, creates much need social connection, multiplies our impact, and leaves us wanting to do even more.

In that spirit, we've assembled a guide full of ideas that you can do in community to improve sustainability in three areas: food, environment, and fuel. Since every community is different, these are jumping-off points, complete with resources, that you can use to make these projects your own. And how you define community is up to you — it could be your neighborhood or apartment building, workplace, place of worship, or school.

We encourage you to also survey what's already happening in your community. Search for groups on Meetup or Facebook, or look for local chapters of national environmental organizations. Does your church or school have an environmental committee or club? Tap into what they are doing, invite others, and bring some of these ideas to the table.

If you're ready to make a difference, browse through this guide and pick a project, grab some friends and dig in.

IDEAS FOR ACTION KEY

Throughout the toolkit, you'll find ideas for different levels of action.



VOLUNTEER

Ideas for finding communities to get involved with



NEIGHBOR -TO- NEIGHBOR

Ideas for one-on-one cooperative actions



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Group actions that strengthen community and environment in tandem



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Long-term projects that require higher levels of commitment and organization



FOOD

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PREVENTING FOOD WASTE

Food waste is one of the most pressing problems we face. In the U.S., as much as 40% of the food we produce never gets eaten. Most of it ends up in landfills where it produces methane, a major contributor to climate change. This wasted food is also a waste of the valuable land, water, and fuel that goes into producing it.

Households are responsible for the biggest slice of America's total food waste. In fact, it's estimated that the average person wastes close to a pound of food per day, costing a family of four up to \$1,500 a year. Every person should be working in their own kitchen to reduce food waste, but there are several ways to work together to waste less too.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



NEIGHBOR -TO- NEIGHBOR

Share Extra Food

If you have food you're not going to eat — extra produce from your garden, leftovers from a party, or a gallon of milk you won't drink before vacation — instead of letting it go to waste, look for ways to share with your neighbors. You could simply text people you know, or offer it up on a site like [Nextdoor.com](https://www.nextdoor.com). There's also [Olio.com](https://www.olio.com), an app that notifies others when you have something to share.



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Host a Salvaged Food Dinner Party

Want to have fun with friends and learn more about food waste? Host a dinner made from ingredients that would have otherwise been thrown away.

Plan the Party

Pick a date and location, and recruit a friend to help. Make your guest list and ask everyone to bring items that are being neglected, in danger of going bad or are beyond their sell-by date. Items like: carrot greens, limp herbs, the stalk and outer leaves of cauliflower, bruised fruit, stale crackers, etc. (Things not to use: expired meat, milk, or items covered in mold.) Have your friends bring their items over a day or two before the dinner.

PREVENTING FOOD WASTE

Create the Menu

Make a list of the ingredients you've gathered, then use it to search for recipes and start building a menu. Assess your salvaged ingredients and think about what basics you can make from them. Start simple with soup, stocks and spreads, but don't be scared to be creative or unconventional with a traditional recipe. Think about what you can make in advance and heat later or serve chilled. Don't make it too complicated. Remember, this is supposed to be fun!

If you need more ingredients, ask neighborhood restaurants if they have any scraps they can donate to your dinner. Visit your local farmer's market and ask vendors if they have items that are "ugly," bruised or being passed over that they will donate or sell cheaply. The remaining few items, if any, can be picked up at the grocery store.

Party Timeline

The day before the party, roast vegetables for soup and make pesto or stock from vegetable trimmings. The day of, print out a menu to highlight what went into each dish and who or where the donations came from.

During dinner, consider leading a discussion about food waste and swapping tips for reducing food waste at home. You can find stats and tips on IValueFood.com.

The day after, compile the recipes, list every ingredient so you'll know how much food was rescued from the landfill, and send to the attendees.

If you need more ingredients, ask neighborhood restaurants if they have any scraps they can donate to your dinner. Visit your local farmer's market and ask vendors if they have items that are "ugly," bruised or being passed over that they will donate or sell cheaply. The remaining few items, if any, can be picked up at the grocery store.

PREVENTING FOOD WASTE



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Lead a Group Food Waste Challenge

Are you part of a group or organization looking to make a lasting impact on environmental issues? The [*I Value Food: Too Good to Waste Challenge*](#) is designed for workplace, school, religious or community groups, or it can be done by a group of neighbors or as a city-wide challenge.

During the first week, each participant does a home food waste audit by tracking their preventable food waste and analyzing what is going to waste and why. During the following three weeks, participants are emailed tips, tools, and strategies to try as they continue to track their waste. By the end of the month, the online tracker calculates how much waste they were able to prevent.

Doing this challenge as a group helps keep people engaged, encourages competitiveness, and inspires a valuable exchange of ideas. Group challenges generate excitement and hold participants accountable. And if you offer an incentive for people to participate and succeed, they will be more likely to stick with it and learn something new.

RESOURCES

I Value Food

ivaluefood.com

Sustainable America's campaign to help consumers reduce food waste, including a 4-week challenge

Save the Food

savethefood.com

A public service campaign to combat food waste, from the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Olio

olioex.com

Connects neighbors with each other and with local businesses so surplus food can be shared, not thrown away.

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING

As we pointed out on page 5, as much as 40% of the food we produce never gets eaten, and most of it ends up in landfills where it produces methane and contributes to air, water, and soil pollution. Instead of causing these problems, food can be recycled through composting into rich, soil-building material that can be used to fertilize plants naturally. Unfortunately, only 3% of food waste is recycled into compost in the United States.

Very few areas of the United States offer city-wide curbside composting services, but the good news is that composting can be done almost anywhere. You can certainly compost on your in your backyard or apartment, but you don't have to go it alone! Composting is a great way for communities to work together to make a difference collectively.

There are many ways community composting can take shape, and what works in one area may not work in another. Talk to your neighbors to find others who are interested in making composting happen where you live. Then check with your municipality to see what kinds of support they offer for composting.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



NEIGHBOR -TO- NEIGHBOR

Compost with Neighbors

If you are already composting, do you have room for more food scraps? If so, ask your neighbors if they'd like to contribute. Or, offer to help them get their own compost pile started. If you'd like to share your knowledge with more people, organize a group to meet at a coffee shop and share resources. Some people just need a friendly nudge to help get started.

[ShareWaste.com](https://www.sharewaste.com) helps connect people who want to compost their scraps with people who are already composting, and [SharedEarth.com](https://www.sharedearth.com) is a similar matchmaker for shared garden spaces. Both sites may be helpful in finding neighbors who want to compost together.



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Compost at a Community Garden

Community gardens or urban farms in neighborhoods or at schools and universities are natural locations for composting. Check with gardens in your area to see if they are composting and accept food scraps from neighbors. If not, you can get involved and help get it started.

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Compost Collection at Farmers Markets

Some farmers markets partner with local composters to serve as weekly drop-off points for residents. Under this arrangement, market-goers usually freeze their scraps and drop them off for free or for a small fee. Or, they may exchange a full bucket for a clean bucket. Check with markets in your area. If they don't offer this service, you may be able to help start a partnership with your market and a local compost provider.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Residential Composting Services

If you live in an apartment building or work in an office building, you can compost using a worm bin, or you may be able to organize with your neighbors or coworkers to bring a composting pick-up service to your building.



RESOURCES

Community Composting Done Right: A Guide to Best Management Practices

<https://ilsr.org/composting-bmp-guide/>

Report from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance designed to support community-scale composters in successfully managing their composting process and site.

Growing Local Fertility: A Guide to Community Composting from Institute for Local Self Reliance

ilsr.org/growing-local-fertility/

Report from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance that profiles 31 model community composting programs in 14 states and the District of Columbia

Community-Scale Composting Systems by James McSweeney

www.chelseagreen.com/product/community-scale-composting-systems/

Book that provides a comprehensive practical guide for closing the food system loop

Composting for a New Generation: Latest Techniques for the Bin and Beyond by Michelle Balz

www.amazon.com/Composting-New-Generation-Latest-Techniques/dp/1591866928

Book detailing tried-and-true composting methods and new, innovative techniques

How to Compost at Work

sustainableamerica.org/blog/how-to-compost-at-work/

Article detailing steps for starting a workplace composting program

GROWING LOCAL FOOD

Growing and eating locally grown food has myriad benefits for you and your community. Local food is less resource intensive, it's fresher and more nutritious, it builds resilience, and can bring communities together to share resources and knowledge. It can also save money and keep dollars in your community. Community local food action can come in many forms. Here are a few ideas for tapping into what's happening in your area or starting something new.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Grow Food in Community

Ideally, anyone who would want to grow their own food could do so, but there are a lot of barriers for many folks, including access to space, knowledge, tools, and time. Here are a few ways that communities can work together to grow more food:

Garden Sharing

Garden sharing is an arrangement where you garden on someone else's land or offer your land up for someone else to garden. You can find people interested in garden sharing on [Shared Earth](#), or just ask your neighbors. When you find a match, use the "Garden Sharing Checklist" in the Appendix to put together a plan for your garden sharing arrangement.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are shared spaces where people can rent a small plot to garden, or they may take the shape of a larger garden that all members help tend. Most community gardens were started by people like you, so if you don't have one nearby, you may be able to start one yourself. Look for vacant plots of land, a church yard, or a willing property owner to get started.

Community Fruit Trees and Food Forests

Community fruit trees are fruit trees planted for the community to share. You can plant one in your front yard, or gather with a group to plant trees in public spaces, like parks, churches, schools, etc. Place a sign next to your trees letting the community know that the fruit is free for the taking. Food forests are more involved agroforestry systems that incorporate fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and perennial vegetables that all produce food for a community.

GROWING LOCAL FOOD



NEIGHBOR
-TO-
NEIGHBOR

Share What You Grow

Whether you're growing in your backyard or in a community garden, the bounty of your harvest can be used to help your neighbors. Here are a few ideas:

Donate to a local food pantry or food rescue organization

Search for food pantries and food rescue groups that accept fresh produce through our [Food Rescue Locator](#) or ampleharvest.org. Make sure you discuss donations with a food pantry ahead of time to find out what kinds of foods they are able to use.

Start a produce stand in your front yard

A simple "FREE" sign taped to a basket or table of zucchini, tomatoes and peppers will help your veggies find good homes. If you have a lockbox you can secure to the table, you could even solicit donations in exchange for the vegetables and deliver the proceeds to a food pantry. TIP: Want to get your neighbors in on a collaborative growing effort next year? Check out [Food is Free](#) for steps to get started.

Add a listing to a local crop-swap site:

[Ripe Near Me](#) and [Cropmobster](#) (San Francisco area only so far), and [Vinder](#) allow users to browse for available produce (for free or sale) right in their neighborhoods. Or sign up for [Nextdoor](#), to let your neighbors know you have food to share.

Cook a meal for a neighbor in need

Maybe you're sick of ratatouille and eggplant parmesan, but the elderly man a few houses down or the family who just had a baby would absolutely love a home-cooked meal featuring the flavorful products of your garden.



GROWING LOCAL FOOD



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Save and Swap Seeds

Sharing seeds is the age-old practice of saving seeds from your own plants and sharing them with others. At first glance, it can seem like a quaint hobby, but seed saving and sharing can actually be an act of building resilience. In the United States, we've [*lost approximately 90%*](#) of our fruit and vegetable varieties. Preserving the diversity of crops we still have is important to our future food security. Seed savers work to preserve and share seeds to preserve [*heirloom varieties*](#) and protect local varieties that can help a community build food security.

Seed swaps, also called seed exchanges, are a great way to meet other gardeners and swap tips as well as seeds. They happen around the country; if you can't find one in your area, here's [*a guide to starting your own*](#).

RESOURCES

American Community Gardening Association

www.communitygarden.org

Nonprofit that supports community gardening by facilitating the formation and expansion of community gardening networks, developing resources, encouraging research, and conducting educational programs.

Ample Harvest

ampleharvest.org

Nonprofit that uses technology to enable gardeners to donate their excess harvest to a local food pantry

Community Fruit Trees

communityfruittrees.org

Grassroots project started by Rob Greenfield to help people plant fruit trees for their communities

Community Garden Start-Up Guide

<http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/files/97080.pdf>

Guide to help neighborhood groups and organizations along the path to starting and sustaining a community garden

RESOURCES

Falling Fruit

fallingfruit.org

Open-source fruit tree map

Food Is Free

foodisfreeproject.org

A worldwide movement of people growing and sharing food freely

Ground Rules: A Legal Toolkit for Community Gardens

changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit_Final_%28CLS_20120530%29_20110207.pdf

Legal resources for establishing community gardens on vacant or underutilized parcels of land

Food Rescue Locator

foodrescuelocator.com

A directory of organizations across the United States that rescue, glean, transport, prepare, and distribute food to the needy in their communities

Seed Savers Exchange

www.seedsavers.org

Works to conserve and promote America's endangered garden and food crop heritage for future generations by collecting, growing, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants

Shared Earth

sharedearth.com

Website that connects people who have land with people who want to garden or farm

FOOD RESCUE

Did you know that there are thousands of pounds of good, wholesome food going to waste every day in your town while many families struggle to put food on the table? Food rescue, or food recovery, is the act of saving that food from places like grocery stores, restaurants, markets, and dining facilities and getting it to those in need. It's a great way to cut down on food waste and help people at the same time. Here are some ideas for getting involved with food rescue efforts in your community.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



VOLUNTEER

Volunteer with a Food Rescue Group

The best way to get involved in food rescue is to find an established group in your area and volunteer to help. Volunteering can take many forms. Some groups need people to pick up and deliver food, others may need help gleaning from a farm or sorting donations. If you have a truck or other vehicle with lots of room for crates of food, that's a plus. Or, if you have special skills, like photography, accounting, fundraising, or graphic design, offer to pitch in in those areas. Volunteering is also a great way to get kids involved. Search for groups at foodrescuelocator.com.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Start or Join a Gleaning Group

The ancient practice of gleaning—collecting leftover crops from a farmer's field after harvest—was an early form of welfare for the needy. It turns out that the practice is alive and well, and is one of many ways to harness the power of community to reduce food waste and feed those in need.

Gleaning happens on farms, but you can glean from neighborhood fruit trees in urban and suburban areas. If you have your own fruit trees, invite neighbors to help you harvest them. Or if you see trees that aren't being picked in your area, organize a group to help gather and distribute or donate the fruit.

Some cities have established farm and fruit tree gleaning groups. Search the web for them, check out the resources at the end of this section, or gather some neighbors and start your own.

FOOD RESCUE



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Start a Food Rescue Group

If you don't have a food rescue group in your area, you can start your own. You can start small, maybe by asking farmers market vendors if you can collect their extras and deliver them to a food bank. Or, you can start a backyard fruit tree gleaning group. If you want to start something bigger, check out these guides from [Boulder Food Rescue](#) and [City Harvest](#). Your child's [school](#) is another place to start a food rescue program.

RESOURCES

Food Rescue Locator

foodrescuelocator.com

A directory of organizations across the United States that rescue, glean, transport, prepare, and distribute food to the needy in their communities

Society of Saint Andrew

endhunger.org/gleaning-network/

Brings people together to glean fields and share food with those in need

Falling Fruit open source fruit tree map

www.fallingfruit.org

Open-source fruit tree map

USDA Gleaning Toolkit

www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda_gleaning_toolkit.pdf

Resource guide on food recovery programs for businesses, community-based organizations, private citizens, and public officials.



ENVIRONMENT

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NATURE

Our yards, parks, and other green spaces are an important part of our communities, especially in urban areas. We have the chance to make positive impacts on the health of our local ecosystems right in our own backyards. With biodiversity at risk, water quality in jeopardy, and air quality in need of improvement, we should all be asking ourselves what steps we can take to improve these conditions. Taking care of the nature around us can boost air, water, and wildlife — as well as our own quality of life.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



NEIGHBOR
-TO-
NEIGHBOR

Swap Native Plants

One important way to support a diversity of important insects, birds, and other wildlife in your area is by growing more native plants. Native plants provide wildlife necessary food, habitat, and shelter that is often lacking in nonnative species. Plus, native plants are usually easy to maintain because they evolved to thrive in your particular growing conditions. If you're growing native plants that can be divided and shared, offer some to your neighbors. To have more of an impact, organize a native plant swap in your neighborhood where people can bring plants from their yard and pick up new ones. It's a great way to share knowledge and build awareness around native plants.



COMMUNITY
PROJECT

Plant Neighborhood Pollinator Gardens

Forty percent of invertebrate pollinator species — particularly bees and butterflies — are at risk of extinction, which is a major problem for our food system considering one-third of our food relies on pollination. One major reason for the decline is habitat loss. Thanks to campaigns like the [Million Pollinator Garden Challenge](#), pollinator-friendly gardens are making a comeback, but we still need a lot more. Planting pollinator gardens is a fun community project. Look for community spaces like boulevards, parks, city properties, or even local businesses that would be willing to host a garden and gather a group to help. According to the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge, gardens should:

- *Use plants that provide nectar and pollen sources*
- *Provide a water source*
- *Be situated in sunny areas with wind breaks*
- *Create large “pollinator targets” of native or non-invasive plants*
- *Establish continuous bloom throughout the growing season*
- *Eliminate or minimize the impact of pesticides*

NATURE



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Organize a Tree Planting

Trees are one of the best investments in environmental action. They sequester carbon, provide food and habitat for wildlife, improve air quality, provide shade, and more. [*The Nature Conservancy*](#) has a good toolkit that can help you get started. If you embark on tree planting, make sure to consult with an arborist or other expert who can advise your group on species and site selection and maintenance needs.



RESOURCES

Arbor Day Foundation

<https://www.arborday.org/>

Nonprofit organization that inspires people to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees

National Audubon Society's Native Plant Database

<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

Native plants database where you can research the best plants for birds in your area

National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Finder

<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>

Website designed to help you find the best plant species to attract butterflies and birds in your area

Prairie Nursery

<https://www.prairienursery.com/>

Online retailer of native plants and seeds specializing in natives that range from the midwestern prairies to the eastern woodlands

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

<https://www.wildflower.org/>

Comprehensive database of native plants for North America, plus links to other resources

WASTE REDUCTION

Reducing waste is a worthy goal for our communities. Cleaning up litter is a tried and true way to keep our neighborhoods clean and prevent trash from polluting our waterways. Reducing reliance on single-use plastics and finding ways to reuse material before recycling are important ways to shrink the waste stream. Here are a few ways to work on waste projects as a community.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Organize a Litter Clean-Up

No matter where you live, it's hard to escape the scourge of litter. Luckily, a litter clean-up project is one of the easiest to pull off. You can simply identify an area in need of a clean-up — beaches, roadways, parks — grab some friends, gloves and bags, and get started. Share before and after pictures on social media to inspire others and build momentum. (Some popular hashtags are #trashtag and #5minutebeachcleanup.) Here are other organized events that you can join or bring to your community:

The International Coastal Cleanup

Now billed as the largest global volunteer effort to help the oceans, this annual event was started by one woman who wanted to clean up her local beaches. A project of the Ocean Conservancy, the website can help you find an event near you and offers instructions for organizing your own clean-up. Visit <https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/> to get involved.

The Great American Cleanup

Keep American Beautiful organizes this annual event that takes place in an estimated 20,000 communities nationwide. Affiliate organizations run this event and others at cities around the country. Search for one near you or find out how to start one at kab.org.



WASTE REDUCTION



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Start a Community Bag Share

Plastic bags are one of the most common items found in waterway cleanups, they are hard to recycle, and if they enter the environment, they degrade into harmful microplastics. Getting more reusable bags into the hands of people can help cut plastic bag use. One way to do it is to organize a group to make reusable bags to give away. Here are three project examples and ideas:

The BagShare Project

Volunteers in Massachusetts sew and donate cloth bags to stores, libraries, farmer's markets, and other venues that want to reduce their bag waste. Shoppers can borrow and return bags to any BagShare location. Learn more at thebagshare.org.

Boomerang Bags

This organization gives you all the tools and resources needed to organize a group bag-making project using donated materials. See how it works at boomerangbags.org.

Farmers Market Bagshare

Get zero waste advocate Polly Barks' steps to starting a bag share at your farmers market here: <https://pollybarks.com/bag-share-program/>

Reusa-Bag

Blogger Anne-Marie Bonneau has inspired produce bag-making projects around the world. Get her tips for starting one or find one near you here: <https://zerowastechef.com/reusa-bags/>



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Join or Start a Buy Nothing Group

Buy Nothing Groups are hyperlocal Facebook groups that operate on the gift economy. The guidelines are: "Post anything you'd like to give away, lend, or share among neighbors. Ask for anything you'd like to receive for free or borrow." These groups foster a way to find used things you need close to home rather than buying new things shipped from far away. Learn more at buynothingproject.org.

WASTE REDUCTION



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Organize a Clothing Swap

Clothing is resource-intensive to make, but the rise of cheap “fast fashion” has us buying more clothing than ever — and too much of it ends up in the landfill or exported to countries that can’t manage the waste properly. Instead of buying new clothes, try holding a clothing swap. (This is especially helpful for baby and children’s clothing since they grow so fast.) You can host one with friends and neighbors at your home. Ask invitees to bring items they want to swap and put out a few mirrors. Try to organize like items with like items, or by size, to make it easier for guest to browse. If you’d like to organize a bigger swap, try hosting one at a community space with tips from nonprofit 1 [*Million Women.*](#)

RESOURCES

Earth Day Network End Plastic Pollution Campaign

<https://www.earthday.org/campaigns/plastics/plastics-campaign/>

Toolkit and resources to help reduce plastic waste and pollution

The Freecycle Network

<https://www.freecycle.org/>

Coordinates a worldwide network of “gifting” groups to divert reusable goods from landfills.





FUEL

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VEHICLE IDLING

In the United States, nearly 8 million gallons of fuel (enough to fill five Olympic-size swimming pools!) is wasted every day as a result of unnecessary idling from passenger cars and heavy duty vehicles. It's an irksome habit that contributes to our community's air pollution and can have health implications for everyone, especially kids. Children are especially vulnerable because they inhale more air per pound of body weight.

Most people don't mean to be so wasteful — they just don't really even think about it. They may be following the outdated notion that restarting your car wastes more gas than letting it run. Once you point out the facts to a driver, they're usually more than willing to change their behavior. With that in mind, we've put together some steps you can take to raise awareness about this important issue in your community.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Launch a Community Awareness Campaign

A good way to reach a lot of people with the anti-idling message is to launch an anti-idling campaign in your city or neighborhood or at your school, workplace, or place of worship. It can be as simple as posting signs to raise awareness or a larger effort to enact no-idling policies where you live, work, or play. Encourage others to get on board for a safer and healthier community for all!



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Host a Pledge Drive

If you are inspired to share what you have learned about vehicle idling with others and want to encourage them to join you in taking action, consider hosting an anti-idling pledge drive. Find a location, recruit volunteer help, gather pledges, educate your community.

Online pledges can be collected at: iturnitoff.com/pledgedrive.html Printable pledge sheets are included in the Appendix of this toolkit on page 37.

RESOURCES

I Turn It Off Anti-Idling Toolkit

<https://iturnitoff.com/resources.html>

Sustainable America's guide to taking action on idling in your community

EPA Idle Free Schools Toolkit

<https://www.epa.gov/schools/idle-free-schools-toolkit-healthy-school-environment>

Guide to running an effective idling reduction campaign at a school to reduce student exposure to toxic vehicle exhaust.

Campaign for Clean Air

<http://www.campaignforcleanair.org/turn-it-off.html>

Toolkit designed to help schools reduce and/or eliminate idling on school property using the collaboration of students and faculty

No Idling Signs

<https://www.compliancesigns.com/signs/No-Idling>

Source for signage that educates and deters idling



WALKING & BIKING

It's not hard to find the benefits of getting out of our cars and onto two wheels or feet. Walking or biking instead of driving boosts our personal health and cuts vehicle emissions that harm our communities. Walking and cycling are also good for local businesses. [Research shows](#) that improving communities for walking and biking increases retail sales and it helps us interact more with others in our community.

With that said, there is plenty of work to be done in our communities to help facilitate people-powered transportation, namely issues of safety, accessibility, and infrastructure. Here are a few ways your community can improve its walk/bike-ability. There are a number of national organizations listed in the resources that may have programs in your area.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Advocate for Walk- and Bike-Friendly Communities

There is a laundry list of things that can facilitate more walking and biking, and every community is different, so a good place to start is in your own neighborhood. What would help you and your neighbors walk more and drive less? It could be a sidewalk or a bike lane. Maybe the speed limit is too high or there aren't enough bike racks at local businesses. Once you've identified something, get the word out to neighbors and take your idea to your local government and advocate for it. It takes work, but the results will be worth it.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Organize a Community Walk or Ride

Whether you take part in national efforts like Bike to Work Day and Bike to School Day, which both happen during National Bike Month in May, or just organize your own walk or bike ride, a group event can help build a community around walking and cycling in your area. Noncompetitive community bike rides can help riders feel more comfortable with riding on the streets. A group in Boston, for instance, holds [Bike Rides for Ordinary People](#) designed to encourage all people to get on their bike. You can use these events as fundraisers or as an opportunity to gather thoughts about how to improve accessibility.



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Harness the Business Community

Would you ride your bike more if you got discounts at local businesses for doing so? That's the idea behind Bicycle Benefits, a rewards program that incentivizes cycling. Individuals purchase Bicycle Benefits stickers to place on their bike helmets, then show their stickers at participating businesses for rewards. Visit bicyclebenefits.org to learn how to bring this program to your community.

RESOURCES

America Walks

<https://americawalks.org/>

Nonprofit organization that works to advance safe, equitable, accessible, and enjoyable places to walk by giving communities resources to advocate for change

Building a Bicycle-Friendly Neighborhood: A Guide for Community Leaders

<https://waba.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/waba-guide-for-community-leaders-web.pdf>

Guide from the Washington Area Bicyclists Association that helps community members and leaders bring the benefits of increased and improved bicycling to their communities

The League of American Bicyclists

<https://www.bikeleague.org/>

Nonprofit that offers education and advocacy for creating safer roads, stronger communities, and a Bicycle Friendly America

People for Bikes

<https://peopleforbikes.org/>

Offers programs, grants, and tools to help communities build better places to ride bikes

Walk and Bike to School Day

<http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>

Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day, celebrated each October and May, give communities a chance to celebrate the joy of walking and biking to school.

Walk-Friendly Communities

<http://walkfriendly.org/>

A national recognition program that encourages towns and cities across the US to support and prioritize walking

CARPOOLING & CARSHARING

Cars are an expensive resource to buy and maintain, and many of them sit stationary hours per day. When they are driven, there's often just one person in the car. According to 2017 data from the American Community Survey, 76% of workers drive alone to work. Reducing single-driver trips and even the number of vehicles we own can pay big dividends in fuel and emissions savings. You could also get access to the coveted HOV lane and save on parking and tolls.

Even if you don't have access to public transportation, there are ways drivers and communities can lower the number of cars they own and miles they drive through carpooling and carsharing.

IDEAS FOR ACTION



NEIGHBOR
-TO-
NEIGHBOR

Share Your Car

Chances are, many of the cars in your neighborhood — maybe even yours — aren't being used much of the time. Car-sharing apps like [Turo](#) and [Getaround](#) let you list your car to be rented out when you're not using it, but they aren't available in all cities.

As an alternative, you can network with your neighbors to see how you could share vehicles as a community. It could be an arrangement between just two neighbors with different schedules, or more of a micro car-sharing community. But be advised that if you're using someone else's car on more than an occasional basis, you will need insurance. Non-car owners should be able to purchase drivers insurance that provides coverage in any car (rentals, too). [Nolo.com](#) has articles that go into more detail about the legal issues around car sharing. You will also want to work out the details of how to pay for gas and maintenance ahead of time.



CARPOOLING & CARSHARING



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Arrange a Work Carpool

Instead of starting with your neighbors, it might make more sense for you to find a carpooling community at work. Larger employers may have a program already in place that helps match car-pooling partners and incentives for those who share rides. If not, you can organize one yourself. Here are a few tools that may help:

[Waze Carpool](#)

Driving app Waze now offers different ways to organize carpools. You can sign up as a rider or driver and find rides or riders going your way, even searching by workplace. Shared costs are handled through the app. There's also a program for employers that is free to use and offers reporting on employees' impact.

[Commute with Enterprise](#)

Rental car company Enterprise lets you organize a car-pooling group and then rent a vehicle by the month. That way, no one's personal car shoulders all the wear and tear and maintenance costs, and riders can rotate drivers. If you have an emergency and need to leave early, Enterprise will help coordinate your ride home. You may even be able to pay with pre-tax income through IRS Code 132(f). They also have an employer program.

More workplace solutions:

[RideAmigos](#)

[Luum](#)

Organize School or Activity Carpools

Carpooling isn't just for commuters. Families can turn to carpooling to shuttle their kids to and from school and activities. You may already know of other families who would make ideal carpool partners. If that's not the case, there are several apps designed to make it easier for families and school communities to arrange carpools. One of the side benefits is that you and your kids will make new friends in your school community. Here are a few companies that offer family-friendly carpooling tools:

[CarpooltoSchool](#)

[GoKid](#)

[Pogo](#)

[Carpool-Kids](#)

RESOURCES

Carpool Savings Calculator

http://alternetrides.com/zz_savings_calculator.asp?location_key=

Online calculator that helps commuters determine how much gas, money, and CO₂ they will save by carpooling

The Basics of Carsharing Programs

<https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/the-basics-carsharing-programs.html>

Legal advice on how to finance, schedule car use, and handle other details of a carsharing program.





APPENDIX

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GARDEN SHARING CHECKLIST

A garden share plan outlines how the arrangement will work and how you'll divide things like costs, labor and produce yield. Here are some questions you'll want to discuss when making a garden share plan:

Where will the garden be located?

What will you grow in the garden? Any restrictions on how it will look?

How is the condition of the soil? Does it need to be tested?

When can the gardening be done?

How will you share expenses (seeds, plants, tools, water, etc.) and labor?

Will the garden be organic?

Who can have access to the garden?

How will you share the produce?

Where will you keep supplies and tools?

Will you sell any of the produce? If so, will proceeds be shared?

What happens if someone gets injured? Does the homeowner have insurance?

Will you be composting? How and where?

How long will the arrangement last?

How will you communicate about the garden? Text, phone calls? Email?

What will you do if one of you wants to end the arrangement?

HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING

Documentary films are a powerful way to bring a community together to learn about issues, spark discussion, and inspire action. If you are moved to share what you have learned about environmental issues with others, consider hosting a film screening. Here's how to do it:

1. Choose a Film

No matter what environmental topic you want to focus on, chances are there are several great films to choose from. We've written about several over the years, including [*Wasted! The story of Food Waste*](#), [*Idle Threat: Man on Emission*](#), [*Just Eat It*](#), [*Growing Cities*](#), and [*Pump The Movie*](#). Here is a list of sources of documentaries for public screenings to get started.

[*Bullfrog Films*](#)

Offers screening of documentary films as fundraisers.

[*Netflix*](#)

Allows for one-time screenings of select documentaries for free

[*Green Planet Films*](#)

[*ro*co educational*](#)

[*Video Project*](#)

2. Find a Location

There are plenty of public and private spaces that would be open to hosting a film screening. Your local library is a great place to start. If your library already has a film program, they may be open to recommendations. If not, ask if they would be willing to host a screening. Cinemas both small and large are often willing to take on documentary film screenings as part of their community initiatives; contact the cinema manager to inquire. Public parks, community centers, schools, non-profit offices, co-working spaces, and art galleries are also great locations. Consider the assets in your community and get creative!

HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING

3. Determine Your Equipment Needs

Once you have secured a location, you may need to secure some equipment to show the film. If you're working with a cinema or library, they will probably have everything you need. If you plan to screen the film in a public park, however, you will need to secure a projector and screen, possibly chairs (unless you make the event bring-your-own seating), a table for informational handouts, snacks, etc.

4. Secure the Film

Depending on who will be purchasing the film and how many people you expect to attend, different screening licenses are available. Work with the provider to determine the right license and get registered to screen. Some licensees may allow you to use the screening as a fundraiser for a nonprofit organization.

5. Advertise, Advertise, Advertise!

Once you have your location, equipment and screening license secured, it's time to fill the seats. Depending on your location, ask if they have a newsletter that goes out to their network and if they will promote your movie in it or offer a spot to advertise the screening. If your public location has a website, ask if they can promote your screening online. Place an ad of your own in a local newspaper and hang up posters in high visibility spots around town. Libraries, government offices, coffee shops, grocery stores and schools often provide community boards where you can post flyers and information. Promote at public locations and nearby colleges to draw the most attention. Consider reaching out to a local radio station to help get the word out. The more you advertise the better, so don't be shy, and get creative!

6. Don't Just Advertise; Advertise Well!

Now that you know where to advertise, try to sell your movie. Some people will naturally be inclined to attend your film screening, while others may need more of an incentive. You can offer door prizes, a raffle, coupons, or invite local celebrities or government leaders to get involved. Free refreshments are often a great and easy incentive as well. If you have a strict budget, see if the location of the screening can pitch in, or ask local businesses to sponsor or make donations.

HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING

7. Host an After-Party

After the film finishes, do not let people leave with questions. Host a post-screening discussion or Q&A. Consider arranging a panel of local allies and experts. You, as the host (or hosts) of the film screening, can also lead a robust discussion.

Documentary films can be a great way to inspire action, and you'll want to seize this opportunity to engage with others who share your passion for change in your community. Set up a table with further information about the film's topic and opportunities for viewers to act on what they learned. Consider it an opportunity to form a local action group and recruit interested individuals to take part.

8. Don't Forget to Follow Up!

If you've had a successful screening, make sure to use the event as a springboard to spread the word. Send a short article to your local paper noting how many attendees you had and how many people signed up to take part in a local action group. Note interesting questions, comments or discussion points from the Q&A session. Invite local leaders who attended the film to provide a quote. Make sure to also take this opportunity to thank anyone who helped along the way.



HOW TO FUND COMMUNITY PROJECTS



COMMUNITY PROJECT

Our goal was to keep the ideas in this toolkit free or low cost, but some projects may be helped along if you have some funding. Here are a few ways to raise money for community projects.

Go Door-to-Door

If you're working on a project in your immediate neighborhood, like planting community fruit trees or a community garden, talking directly to your neighbors can help drum up support. You can also solicit in-kind donations, like the use of garden tools, and find like-minded people who want to help. Make flyers to leave behind or drop in mailboxes to spread the word about your project.

Hold a Fundraising Event

A grassroots event like a bake sale, lemonade stand, car wash, or community dinner is a tried-and-true way to raise money for a cause and educate people about your project at the same time.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding platforms can be a great way to use technology to generate excitement and raise money for your project. Check out ioby.org, gofundme.com, and chuffed.org to get started. Each offers tips on how to set up and run an effective crowdfunding campaign.

Solicit Business Donations

Local businesses are always looking for ways to get involved in their communities. Ask around to see if any are willing to support your efforts with monetary or in-kind donations. It helps if you have a plan for communicating their support, whether it's their logo on signage or even a "thank you" on social media. If it's a good fit, they may even become a long-term partner as your project grows.

Apply for Local Grants

Look into applying for grants in your area to fund your project. You can find grant opportunities from a range of government departments as well as public and private trusts and foundations.

IDLING PLEDGE FORM



TAKE THE PLEDGE

"I PLEDGE TO IDLE FOR NO LONGER THAN 10 SECONDS WHEN I AM NOT IN TRAFFIC."

NAME: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

ZIP CODE: _____

 SUSTAINABLE AMERICA — SUSTAINABLEAMERICA.ORG ITURNITOFF.COM



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