



## Mutual Aid Organizing Guide

**This toolkit includes step by step instructions for how you can build your own mutual aid network in your community** while staying safe from the spread of COVID-19. We know that mutual aid networks are and will be critical community survival tools in our current social and economic systems that marginalize and ignore our most vulnerable brothers and sisters (the elderly, unhoused, differently-abled, LGBTQIA+ community, people of color, immigrants, etc.). And when one of us is not safe, none of us are safe! We must keep one another safe while we organize to change the current systems that fail us, and mutual aid networks are one way to do that.

**Mutual aid is “cooperation for the sake of the common good.”** It’s getting people to come together to meet each other’s needs, recognizing that as one human family, our survival is dependent on one another. **It is solidarity, NOT charity.**

### ***Mutual Aid is...***

- ✓ Getting people together in your community to provide material support to each other.
- ✓ Building relationships with your neighbors based on trust and common interest.
- ✓ Sharing things rather than hoarding things.
- ✓ Treating NO ONE as disposable.
- ✓ Providing all kinds of support, ranging from food prep to childcare to translation to emotional support, and recognizing the value of all of them.
- ✓ A political education opportunity, where we build the relationships and analysis to understand why we are in the conditions that we’re in and what systems need to be changed.

✓ Preparation for the next disaster (natural or economic). Next time around we'll already have relationships with each other and know who is vulnerable and needs support.

✓ A great jumping off point for other kinds of organizing and movement work.

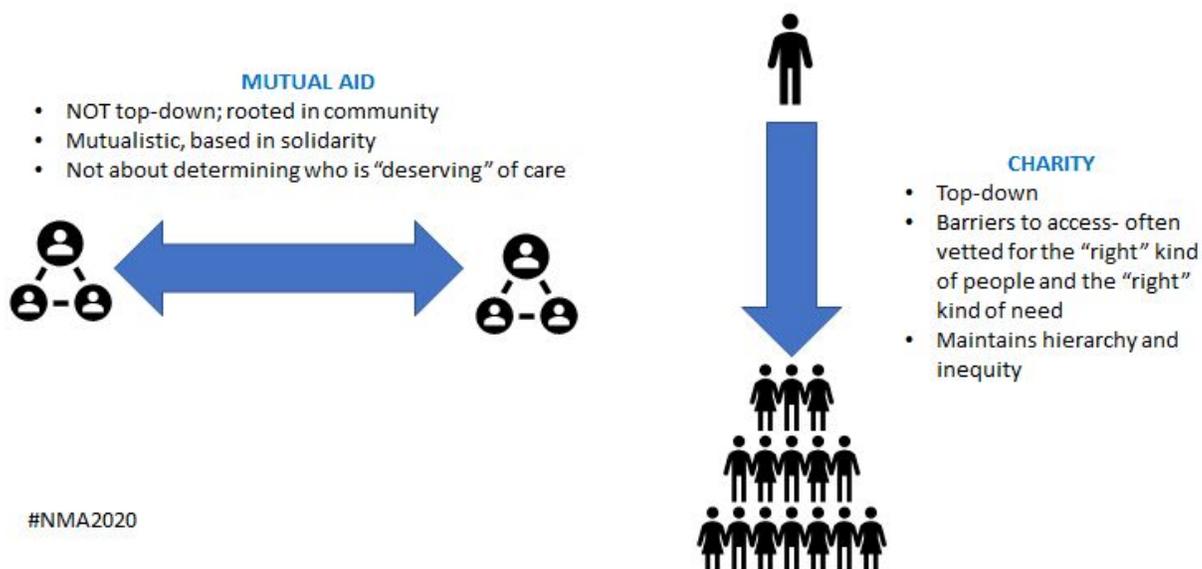
### **Mutual aid is not...**

✗ Quid pro quo transactions or exclusive to only those who “deserve” it.

✗ Only for disasters or crises.

✗ Charity, a way to “save” people or a hierarchy.

## Mutual Aid vs. Charity



*(If you're interested in learning more about the long history, politics and practice of mutual aid, we encourage you to read the links we're including at the end of this toolkit.)*

## ***Mutual Aid Organizing: Step by Step***

**Mutual aid can happen between two, twenty, or two hundred people (or more!). A good place to start, though, is with defining your “pod” or your people.** This may be your best friends, your neighborhood, your city ward, folks from church, or the handful of acquaintances you never hang out with but who want to practice community care. It’s important to assess who would show up for you in a crisis or emergency, and who you’d do the same for.

**This is where “pod mapping” comes in.** Pod mapping is a tool to help you get organized—to connect, make a plan, and follow through if and when it’s needed. There may be certain qualities you look for in the folks in your pod(s): maybe they’re really reliable, well-resourced, generous, committed, kind. Maybe they have certain skills that you don’t and need. Maybe they live nearby. See the pod mapping tool on page 7 to get started.

**A common pod formation is a neighborhood pod, so we’ll use neighborhood pods as an example here, and we’ll assume YOU are your neighborhood captain.** As a neighborhood captain, you’d take on the responsibility of reaching out to your neighbors, checking in on what needs are arising on your block, coordinating a neighborhood group chat or phone tree, and staying in touch with the point people from other neighborhoods for resource pooling. We are trying to build a network of many neighborhood pods across your city.

### **Step 1: Define your zone, and start your Pod.**

- Start small. 5-20 people is a good starting point, and build out as you gain confidence.
- Invite members. Reach out to neighbors by phone, email, social media or flyering. If you decide to flyer, you can print (or write out) copies of the pod contact sheet provided on page 5 and deliver to your neighbors. You might deliver fliers to the houses/apartments right around where you live. Knock, talk through the flyer with them, and if they aren’t home, leave a flyer. Keep in mind, it is illegal to put things in others’ mailboxes, so if they aren’t home, leave the flier in the crack of their door. The purpose of the fliers is to exchange contact information in order to start the neighborhood group chat/phone tree.

### **Step 2: Name your pod.** Pick a fun name with your group!

### **Step 3: Build your pod.**

- Create a group chat for your neighborhood and as people text you, add them to the group. We recommend WhatsApp or Signal. Some mutual aid groups use private Facebook groups for communication.
- Troubleshoot as needed - help folks download the app and get it set up if they need it, answer questions, and ask neighbors to help bring more people in.
- Neighborhood Pods should be between 5 and 30 or so, if there are more than 30 neighbors interested, figure out how to split up into two pods.

- Stay in touch with folks. Use the conversation guide provided below to get a sense of what support needs may come up in your pod.
- Map and share wider community resources.

**Step 4: Connect to other pods.**

- Create a Neighborhood Captains chat on WhatsApp or Signal to connect with other pods. You may want to ask for resources that your pod doesn't have, ask for advice, share successes, or offer ideas to others.

**Step 5: Build relationships and support each other.**

- Set some community agreements, for example, treating each other with respect and assuming the best intentions. You also want to get a sense of what each person needs, and what each person can do to help. These are some questions to ask each other:
  - What are your hobbies and interests?
  - What languages do you speak?
  - When are you generally working/busy and when are you generally available?
  - How regularly do you want to check in?
  - What is your living situation like and who else lives with you?
  - Who are your emergency contacts?
  - What resources, skills or knowledge do you have that you could share with the pod or help others with?
  - What are your needs? What are you afraid of losing? What do you need help with?
  - Do you have any important health info about yourself you want to share with me? For example, do you have regular prescriptions or appointments you need to maintain?
  - What will be your primary concerns if the pandemic lasts two months or longer?
- You might find that it takes multiple conversations with each other before people feel comfortable discussing the last few questions. That's okay! Relationship building is not a means to mutual aid, but fundamental to the work itself.
- Support each other. Your pod will have lots of needs at this time, and they may change as this pandemic continues. Some needs that might or have already come up:
  - Food (both grocery store trips and prep)
  - Childcare (especially as schools close)
  - Picking up medicine or other absolutely essential errands
  - Cleaning supplies
  - Financial support (especially as more workers get laid off or have to stay home without sick leave)
  - Emotional support and socializing
  - Mental health counseling and services

- Recreational activities, for both adults and children
- Help navigating benefits processes
- Language translation/support
- Information on what community resources are available
- Tech assistance
- Internet access
- Timely and accurate public health information

## Pod Contact Sheet

Hey! My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
 and I am your neighbor at the address  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and  
 my number is \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm reaching out because I know that Coronavirus is spreading in our area, and I want to be connected with you and our other neighbors so we can stay in touch, pool resources, and support each other with any needs that may come up. I am going to coordinate a group text message thread or phone tree so we can be in communication. Please text me when you get this if you would like to be part of this network. If you prefer not to communicate via text, give me a call and we can talk that way!

## Pod Conversation Guide

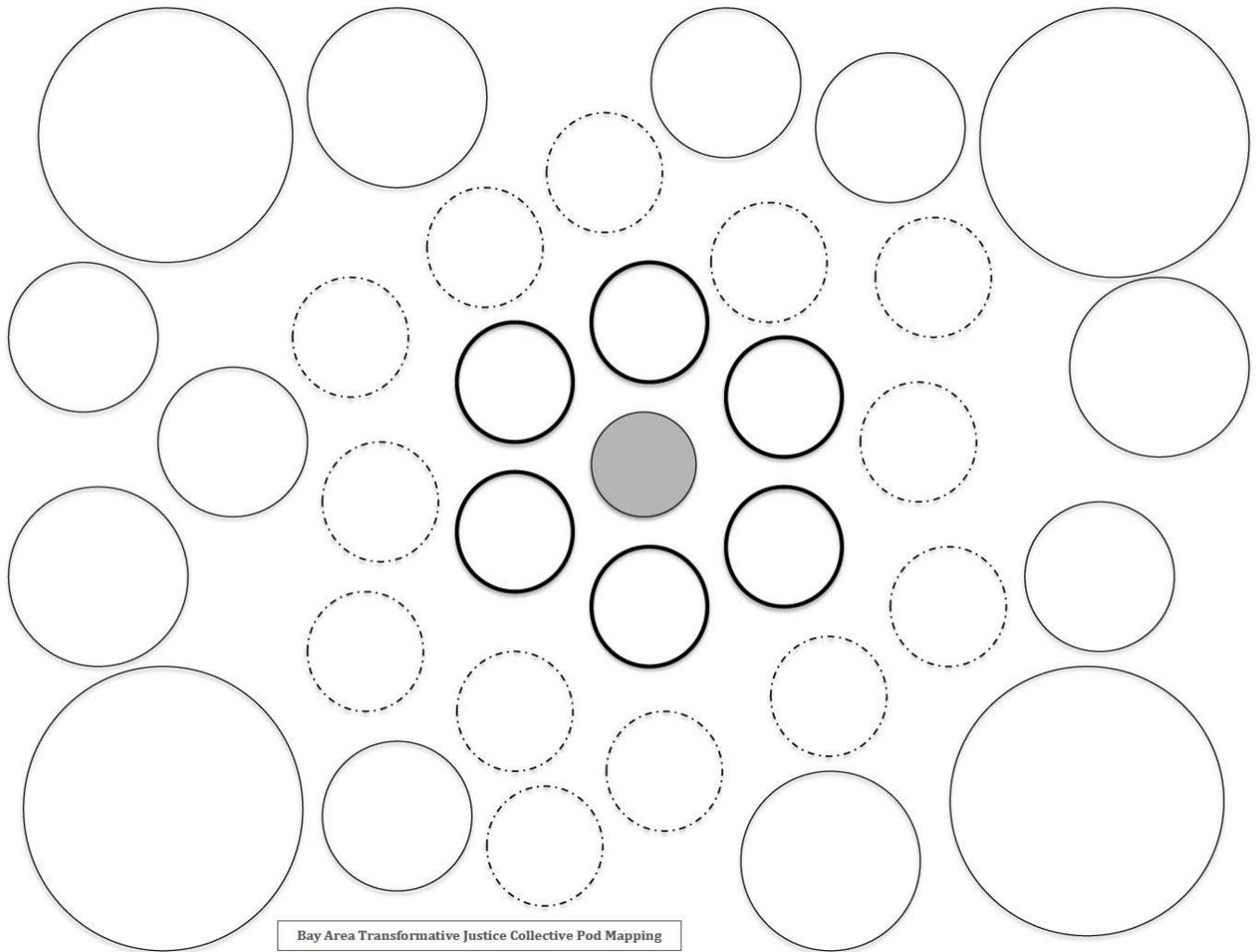
This can be a conversation or you can take notes, compiling a little neighborhood directory with emergency contacts for people. **We encourage that you have this conversation over the phone once you have exchanged info rather than in person to minimize disease spread.**

1. Hi neighbor! We may not know each other well but I'd like to hear your concerns and needs so I can give you a hand if you need it in this scary time. Tell me a little about yourself. What is your living situation like? Do you have pets? What are your days like?

Do you have any particular skills or hobbies? Do you have any particular challenges or needs at this time?

2. What are you concerned about right now in regard to COVID-19? Your health or your family's? Losing work or childcare? Being confined to your home? What do you think this may mean for you?
3. Who are the main people in your life who you contact about your well-being? How do you contact them (by phone, on facebook), and would you be open to sharing their contact info with me in case of emergency? Who else lives with you, and how can we best contact them if need be?
4. What resources, skills, interests, knowledge do you hold that you would be open to sharing with the block?
5. What do you think is important to share with me and others about your health? Dietary restrictions? Where do you pick up prescriptions? Which clinic do you go to?

## Pod Mapping Tool



- In the center circle, write your name. If you are using a neighborhood pod model, the neighborhood captain goes in the center circle.
- The dark circles are your pod. It's important to write specific names, as well as what supports they can provide. Is it a neighbor who has a generator that will charge your wheelchair when the electricity is out? Is it someone who can buy and drop off groceries? What about a friend who will take care of you when you're sick? Talk to your

people and ask what they feel able to provide. Then ask them what they need from you to be in *their* pod, or let them know what you can offer. (Mutual aid is mutual.)

- The dotted lines are people who are movable—they could become part of your pod if you have some conversations and build relationships.
- The larger circles on the outside are bigger community groups, networks, organizations, etc that could be resources for you.
- Here's a completed pod map as an example.



## ***Health & Safety Tips***

Organizing mutual aid during COVID-19 means taking extra precautions to protect yourself and your community from the spread of the virus. Here are some tips for minimizing your exposure:

- ✓ Practice social distancing. Do not interact with people face-to-face. Connect with each other through phone/web.
- ✓ Go to grocery stores and pharmacies for essential errands at non-peak hours.
- ✓ Use delivery services when possible so you stay home. Pool money to pay for these services or find a volunteer delivery collective in your community.
- ✓ When dropping off food/medicine for someone, they should not open the door while you are there. Coordinate the dropoff through text/phone or speak through the door. Don't touch doorbells with your finger.
- ✓ Consider using digital payments rather than handing cash back and forth for errand reimbursements.
- ✓ Pool money to support one another so folks can stay home from work when they are sick or if they have a job that does not allow them to work remotely.
- ✓ Try to remain local and bike, walk, scooter or drive. Avoid public transit when possible. Avoid rideshares and taxis when possible.
- ✓ When you're outside, try to keep 6 feet away from other people at all times.
- ✓ Wipe down and disinfect everything you bring into your home.'

## ***Mutual Aid Resources***

Secure encrypted group messaging apps:

- Signal: <https://signal.org/en/>
- WhatsApp: <https://www.whatsapp.com/download/?lang=en>

How to build a phone tree: <https://ww3.aauw.org/resource/how-to-build-a-phone-tree/>

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief (mutual aid network with many guides, tools and resources):  
<https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/>

(This guide was compiled with resources from “Mutual Aid 101 Toolkit” by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Mariame Kaba and “Pod Mapping for Mutual Aid” by Rebel Sidney Black.)