

How to run a swap shop

What is a swap shop?

It is a free and local exchange where members of the public can pass on things they no longer want, in exchange for something they need. Many people describe it as a kind of cashless bring-and-buy sale, or bring-and-take. Other names are “give or take days”, “free for all”, “Freecycle or Freegle days”. Participants do not need to bring anything in order to take away goods, and vice versa.

Swap shops recognise that things no longer wanted by someone, might be another person’s treasure. By reusing things we cut down on the amount of waste that goes into landfill and reduce the amount of resources that we use in manufacturing of new products. And it saves money!

How to get started?

Venue

Location is very important. Community centres, schools or religious meeting places will be known locally. An easy-to-find venue will attract more visitors.

If the swap shop is held in an area of mixed housing it will increase your chances of attracting both “givers” and “takers”, and help your local community. Finding a venue large enough for your needs and facilities, e.g. free parking, toilets, somewhere to make refreshments and disabled access and facilities, should all be taken into consideration.

When booking a venue, make sure the event won’t compete with a local jumble sale or other similar fund-raising event in the weeks before and after.

Timing

The most usual time for a swap shop is on Saturday morning from 10am to noon. However, this will depend on your proposed audience. For instance, mums may prefer to run swap shops on a weekday to fit around childcare arrangements.

Items suitable to bring to a swap shop

This is entirely up to you. Examples are: books, DVDs and CDs, kitchenware, pictures, tools, gardening items, curtains and other soft furnishings, children’s toys and baby items.

You may wish to accept items from household sources only because disposal of household waste is free. This avoids issues of commercial waste disposal charges.

You may like to provide general guidance such as:

- items from households only
- must be fit for reuse
- must fit in your car
- no electrical items (unless PAT testing)
- no duvets (to avoid problems of dust mites, etc)



Items NOT suitable to bring to a swap shop

Again, this is up to you and what you feel is appropriate. Here are some tips:



- Paint and other hazardous waste, chemicals etc: some groups do take paint but have an arrangement with a local [Community Repair](#) scheme which can organise reuse of this product.
- Very heavy items: You can have a photoboard to advertise heavy items like tables and beds. It is good to promote your [local Freecycle, Freegle or equivalent website](#), and possibly details of other organisations that might take the items, e.g [Somerset's network of furniture reuse groups](#).
- Small electrical items: Under EU law electrical items can only be swapped if they have been tested by someone who is Portable Appliance Test (PAT) trained.

Make sure publicity clearly states what you will or won't accept at your swap. If you are not accepting small electrical items (WEEE – Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment), it is a good idea for somebody to be on duty to check that people are not bringing in electrical goods inadvertently or items that are not in any way swappable.

People do need to be advised that they should be responsible for disposal of their own goods if they are outright tat! Remember that battery operated goods are also classed as "WEEE", so it's good to check children's toys as well.

People

Whilst it is perfectly possible to run an average event with only a handful of volunteers, the old saying "many hands make light work" really does apply to swap shops. Recruit as many volunteers for the day as you can and it is often easier to get volunteers if you ask them to help out for just an hour at a specific time rather than all morning. Volunteers should be briefed prior to the event, explaining what is expected of them and pointed out such things as fire exits.

You will need well-informed volunteers for the following tasks:

- advance publicity
- setting up the venue, signage, etc
- car parking assistants
- greeting or counting people, and explaining how the event works
- sorting swap items into groups, e.g. CDs, books, kitchenware
- weighing goods out
- taking photographs
- making tea and coffee for the volunteers!
- help to clear up
- collecting up and transporting unwanted "leftovers"



Risk assessment and looking at potential problems

Find out whether your event is already covered by the venue's insurance. You may need to take out suitable cover – public liability, employees (your volunteers) and product liability insurance. You will also need undertake a risk assessment for the event to ensure that your insurance is valid. A template and guidance is available to help you do this on www.somersetwaste.gov.uk (see Education & Fun).

Some swap shop organisers have noted that people bringing items have been approached prior to entry to the venue by people wishing to take goods, sometimes for resale, or sometimes just to beat the queues. Although this in effect reduces the amount of items being disposed of to landfill, surveys of people using swaps suggest they would rather items be brought into the venue for local reuse, also stating that if they wanted items to be resold they would have taken them to charity shops rather than a swap. If this is a problem, volunteers helping people in from the car park seems to discourage this type of behaviour.

You may want to set a limit for the number of items per person to prevent bad feeling against “greedy” or unfair behaviour. Put up signs ‘10 items per person’ to allow all browsers a fair chance. Additional items could be taken in the last 30 minutes for “everything must go!”

Publicity

If you want to have plenty of people attending, publicity is crucial. There is a sample press release and example poster on Somerset Waste Partnership's (SWP's) website www.somersetwaste.gov.uk.

Here are some easy ways to promote your event:

- Put up posters in local libraries, doctor's and dentist's surgeries, schools and shops
- Advertise in your local newsletter or paper well in advance, so people can collect items together. Repeat this just before the event
- Advertise on your local news website
- Ask along your local press as publicity for the “reduce waste” message
- Ask volunteers to give out publicity leaflets in their area or at other events – but remember you are trying to reduce waste, so do not want to litter the neighbourhood with unwanted flyers
- Remember email and social media are low-cost options to spread the word – ask your volunteers to share event details with their online contacts

Partners

It may be useful to share the event with another voluntary group in your area – you can then attract a wider range of people to the event, share publicity, share the workload, and get to know other members of your local community better.

Since swap shops tend to draw in a very diverse range of people, it is a good opportunity to showcase some of the other initiatives that the groups may be involved with. You may want to invite other organisations to have stands, or even better, practical demonstrations to give local residents access to information they wouldn't normally come across.

Refreshments

Having refreshments and a place to sit and chat offers an opportunity for different parts of the community that perhaps wouldn't normally meet to socialise. In fact, at some of the more popular events some people have said they mainly come for the chance to meet their neighbours. In this way, offering refreshments will often attract more attendees. Your local Women's Institute (WI) group may be able to help run a café. And remember, a volunteer with tea and cake is a happy volunteer.



Monitoring

Whilst it might not be your first priority, keeping track of how many people come to your events and the amount of goods you have diverted from landfill is really important because it helps you measure your success. This is great to help motivate the group and as a means of having something tangible to use when applying for funding or when writing a press release.

Greet people as they come in so that you can explain how the swap works, intercept any tat, or items you don't accept, and have an idea of numbers attending. Weigh things out as people leave.

If you hold regular swaps, it can also be a good idea to have a running total displayed at your event so people coming along feel they part of something bigger than just getting free stuff!

Dealing with leftover items

Have a plan of action for what will happen to all the leftovers. Consider how to organise transport if required. If you are unable to transport or store larger items then make sure people know they cannot bring them and encourage the use of a photoboard to advertise these items.

Here are some tips for dealing with leftover items:

- if you are doing more than one event – can the leftovers be stored and saved for the next one?
- [Somerset's furniture charities](#) may want some of the furniture, kitchenware and utensils
- textiles and books – sort by quality and reuse or recycle as appropriate
- check opening times for [local charity shop](#) or if they would collect large amounts

Bric-a-brac not taken for free won't be of interest to charity shops. If it's from local household sources, you may take this to local recycling centres. If you have large quantities of this after your swap shop, please contact SWP before visiting a Somerset recycling centre or you may be challenged onsite.

Somerset Waste Partnership
www.somersetwaste.gov.uk
01823 625700
enquiries@somersetwaste.gov.uk

If leftover items are from commercial sources, you will need to arrange disposal of business waste (this is chargeable). Please refer to guidance on business waste or contact SWP for advice.

Swap shops are great fun!

Everyone enjoys getting something for nothing as well as doing their bit for the environment. Enjoy the day and let as many people as possible know why you are doing it.