

Helping Each Other

A practical coordination kit for small groups

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Good intentions are a beginning. The next questions are ordinary ones: What is actually needed? Who has time? Has anyone agreed? What happens when the plan does not work?

This kit helps a few people organise a modest shared activity without turning help into an obligation. Use it for a neighbourhood exchange, a reading group, a creative gathering or another small project within the participants' abilities. It works on paper, in a text document or in a spreadsheet. No subscription or special account is required.

The eight templates move from a small idea to an agreed trial, then to review and repair. Each has instructions, a blank version to copy and a fictional worked example. The examples follow **Harbour Lane Book Share**, an invented group planning a one-hour exchange of books in a shared courtyard. The people and event are fictional; they are not customers or endorsements.

Begin in 20 minutes

1. Complete the **Small Start** card together. Choose one activity you can try with resources already available.
2. Give each participant a **Need or Offer** card. Passing is a valid answer.
3. Agree the **Consent and Contact** card before exchanging personal details.
4. Make one **Matching Proposal**. Ask the people involved separately before treating it as agreed.

Use the remaining templates when you meet, make a consequential change, encounter a problem or finish the trial. You do not need a committee to fill in a committee's worth of forms.

Five working promises

- **Ask rather than assign.** A useful suggestion is still a suggestion until the people doing it agree.
- **Make “no” usable.** People can decline, pause or change an offer without having to tell a personal story. Update the plan when they do.
- **Keep the burden visible.** Preparation, messages, travel, cleaning and follow-up are work too.
- **Share only what is needed.** Keep contact details separate from the shared task list. Ask before forwarding details, quoting someone or taking photographs.
- **Leave room for correction.** Record what changed, who will act and when you will check it. A successful meeting can end with a smaller plan.

These are practical worksheets, not a professional assessment or a guarantee of anyone's suitability. Keep the first activity low stakes. Tasks needing qualified expertise or a formal safety process belong with appropriate support, rather than being made acceptable by completing a card.

Find the template you need

Each template has a guide and fictional example on one page, followed by a separate blank worksheet. Copy a worksheet when you need another version. Use only the cards that help your activity.

Template	Guide	Blank
1 Small Start	3	4
2 Need or Offer	5	6
3 Consent and Contact	7	8
4 Matching Proposal	9	10
5 A Short Meeting That Ends in a Decision	11	12
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A rhythm for the next trial

Before: one small aim; one need or offer at a time; explicit contact choices; no unaccepted assignments.

During: make the work visible; leave a way to ask, pause or decline; change the procedure when a real barrier appears.

After: return resources; close tasks; remove unnecessary details; record one lesson; ask again before continuing.

You can measure a useful beginning without scoring people: Was the task clear? Did the people involved agree? Could someone say no? Was the burden manageable? Did a concern change what happened?

A little shared work, done with care, is enough for a first trial. The clipboard may attend; it does not get a casting vote.

Using the editable files

In Word, type in the space below each prompt and let the page grow as needed. The PDF keeps the print layout. The CSV is a blank task list: use agreed labels and leave private contact information in a separate place with limited access.

1 Small Start

Use it when: a promising idea is becoming larger than the group's available time or resources.

Time: 10–15 minutes. **Useful result:** one bounded trial with a clear end.

Start with an observable change, such as “six neighbours can exchange books”, rather than a broad ambition such as “transform the community”. List what you already have. If an essential resource is missing, shrink or postpone the trial. Do not convert somebody's enthusiasm into a promise on their behalf.

Write down who is affected even if they will not attend. Agree what the group can decide and what belongs to an individual or another organisation. Choose a stopping point before you begin.

Fictional worked example

Small change: six interested neighbours can exchange books and meet without buying anything. Six people expressed interest in the building's existing notice group; that is an indication of interest, not a booking.

Trial: Saturday, 10–11 am, at the covered courtyard table. The table's coordinator has agreed to its use. Residents using the courtyard for other purposes must still have space to pass.

Agreed capacity: Priya can host for one hour; Tomas can carry one small box; Jo can prepare a handwritten sign. Each will confirm again on Friday. Setup and clearing take 15 minutes either side, with two people volunteering for each.

Limits: no money, transport, storage of other people's books or ongoing weekly commitment. People take their unexchanged books home. Everyone may browse without bringing a book.

Stop rule: postpone if the space is unavailable or no two people agree to setup and clearing. A useful trial means people can find the table, participate comfortably and leave the shared space as they found it. Jo invites a ten-minute review on Sunday.

1 Small Start worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Project / date / person keeping this card:

The small change we want to try:

Who asked for it, and how do we know it is wanted?

Who may be affected without taking part?

First trial: activity, place, start and finish:

Resources already available, with owners' permission:

People who have actually agreed, and their time limits:

Work before and after the visible activity:

What we are not taking on in this trial:

Permission or missing information we still need:

Our group may decide:

Individuals / others must decide for themselves:

We will postpone or stop if:

We will call the trial useful if we observe:

Review date / person who will invite the review:

2 Need or Offer

Use it when: “someone should help” needs to become a specific, manageable request.

Time: five minutes per card. **Useful result:** a clear ask or offer that can be accepted, changed or declined.

Use one card for one need or offer. Describe the task and the time, not the person's worth or circumstances. A request for help does not need a justification. An offer does not create an unlimited duty. Avoid posting phone numbers or private circumstances on a shared board.

People can contribute different things at different times, or receive help without offering anything back. Do not use this list to rank who is generous, reliable or deserving.

Fictional worked example

O-03 — offer, expires Friday at 6 pm. Jo offers to make one large-print handwritten sign saying “Book Share, Saturday 10–11”. Enough means one sign, delivered to Priya on Friday. Jo has card and a marker but cannot print copies, manage publicity or handle replies. Responses go through Priya. Jo agrees that the task and first name may appear on the group list.

N-02 — need, expires Friday at 6 pm. The group needs two people for 15 minutes after the exchange to return the courtyard to its previous layout. People can offer one slot. The card does not say “reliable people urgently needed”, and it is not silently extended if nobody responds. The fallback is to reduce the setup or postpone.

2 Need or Offer worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Card ID / date / review or expiry date:

This is: a need / an offer / an idea for discussion

Name or agreed label shown to the group:

Task or item, in one clear sentence:

What would count as enough?

Time / place / duration / quantity:

What I can manage, and what I cannot take on:

Resources required / anything unavailable:

Preferred way to respond through the coordinator:

Sharing choice: group only / named people only / do not post

Current state: open / discussing / agreed / withdrawn / complete

Person who will update or remove the card:

3 Consent and Contact

Use it when: you are about to share details, introduce people, record a meeting or publicise an activity.

Time: five minutes together, plus individual choices. **Useful result:** everyone knows what is shared and how to change it.

Explain the choices in ordinary language. Ask separately about joining an activity, sharing contact details and appearing in publicity. Agreement to one does not imply agreement to the others. Let someone answer privately or later. Silence is not a yes.

Keep only information needed for the activity. A coordinator can pass a message without disclosing a phone number. Set a date to remove contact notes you no longer need. Explain that a public post or forwarded copy may be difficult to retrieve; do not promise perfect deletion.

Fictional worked example

Tomas agrees to help carry one box. Priya may message him through their existing contact route. The shared list may say “Box setup — Tomas — confirmed”; it must not contain his number. Priya must ask before passing his contact details to another participant. Tomas does not agree to photographs or publicity.

Priya keeps contact choices in her private planning note and the task list in the existing group thread. On Sunday she will remove the temporary matching notes and ask whether any contact information still needs to be kept. A previously posted event notice cannot be guaranteed to disappear from other people's copies. Tomas can change his choice by messaging Priya; no explanation is needed.

3 Consent and Contact worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Activity / coordinator / date:

How someone can ask a question or change a choice:

My activity choice: interested / agreed / not joining / ask me later

Name or label the group may use:

Contact method the coordinator may use:

The coordinator may share these details:

Only with these people / for this purpose:

Introduce me to a proposed match: ask me first / no introductions

Photos, recordings or quotations: no / ask me for each use

Public name or publicity: no / ask me for exact wording

Details kept in: [location and who can access it]

Details reviewed / removed by: [person and date]

Tasks or circumstances I do not want recorded:

Choice confirmed by me on:

4 Matching Proposal

Use it when: a need and an offer appear to fit.

Time: five minutes plus replies. **Useful result:** a small agreement made by the people involved, with an easy way out.

Check the actual limits on both cards. Ask each person whether they are open to the proposed introduction. Share only the details they permitted. Then agree the task, timing and finish together. A coordinator suggests a connection; they do not certify a person or guarantee an outcome.

Do not publish “matched” while one person is still considering. If someone declines, close the proposal without labelling them difficult or unreliable. Reopen the task or use its fallback.

Fictional worked example

M-01: Priya proposes that Tomas bring his offered small box at 9:45 am while she prepares the table. Both separately agree to discuss it. Neither phone number is forwarded; Priya relays the messages.

They agree to one box of books carried from the building entrance to the courtyard, taking no more than 15 minutes. Tomas is not agreeing to collect books from homes or carry furniture. He can cancel through Priya before the event. If he cancels, Priya brings fewer books and uses a bag she can manage herself. The task ends when the box is placed at the table. Priya checks completion at 10 am and closes the proposal.

4 Matching Proposal worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Proposal ID / need card / offer card / coordinator:

Proposed task and why the limits appear to fit:

Person A agreed to discuss on:

Person B agreed to discuss on:

Details each permitted the coordinator to share:

Task both people have now accepted:

When / where / how long / resources each will bring:

What each person is not agreeing to:

How to check in / change / cancel:

If either person cannot continue, the fallback is:

When this agreement ends:

State: proposed / both considering / agreed / declined / finished

Confirmation from A / confirmation from B / date:

Follow-up owner / date:

5 A Short Meeting That Ends in a Decision

Use it when: a group needs to choose what happens next without letting the longest conversation become the decision.

Time: 25 minutes. **Useful result:** a decision people can understand, with named work and a review date.

Send the actual question beforehand. Offer written input or a shorter check-in to people who cannot attend. At the start, say what the group has authority to decide. A group can change its event plan; it cannot agree to another person's time, data or participation for them.

Use your group's agreed decision rule and record it. For a small voluntary trial, seek a proposal the people taking responsibility can accept, then check whether it creates an unresolved burden for anyone else. If the answer is uncertain, choose a smaller reversible step or defer. Absence or silence is not individual consent.

Fictional worked example

Question: should Harbour Lane run a second book-share next month? Priya and Jo attend; Tomas sends a written note saying he cannot carry books next time. The group may propose another event but cannot commit a future helper.

They compare a one-hour exchange, a smaller half-hour table and no further event. They agree to offer one half-hour trial only if two people voluntarily confirm setup and clearing by Wednesday. Tomas's previous offer does not carry over. Priya accepts sending one invitation; Jo accepts updating the sign if the trial proceeds. The concern about leaving unwanted books behind stays in the record. Priya will message the outcome to interested neighbours, and the plan closes automatically if nobody confirms.

5 A Short Meeting That Ends in a Decision worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Date / facilitator / note keeper / finish time:

Question we need to decide:

What is within this group's authority?

Who is affected but absent / how was input invited?

Decision rule agreed for this question:

0–3 minutes: state the question, limits and time available.

3–8 minutes: hear needs and missing information; passing is allowed.

8–15 minutes: compare two workable options, including postponing.

15–20 minutes: test the preferred option for burdens and objections.

20–25 minutes: record the decision, tasks and review date.

Decision / reason / what remains uncertain:

An objection or concern we must carry forward:

Task | person who explicitly accepted | deadline | capacity limit

How absent participants will receive the decision:

What would cause us to reopen it?

Review date / invitation owner:

6 The Consequence and Missing Voice Check

Use it when: a plan seems efficient but someone else may carry its cost.

Time: 10 minutes. **Useful result:** one practical change, or a clear reason to pause.

Look beyond the people in the room. Include those who clean up, people who cannot use the proposed place or time, neighbours affected by noise, and the living surroundings. Record what you know separately from what you are assuming. Someone can describe a possible barrier without claiming to speak for everyone who experiences it.

Do not insist that an affected person attend a meeting, disclose private circumstances or educate the whole group before you change something obvious. Offer a quieter way to contribute. When you cannot get input, keep the uncertainty visible and make the next step smaller.

Fictional worked example

The book-share helps browsers, but a table across the narrow entrance could burden everyone else. The group knows the entrance is narrow because they checked the layout. They do not know whether their chosen time suits residents who work weekends, and will not describe a Saturday event as “accessible to all”.

They move the table beside the wall, keep a clear route and advertise that browsing does not require bringing a book. Priya offers a private reply route for access questions. No music or speaker is needed. They use the existing sign rather than distributing loose flyers around the planted area. Jo checks the route at setup and halfway through. If the table obstructs passage, they stop and move it; they do not wait for the review meeting.

6 The Consequence and Missing Voice Check worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Plan / date / people checking:

Who benefits, and what do they actually gain?

Who does the preparation, waiting, travel and clearing?

Who may be excluded by cost, timing, language, noise or access?

Who is affected but has no place in our current discussion?

What could this change for the shared space or living surroundings?

What we know, and how we know it:

What we are assuming / whose perspective we do not have:

How input can be offered without joining the meeting:

One change we can make now:

Permission or information needed before proceeding:

If the impact is worse than expected, we will:

Person who will check / date / what they will look for:

7 A Problem and Repair Conversation

Use it when: an ordinary coordination problem has caused inconvenience, confusion or friction.

Time: 15–20 minutes. **Useful result:** an agreed next action, without forcing agreement about motives.

Ask whether the people involved want a conversation, written messages or a pause. Begin with an observable event and its effect. Separate those from assumptions about intention. Each person can correct the account, decline a proposed remedy or stop participating.

Do not use a group process to pressure someone into contact, forgiveness, disclosure or an admission. If there is intimidation, harassment or a safety concern, stop this worksheet and use appropriate support or an established reporting process. This card is for modest practical repair, not for deciding serious allegations.

Fictional worked example

After the exchange, two boxes remain near the doorway. Jo had expected every owner to take books home; Priya thought one box belonged to the group's shared stock. Both agree the notice was unclear. They do not agree who first suggested storing books, and deciding that is unnecessary for the immediate repair.

Priya moves the boxes out of the route with a second willing helper and sends one message asking owners to collect them by the agreed time. She does not publish blame or nominate Jo as the new storage person. For the next event, each owner keeps a named bag and takes it home. Priya and Jo agree the public update: "Our collection instructions were unclear; next time every contributor will keep responsibility for their remaining books." They check on Sunday that the courtyard is clear. No one is required to say that the disagreement is resolved emotionally.

7 A Problem and Repair Conversation worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Date / person coordinating / record visible to whom:

People agreed to this format: conversation / writing / pause

What happened, stated as specifically as we can:

What effect it had / on whom:

What is agreed about the account:

What remains different or unknown:

Immediate action needed to limit further inconvenience:

What each person needs next; passing is allowed:

Two possible repairs:

Repair each person has actually agreed to:

Who will do what / by when / within what limit:

Check-in date / person:

If no agreement is possible, how we pause or end the arrangement:

What can be shared with the wider group, with whose agreement:

8 Review Close or Hand Over

Use it when: the trial ends, the same person keeps doing everything or the group is tempted to continue automatically.

Time: 10–15 minutes. **Useful result:** an honest choice to continue, change, hand over or stop.

Compare the result with the modest aim on the first card. Count the hidden work as well as attendance. A small event can be worthwhile and still be too much for the current organisers. Ask whether people want to continue; do not roll their consent forward.

Keep a brief learning record. Remove contact details and matching notes that no longer serve an agreed purpose. If there is a handover, the receiving person accepts the task and the transfer of any necessary information is separately agreed. Nobody becomes coordinator because they missed the meeting.

Fictional worked example

Five neighbours visited; two exchanged books, one browsed and two stopped for a conversation. The group did not ask every visitor for feedback, so it cannot claim universal satisfaction. Organisers spent about three hours altogether on messages, setup, hosting and clearing. Priya enjoyed the gathering but cannot host every week.

They choose one possible half-hour repeat, subject to the confirmations recorded in the meeting log. No recurring rota is created. Jo keeps the improved sign wording; Priya removes the temporary matching notes on Sunday. The shared record keeps the date, approximate effort, lesson about the clear entrance and next decision deadline, without private contact details. The closing message says: “Thank you for the first trial. We will confirm by Wednesday whether another small session is possible.” If it ends there, the group keeps the reusable sign and the useful lesson, with no obligation to keep an institution alive.

8 Review Close or Hand Over worksheet

Write below each prompt or edit this page in Word. Use another sheet if you need more room.

Project / trial date / review date / participants:

Our original small aim:

What actually happened, including a limit or disappointment:

Who benefited / whose experience is still unknown:

Time and effort used, including preparation and follow-up:

What felt worthwhile / what became too much:

One correction we want to keep:

Choice: end / repeat once / change and test / offer a handover

What each person has newly agreed to, with a finish date:

Unfinished task | willing owner | deadline | fallback

Resources returned / shared space restored:

Information to retain, reason, access and review date:

Information to remove, person and date:

Message the group has agreed to share:

If we stop, what is still worth preserving?
