



# **SWAP IT** **TOOLKIT**

**Step-by-step guide for organizing a swap event for Toronto's multi-residential buildings**



Developed by Recycling Council of Ontario as a resource of Waste Reduction Week in Canada. This project is supported by the City of Toronto through its [Waste Reduction Community Grants](#).



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# Swap Introduction



## Why Host a Swap Event?

### Waste Management in Multi-Residential Buildings

The City of Toronto manages almost 1,000,000 tonnes of residential and non-residential waste each year! Multi-residential buildings—comprising condos and apartments—divert less than 30% of their waste, compared to single-family homes that divert more than 60% of their waste. With almost 50% of Toronto residents living in multi-residential units, improving their waste diversion performance is critical to meeting the city’s waste diversion goals.<sup>1</sup>



### What is a Swap Event?

Swap events are a fun way for people to get together and bring their gently used clothing or small household items that they no longer want or need and swap them for ‘new’. These social functions are becoming increasingly popular in communities in Toronto and across Canada to foster community engagement, reduce material lost to landfill, and help buildings save on waste disposal costs. Swap events can take place in building lobbies, common areas, or recreation rooms of multi-residential buildings. Nearby community centres, schools, and workplaces are also great event spaces if your building cannot accommodate a swap event.

There are typical guidelines for organizing a swap (as outlined in the Swap It Toolkit Step-by-Step Guide), however, swap events are flexible and can be adapted to best suit your building and event space.

### Differences Between Swap and Donation

The purpose of a swap event is to provide an opportunity to exchange gently used clothing or items that are in good condition for someone else’s. This is a great example of reuse, the second R in the 3Rs hierarchy of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Conversely, when you donate material to a charity you can likely include all kinds of things that may not seem to have a useful second life for someone else, including damaged or heavily worn clothing, and even single shoes. It’s important to check with the charity you intend to donate to regarding the materials they accept. Charity collectors and retail stores often resell useable material to generate funds, and material that cannot be resold is sent to facilities that have the capability to recycle or repurpose them. For example, textiles that cannot be reworn can be downcycled into industrial rag or shredded and turned into insulation. Whether you swap or donate your items, it’s important that they stay out of the waste stream and landfills.

<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto, Tenant Engagement Guide: Increasing Multi-Residential Waste Diversion

## Swap Events: The Benefits

### Your Community

Swapping is a great way to promote and practice the 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle! These events also help your community become more sustainable:

- **Social:** Brings people together and allows residents to meet their neighbours; and offers low cost options for gently used items for everyone.
- **Environmental:** Gives clothing and other products second lives; reduces the environmental impacts involved in making new items; and avoids the impacts and costs of disposal.
- **Economical:** Clothing swaps are a fantastic way for residents to find new and unique items at no or low cost.



### Your Building

Multi-residential buildings in Toronto are responsible for the costs associated with their waste removal. Property owners of multi-residential buildings pay a fee based on how much waste the building generates and the number of units in the building. There is no fee for Blue Bin recycling and Green Bin organics collection. Buildings that reduce waste by diverting more material reduce their solid waste fees. By removing textile waste from your buildings waste stream, you can reduce the costs associated with your waste collection. To see how your waste costs are calculated see the [City of Toronto's Fees, Set Out & Bins for Buildings](#).

To help reduce waste generated in your building you can also contact the city at [swmsupport@toronto.ca](mailto:swmsupport@toronto.ca) for posters, stickers, lobby displays, kitchen catchers, recycling bags, presentations, site visits, and support.

### My building doesn't receive City of Toronto collection services

Check with your service provider to see how you are billed. Usually private service provides charge multi-residential buildings for the number of pickups and/or the amount of material they remove. If this is the case removing wearable clothing could reduce disposal costs.

## The Environment

### Textiles Waste: The Issue

The average person throws away 37 kilograms of textiles each year, and 95% of which can be reused or recycled. Globally, textiles waste has increased dramatically due to the rise in clothing consumption and production.

We are buying more clothes than ever, wearing them only a few times, and then discarding them without giving them a chance at a second life. It takes 2,650 litres of water to produce just one cotton t-shirt, a frightening number when you realize the average Canadian buys 70 new items of clothing every year!<sup>1</sup>

### The Importance of Reuse

Reuse extends the useful life of the things we use in our daily lives, including our clothing. It also increases the value of the materials, prolongs its life to avoid producing new material, and delays its eventual end of life disposal.

Swapping items that are still in good condition is just one way we can contribute to advancing a circular economy, which keeps resources in use for as long as possible. Swapping extends product and textile lifecycles, offers a low or no cost option for users, and diverts more materials from disposal. These factors reduce the impacts associated with energy, land, and water used to make new items.



1 [Value Village](#)

## Health and Safety

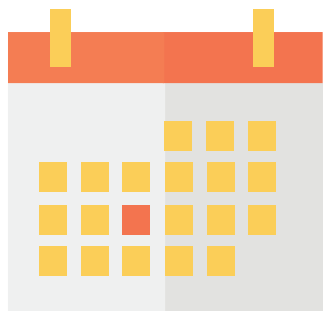
At an event where people are gathering to exchange items it is important to keep health and safety in mind. A major concern in multi-residential buildings is the spread of pests such as bed bugs. By putting proper measures in place you can ensure that pests and germs are not spread throughout your community:

- Communicate to swap attendees that all materials must be cleaned before bringing them to the swap.
- Encourage attendees to clean their 'new' items before use.
- Consider not accepting items that are more prone to pests, such as linens and upholstered furniture.
- Thoroughly inspect items brought to the swap to make sure nothing is soiled or in unsuitable condition.

## Managing Leftover Materials

There will likely be remaining items after your swap event is over. Leftover items can find new life somewhere else by donating them to a local charity, bringing them to a thrift/ secondhand store, or posting them on a reuse site. The Swap It Toolkit Step-by-Step Guide provides organizers a list of common options for reusing materials.

# Step 1: Planning Your Swap





Welcome to the Swap It Toolkit Step-by-Step Planning Guide that helps organizers conduct a successful swap event from pre-planning to post-swap resources. This guide is just one of the resources available to organizers. For additional resources please use the link that you received when you registered at [swapittoolkit.ca](http://swapittoolkit.ca) to access all available resources, and includes:

- Event day signs
- Promotional material
- Letter to property manager(s), building staff, condo board, and residents

The first step to organizing a swap is to plan logistics and structure of how your event will run. Having guidelines in place and communicating them prior to the event are crucial for a successful swap. This section provides best practices for successful swaps, and will guide you through the main questions you will want to address when planning your event:

- Who will organize the swap?
- When will the swap take place?
- Where will the swap take place?
- What materials will be accepted?
- When will attendees drop off materials?
- How will swapped materials be counted and tracked?
- How much will the swap cost?
- When will attendees drop off materials?
- Whose support will be needed? I.e. property manager, building staff, condo board, tenants association.
- How will the swap be promoted?

### *Swap It Quick Tip:*

It's important keep in mind that best practices provided in this guide are suggestions that can be adapted for your swap as you see fit. Choose rules and guidelines that work best for you!



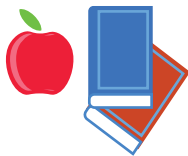



## Build a Team

From the initial planning stage to post-swap, there are many parts involved to ensure a successful event, which is why it's important to delegate roles and responsibilities right away.

Use the *Swap It Event Planning Checklist* to delegate tasks and track progress.

## Choose a Date

Consider applying a theme and aligning it with other significant events. Changing seasons is a great time as many of us will go through our closets in preparation for different temperatures.

Event	When	Why it's a good time
 <p>Back to School and Fall</p>	August - September	New classes doesn't mean new outfits. Host a back to school swap where families and students in your community can find 'new' clothes, backpacks, and supplies.
 <p>Waste Reduction Week in Canada</p>	Upcoming dates: October 19 - 25, 2020 October 18 - 24, 2021 October 17 - 23, 2022 October 16 - 22, 2023	<p>Celebrate Waste Reduction Week in Canada by hosting a swap during the 3rd week of October. Swap events align well with Waste Reduction Week's theme days: Textiles Tuesday and Swap &amp; Repair Sunday, as they promote extending the lifecycle of our products and textiles, contributing to a circular economy.</p> <p>With summer's end and winter just around the corner, fall is a great time to host a swap.</p> <p>October is also Halloween. Consider including costumes in your swap or host a swap dedicated to costumes.</p>
 <p>Winter Holidays</p>	December - January	Encourage the act of giving and host a holiday-themed swap. People can bring gifts that weren't a hit, find a gently-used gift for someone, or find something 'new' to wear to holiday gatherings.
 <p>Earth Month</p>	April (Earth Day: April 22)	After a cold winter, people are spring cleaning and eager to start thinking about spring and summer clothes. Better yet, April is Earth Month, which offers an excellent opportunity to educate your community on the importance of conservation and extending material lifecycles through swapping.



## Choose a Time

To maximize participation, host in the daytime on a weekend or on a weeknight.

Duration is up to you! A minimum of two hours is recommended to allow ample time for swappers to drop materials off and look around.

## Choose a Location

Your swap could be in the recreation room or lobby of your building, a local park, or nearest community centre. If you require larger, more public space, you can also consider [City venues and facilities](#). Remember to keep it accessible. Find a space with enough room to display all the materials for swapping and for racks, tables, and space for people to try things on. If choosing an outdoor location, have a plan in place in case of inclement weather.



### Swap It Quick Tip:



Swap location ideas:

- Apartment/condo lobby
- Recreation room
- Community centre
- School gymnasium
- Library
- Park
- Common area at your workplace
- Religious gathering space
- Public space that can be booked

## Book the Location

Once you've found a possible location, confirm you can host your swap there. Find out what permits or fees are associated with booking the space.

### Multi-Residential Buildings

Most recreational rooms in multi-residential buildings need to be booked ahead of time and there may be fees associated with booking the space. To start, discuss the idea of hosting a swap with your property manager, building staff, tenants association, and/or condo board. Keep in mind that the process for requesting a location may be different based on your building type. For example, condo buildings may require a formal meeting process with the condo board.

If more information about swaps is required, the [Introduction section](#) of this toolkit gives you all the information you need. You may also need to provide an official letter of request. If an official letter is needed, please use the *Sample Request Letter for Multi-Residential Buildings* [provided](#).



### City Venues & Facilities

For City venues and facilities such as community centres, parks and other recreational facilities, find out how to book them at [toronto.ca/services-payments/venues-facilities-bookings/](https://toronto.ca/services-payments/venues-facilities-bookings/)

### Private Event Spaces

Contact the event venue directly.

## Overcoming Location Challenges

You may experience challenges when finding a location to host your swap - but don't let this discourage you from hosting your event! Swaps are flexible and can be adapted to best suit your community.

- Modify the anticipated size of your swap if finding a large enough space is a challenge.
- Reach out to organizations in your community that host swaps as they may be able to provide advice and guidance.
- Reach out to your city councillor for support
- Consider partnering with an organization in your community that may be able to offer space, assist with planning, and amplify promotion.
- Host a small swap party in your apartment/condo unit instead. Invite some friends, family, or neighbours over for a more casual swap.

### Swap It Quick Tip:

Keep in mind, if you plan on accepting materials before the swap, you will need to book the space for longer. See [page 9](#) for more information.



## Accepted Materials

The types of material attendees can bring to your swap is completely up to you, however, it is important to set guidelines and communicate them prior to the event.

Make it fun by following a theme such as Halloween or holiday items, or align with a particular season such as winter gear.

In addition to deciding the list of accepted materials, determine the acceptable condition and quality of materials brought to your swap. Encourage items to be washed, in gently used condition, and still ready for wear/reuse. You may want to exclude clothing with rips, tears, holes, broken zippers, and stains. You don't have to limit your swap to just clothing and accessories; welcome attendees to bring small appliances, toys, or home décor. Make sure this aligns with the items and condition of items accepted by the organization that will receive swap leftovers.



### What materials are typically accepted at swaps?

- Clothing: tops, pants, sweaters, jackets, shorts, skirts, dresses
- Footwear: boots, shoes, sandals
- Accessories: hats, mittens, scarves, ties, purses, wallets, backpacks, bags, jewelry, watches, belts
- Small miscellaneous items: books, toys, games, puzzles, stuffed animals, pots, pans, utensils, vases, dishes, cutlery, glassware, silverware, stemware, crafts, mugs, candles, picture frames, baskets, ornaments, hand tools, movies, music, small furniture, small appliances

## Health & Safety Considerations

At an event where people are gathering to exchange items it is important to keep health and safety in mind. A major concern in multi-residential buildings is the spread of pests such as bed bugs. By putting proper measures in place you can make sure that pests and germs are not spread throughout your community:

- Communicate to swap attendees that all materials must be cleaned before bringing to swap.
- Encourage attendees to clean their 'new' items before use.
- Consider not accepting items that are more prone to pests, such as linens and upholstered furniture.
- Thoroughly inspect items brought to the swap to make sure nothing is soiled or in unsuitable condition.

### Swap It Quick Tip:

Keep in mind that any leftover materials can be brought to a local thrift store or donated to charity. Make sure your list of accepted materials aligns with the items and condition of items accepted by the organization that will receive leftover materials. Consider contacting an organization to schedule a pickup at the end of your swap. See [Step 4](#) for a list of organizations that offer pickup.





## Costs

Your swap event may incur the following costs:

- Rental/permit fees for the swap location
- Purchasing and/or rental of supplies such as clothing racks, wall dividers for fitting area, scales, and tables (see [Page 16](#) for full supply list)
- Printing of promotional materials (i.e. posters) and event day signage
- Paid advertising (social media, event listings, etc.)
- Staff time (if applicable)

To help cover event costs, organizers will sometimes charge attendees a small admission fee (\$5 or less).

## Establish a System

The most common way to organize a swap is to provide one ticket for each item an attendee brings, one ticket allows for one item to take home. Use paper tickets or reusable tokens.

You need to decide if you will limit the number of items attendees can bring and/or the number of tickets they can get. Setting limits may encourage people to bring better quality items and ensure fairer access to items at the swap.

We recommend a limit of 10 tickets and offer participants a chance to take home any leftover materials at the end of your swap before it is donated.

If your swap is in a large public space with heavy pedestrian traffic, you'll likely have people passing by interested in participating. By selling tickets for a small fee they can still take part in reuse. For people who did not bring any items to swap or have spent all their tickets, you can sell tickets for a small fee as well.

### Swap It Quick Tip:

If offering early drop-off, inquire about storage and security of the materials overnight.



The property manager may be able to offer a storage closet or secure area indoors for the dropped-off materials.



## Offer Early Drop-Off

Consider accepting materials prior to the event in addition to the day of. Accepting in advance ensures you have materials ready to be swapped for your first attendees. It can also help make the material intake process smoother on event day.

Consider accepting materials a few days or hours before the event. If early drop-off is not feasible, have your team bring gently used items from home to have unique items on hand when the swap starts. If offering early drop-off, you will need to provide attendees with tickets/tokens at that time or record how many they will receive when they arrive at the swap.

To encourage early drop-off, swaps charging admission fees will often be waived or reduced to attendees who drop off their materials before the event.



## Encourage Greater Reuse

Make an effort to promote reuse by encouraging attendees to bring their items in a reusable bag or box. They may need the bag again to bring home their 'new' items.

## Offer Repair Activities

Swap and repair are two simple, yet powerful ways we can extend the life of clothing and household items. To further engage the community on product life extension, organizers of swap events will often include a repair activities alongside the swap.

Located outside of the main swap area, these repair activities typically offer:

- Repair services and tutorials
- Complimentary use of materials (i.e. manuals, instruction guides, videos) for repairing common items
- Complimentary use of repair tools and materials (i.e. sewing supplies, screwdrivers, batteries, cords, etc.)

## Repair Resources

Adding repair activities to your swap event will involve additional planning, materials, and support. We recommend contacting local organizations such as repair shops and Repair Cafés to assist in planning your event.

- [Repair Café \(International\)](#): Repair Cafés are free meeting places where you can find tools and materials to repair clothes and household items. There are approximately 50 Repair Cafes across Canada. Contact your local Repair Café for resources and support for your repair event.
- [Repair Café Toronto - How to Start a Repair Cafe](#)
- [Toronto Clothing Repairathon](#)
- [iFixit](#): iFixit is a wiki-based site that teaches people how to fix almost anything. The website offers free manuals and forums that can be useful for your event.

For additional repair resources, visit [WRWCanada.com](http://WRWCanada.com).



## Gather Supplies

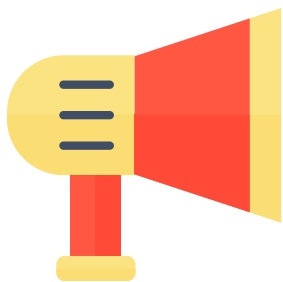
You'll want to keep everything organized, which is where tables, racks, and hangers come in handy. Consider borrowing or renting instead of purchasing new. Some suggested supplies:

- Tables
- Chairs
- Clothing racks
- Mirror(s)
- Bins for accessories
- Tape
- Laptop computer/tablet or printed *Swap Event Tracking Sheet*
- Printed signage and posters
- Reusable tokens or roll of tickets
- Container for collecting admission fees and change (if applicable)
- Pens and markers
- Scale for weighing materials
- Sign-in sheet to collect contact information to send post-swap survey and inform about future events (optional)
- Calculator
- Music playing device and speaker for background music
- Bags or boxes for leftover material
- Curtains or portable wall dividers for a fitting area
- Event tents (if outside)
- Weights to hold down tents, clothing racks, and signage (if outside)
- First batch of swappable items (from early drop-off or your team). See [Set-Up in Section 3](#).
- If hosting a repair event: additional tables, chairs, repair equipment, educational materials, and signage.





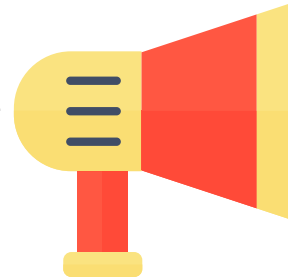
# Step 2: Promoting Your Swap



Engaging your community is important for participation and making sure a wide variety of items are available for the swap.

## Community Outreach

There are many tactics you can use to reach out to your community about your swap. Be creative and build relationships with organizations and individuals who can help.



- **Emails, letters, and newsletters:** use the *Sample Customizable Letter* as a template.
- **Digital/print signage in the lobby and/or elevator:** an effective way to quickly catch the attention of people in your building.
- **Posters:** using the [sample communications and resources](#) provided, advertise around your community.
- **Webpage:** if your building, organization, or community group has a website, create a page dedicated to your swap with all relevant details.
- **Media:** reach out to local outlets such as community newspapers, radio stations, news sites, and tv stations. They may be interested in promoting your swap or even visit your event!
- **Register with local online event directories:** try reaching out to organizations that list local events.
- **SwapItToolkit.ca:** don't forget to tell us when your swap is! We will post all swap events and assist with promotion through [Waste Reduction Week in Canada](#) social media channels.

### Swap It Quick Tip:

Engage building volunteers such as green teams and 3Rs Ambassadors, who can provide helpful suggestions of the best ways to promote the event in your community.



## Social Media

Social media is a free and effective tool to use for promoting your event. There are multiple tactics you can use to spread the word online:

- **Facebook Events:** are easy to create and remind attendees of upcoming events. They also allow guests to RSVP so you can get an idea of how many will attend ahead of time.
- **Local Facebook Groups:** online discussions are a great way to take questions and easily communicate the details of your event, and groups help you gather a community of interested people that may attend future swap events you choose to hold.
- **Social media posts:** along with Facebook events, groups, and status updates, Twitter posts and Instagram stories are other avenues to promote your swap.
- **Social media ads (paid):** anticipating a large swap? If you have a budget, run a localized paid social media campaign to promote your event. Advertisements allow you to target specific demographics, locations, and interests.



# Step 3: Swap Day



On the day of your swap your team will play an important role in making sure it runs smoothly. Refer to the *Event Planning Checklist* to assign tasks and guide your day.

## Set-Up

At least an hour before the event, prepare your swap by arranging tables, tents, chairs, clothing racks, and hangers in a way that best suits the space you are in.

If your swap is in the lobby of a multi-residential building or public area that is still accessible to the public during your event, make sure to not obstruct pedestrian traffic or building exits.

Provide your team with instructions, familiarize them with your event rules and guidelines, and station them at an assigned table or category area for your event. This section will walk you through how swaps are typically set up and organized.



## Organize and Categorize Materials

Once tables and racks are set up, decide how items will be organized and categorized. We have provided printable signage based on material categories typically used in a swap. Depending on how much space you have, you may wish to either decrease or expand these categories. Have your team separate the first batch of materials into each category.

Sample signage is also [available for each station at your swap](#). Organizers are welcome to customize the signage to best fit how your materials will be categorized.





## Check-In Station

The swap check-in station will be the first place your attendees will go to, so set up a table near the main entrance. This will likely be the busiest station so you will want to have a few team members dedicated to accepting material. There should be a scale for weighing items (if possible), multiple tracking sheets (printed or electronic), tickets/tokens, pens, and a bin to place the items being weighed in. Keep in mind that items can be refused if they don't meet the type and criteria of acceptable materials.

Use the *Swap Event Tracking Sheet* to record the total weight of items each attendee brings. This will be important to compare to the total weight of all items at the end of your event to calculate how much you potentially just diverted from landfill. The best way to do this is by counting, weighing, and recording items as they are dropped off. If you do not have a scale to weigh, keep track of the number of items brought to the swap.

Once materials are recorded, give the appropriate amount of tickets to the attendee and they are free to swap!



## Shop Station

This will be the area where your attendees will shop. With people sorting through all the items, trying things on, and putting things back, this area can get messy! Have one or two people dedicated to hanging up newly received items and organizing the shop station.

You may also want to have an event floater helping with organization, answering questions, taking photos, and posting to social media using hashtag #SwapIt.

## Fitting Area

If possible, set up an area for trying clothes on. Include a privacy screen or curtain and a mirror.

## Check-Out Station

Have at least one or two team members positioned at the check-out station, which will be located near the exit. As they leave, attendees will exchange their tickets and take items home. The check-out station should have a ticket collection container that will be counted after the swap to see how many items were actually swapped.

This station is an excellent opportunity to provide more information on swaps, the circular economy, and issue of textiles waste.



# Step 4: Post-Swap



## Take Down

Once all attendees have swapped 'till they dropped, it's time to take down the event. Start by removing leftover clothing and items. Now is also the time to offer attendees who exceeded their 10-ticket limit (or number set for your swap) to take any extra items before they are packed up.

Reuse your swap tickets for future events if possible or recycle them. Keep any signage and reuse them for your next swap!

## Managing Leftover Materials

There are bound to be materials left over once the swap is done, which is why it is important to have a plan in place for what to do with them. Leftover materials can find new life somewhere else by donating them after to a local charity, bringing them to a thrift/secondhand store, posting them on a reuse/resell site, saving them for your next swap, or setting up a reuse/sharing space in your building.

Below is a list of common options across Canada:

### Household Pick-Up

Make sure to call ahead of time to schedule a pick-up

- [B'nai Brith](#) (Ontario-GTA)
- [Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy](#)
- [Diabetes Canada](#)
- [Kidney Foundation of Canada](#)
- [Oasis](#) (Toronto)
- [Salvation Army Thrift Store](#)

### Drop-off at Secondhand/Thrift Store

- [Value Village](#)
- [Salvation Army Thrift Store](#)
- [Goodwill](#)
- [MCC Thrift Shops](#) (Ontario)
- [Habitat for Humanity ReStore](#) (only for home items such as décor and furniture)

### Popular Reuse/Swap Sites

- [Bunz](#)
- [craigslist](#)
- [Kijiji](#)
- [UsedToronto.com](#)
- [Freecycle.org](#)
- [Trash Nothing](#)
- [SwapCity.ca](#)

Visit [Toronto.ca/Reuse-It](https://toronto.ca/Reuse-It) for a full list of non-profit organizations that accept various types of donations in the City of Toronto.





## Submit Results

Tracking and recording inventory data of a swap is important because we want to know the impact of our actions. Recording weight and amount of material at check-in offers a benchmark to compare your weight and materials at check-out, with the difference being your contribution to textile diversion from landfill.

Once your swap is complete, add up all the results from your *Swap Event Tracking Sheet* and complete the online form at [SwapItToolkit.ca](https://SwapItToolkit.ca).



## Continued Engagement

Keep attendees engaged on swaps and the issue of textiles waste. Reach out to your community and see what they've learned and what they enjoyed the most about the swap.

### Start a Reuse/Sharing Space in Your Building

A great way to keep the swap spirit alive in your building is to designate a space in a common area (this can be in a recycling room or common room) to allow residents to leave gently used material that may be of use for other residents. These reuse spaces are a great way for residents to trade items at their leisure, year-round. This will require discussion with, support, and approval from your building management to ensure a plan is in place to keep the area tidy and remove items that aren't collected after a certain time-frame. Items that are not picked up after a certain time and are still in good condition could be donated to an organization listed on [page 24](#).

### Additional ways to stay engaged:

- Share the results of your swap
- Conduct a brief survey of swap attendees
- Encourage attendees to post photos of their 'new' items and outfits on social media using hashtag #SwapIt
- Ask attendees to help with planning the next swap or waste reduction event
- Encourage residents to use the reuse/sharing space to continue swapping all year long

