

# Capital District Mutual Aid

*Community resilience for the COVID pandemic and beyond*

## How to Build a Neighborhood Pod

Capital District Mutual Aid is a network of people and grassroots groups working to build resilience during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. Go to our [Main Page](#) to learn about the project and all the ways to be involved. Our Facebook page is [here](#).

If you're interested in starting a pod and would like support, please read this guide and then [sign up here!](#)

### Table of Contents

What Is a Neighborhood Pod?	2
<b>Being a Pod Point Person</b>	2
Step-by-Step Guide to Building a Pod	3
Start building a team	3
Define & map your zone	3
Review all safety guidelines	3
Make a plan	3
Invite your neighbors	4
Have a conversation	4
Support each other	5
Connect to CDNY Mutual Aid	5

\*The content in the document has been inspired by or taken directly from mutual aid efforts and resources all over the internet, U.S. and world, with gratitude and love.

## What Is a Neighborhood Pod?

A pod is group of up to 5-30 people who organize hyper-locally to share needs, resources, and support, for example:

- 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

We organize pods block by block to make sure that nobody gets left behind, and then we connect the pods in a network so they can communicate and coordinate.

## Being a Pod Point Person

Every pod has a Pod Point Person (PPP). As a PPP, you agree to be responsible for:

1. reaching out to the people in your area (block, village, town, neighborhood of city)
2. checking in on and keeping track of offerings & needs
3. coordinating a neighborhood group chat, phone tree or facebook group
4. staying in touch with the PPPs from other neighborhoods to pool resources, solve problems, and support each other

Below is a step by step guide for setting up a neighborhood pod. It is offered as a starting point, with full awareness that all of you have individual relationships to your community and that understanding and shaping these will be a big part of this work. Feel free to adapt anything in this guide to fit the needs of you and your neighbors.

# Step-by-Step Guide to Building a Pod

## 1. Start building a team

Find a buddy or two (if you can) to build your neighborhood pod.

- A buddy helps make the work feel less overwhelming — you can plan things together
- A buddy keeps you accountable to each other
- A buddy may have relationships and know resources you don't

Start by identifying someone in your building or block, and text/call them to ask them to be your partner in building a neighborhood network. (Just because you are the person starting the outreach process does not mean that you will be the Neighborhood Point Person or that you have to do this all by yourself.)

## 2. Define & map your zone

Pods tend to work better when they are small, 5-30 people – but please do what works best for your neighborhood. If there are more than 30 neighbors interested, you can ask if anyone else in the group wants to be a PPP and break off into their own pod.

Whatever you decide, map it out. If it's your street, walk around and write down all the house numbers. Be thorough and check side roads that you might not have been down before. We do this so that once we start contacting neighbors, we can make sure we don't leave anyone behind!

## 3. Review all safety guidelines

We've got two aims that we're trying to balance:

1. Making sure everyone (especially the most vulnerable) is supported in their community, and that support carries on throughout the outbreak and after.
2. Trying to minimize contact and adhere to rigorous and agreed-upon safety protocols to minimize the risk of spreading the virus while we're supporting each other.

Safety protocols for various aspects of mutual aid support have been compiled in [this pamphlet](#), like how to deliver groceries and collect items from someone who is self-isolating, how to disinfect items, how to properly remove gloves, etc.

As PPP you should read and familiarize yourself with these protocols and ensure agreements and understanding around them within your pod. Any questions should be posted to the [PPP Slack Channel](#) and we will all try our best to use collective wisdom and resources to answer them.

## 4. Make a plan

- a. Name your group — it can be something fun!
- b. Decide how you'll communicate with your neighbors. You have a couple options:

- i. Make a group text or social media chat if everyone is comfortable with it (WhatsApp, Signal, Facebook, SMS, Telegram, etc.)
  - ii. If most people can do text but some can only talk by phone, assign people to be responsible for calling those people to update them.
  - iii. If most people are only comfortable talking by phone, set up a phone tree.
- c. Decide who will do outreach, what information you need to gather, and how you will keep track of it.
- d. If you have not already done so, please fill out our Neighborhood Pod intake form [here](#).

## 5. Invite your neighbors

Be ready to start fielding requests pretty quickly. Be willing to ask potential members if they have the capacity to help you coordinate the pod and what skills they can contribute

### a. Contact as many people as you can over the phone

This is to limit transmission. Introduce yourself as a neighbor, be really friendly and explain you're just here to help and ask them the questions on your questionnaire. And ask if they have any of their other neighbors numbers so you can call them too!

### b. Fill in the gaps by flyering

For anyone who is unreachable by other means, flyer their houses. You can use this flyer template available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) (make a copy of it to edit), or create your own. \*It is illegal to put things in other people's mailboxes: try the crack of their door, between screen door and main door, etc.

**\*\*\*Please follow [safety guidelines](#) to ensure you stay safe and do not spread the virus\*\*\*\***

## 6. Have a conversation

Your pod will only be as strong and resilient as your relationships, so it's important to set up some introductory conversations. 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! Building relationships and trust is what this is all about, and how we make sure we can continue to support each other *after* the pandemic.

## 7. Support each other

- Make sure someone is sending a message to the pod at least every few days and remind folks to check in with their neighbors. This is a tough time and folks might have a hard time admitting when they are struggling.
- Organize to support needs as they arise. Some needs may be met within pods, some may require connecting with other pods or local organizations or organizing as a broader community.
- As information and resources become available through the network let folks in your pod know. Have a weekly "sound-off:" ask neighbors on the thread to submit a word or emoji about how they're doing. If someone submitted an indicator that they're struggling, or did not respond at all, check in individually.
- Even though this pod model is arising out of crisis, not everything needs to focus solely on survival. For example, your pod could have:
  - Weekly sound-offs
  - Weekly calls
  - Art, game, or movie calls
  - Morning coffee
  - Safe outdoor recreation activities
  - Etc.

## 8. Connect to CDNY Mutual Aid

We are stronger together. Our goal is to connect pods so we can work together and inspire others to organize too. When your pod is formed, let us know [here](#) so we can:

- a. Put you on a map with all the pods, to show the community how many people are getting organized. (We won't share any personally identifying information, like address, phone or email).
- b. Connect you to other PPPs to get support, discuss your experiences, pool resources, and share needs. We are using the Slack messaging app for this purpose. Slack works on your phone or computer. If you've never used it before, we'll make sure you get support.