



WHAT ARE OUR SHARED RESOURCES?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource explores the issue of **Environmental Resourcefulness** through the value of **Community**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource prompts us to think about different skills and resources that we have, and those that we might need from others, in order to thrive in a climate-changing world. It gets us to ask both – “what can I offer?” and “what do I need from others?” Looking through the lens of community, learners will have the chance to think about the relationship between dependence and interdependence and consider both the things community can offer, and where it might fall short. It includes an opportunity for a practical mapping of assets and skills for learners to assess what it is they have to offer, and what gaps might be needed to be filled by others.



Time Estimate:

60 minutes



Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard or poster sheets & markers
- Pens and paper/notebook for participants
- [Handouts about the Gemach](#)



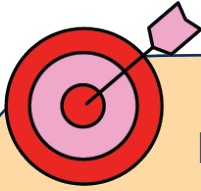
Best Uses:

- For older teens and adults
- Classroom/workshop type setting
- Group discussion, small group learning, and individual reflection



This resource was created as part of M²'s Values in Action Environment Fellowship, generously supported by Micah Philanthropies. For a full list of Fellows in the inaugural Fellowship cohort, [click here](#).

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Read the following for context:

Learning about climate change and its impact on the way we live now and in the future can often feel overwhelming and disempowering. More severe weather events, once habitable places becoming uninhabitable, disruptions to our food and energy systems - all of this can bring up feelings of fear and scarcity, and it is natural for a certain tension to arise between acting in the best interest of yourself and your innermost circle - being entirely independent - and supporting and being part of the wider community - interdependent.

Facilitator prompts the group:

Let's begin by brainstorming what type of skills, knowledge, and physical resources may be useful or even essential to our community in the context of a climate changing world.

- List examples of things that might happen due to climate change that could cause disruptions (power outages, food distribution challenges, extreme heat or cold, storms, etc.) *Collect responses on a whiteboard and draw out any themes that are emerging.*
- Where do you feel best equipped in your own capacities to address some of the challenges above?
- In a moment of crisis, where do you think you would dedicate your limited energy and resources (myself, my family, my neighbors, religious or social community, wider city/town, etc.)

8 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE

Read for context:

Jewish tradition has a lot of wisdom and insight to inform how we design our communities and our social structures, and one theme that is consistent throughout is that we must ensure that the needs of all people, especially the most vulnerable, are met. We learn through the vast laws of Tzedakah that in times of social and economic challenges, it is through community ties and shared resources that we can collectively thrive.

Community, while an intangible idea, is something that we feel and experience on a consistent basis. It signifies a group of people who follow a particular way of life or patterns of behavior which bind them. Community often rests upon shared values, constructs and – as we will see in our exploration below – both tangible and intangible resources.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- When have you most recently experienced the strength of a community?
- When have you found yourself relying too heavily on a community? Explain.

5 min





ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

A "GEMACH":

Facilitator reads the following:

Using the Jewish concept of "a *gemach*" can help deepen our understanding of shared resources within a community. A *Gemach* is a communal institution that helps ensure that everyone's needs are met. The word derives from the Hebrew words "*gemilut chasadim*," which mean "acts of loving-kindness." *Gemachs* are interest-free loan funds or places that lend things to others within the community.

Scan the QR code or use this [handout](#) to learn more about the concept of the Gemach. Have participants in pairs read this for background and context, then consider the prompts below:



Facilitator chooses 2-3 questions from the following list to guide a discussion:

- Have you ever seen a *gemach* or a similar type of structure? *[In non-Jewish contexts, these are often called mutual aid networks, free stores, or tool libraries, etc. It's also important to consider how new technologies are being used to serve this purpose - for example, WhatsApp or Facebook groups through which people share leftover food or seek help from neighbors.]*
- What are some of the values that seem to animate the *gemach*?
- Imagine living in a community with a robust *gemach* network - what impact do you think that would have on the relationships within the community? How might this community be better equipped to navigate the aftermath of some natural disaster or other type of large-scale disruption?
- How does the *gemach* highlight the tension between independence and interdependence?
- What obstacles might make establishing a *gemach*, or a network of *gemachs* more challenging?

15 min





ACTIVITY



Facilitator prompts the group:

Before we engage in the activity below, think back to the Covid-19 pandemic as a way of testing what you learned about your independence v. your interdependence.

- Were there things you could not do on your own, but needed to rely upon the assistance of others? What were they?
- Were there things – both tangible (items) and intangible (skills) that you were able to uniquely contribute to others? What were they?

Asset Mapping:

Let's connect the discussion above back to the specifics of climate change:

- Each person take 3 minutes to write down your own “assets.”
 - What skills and knowledge are you bringing that you think are essential with regard to climate change and natural disasters ?
 - What gaps exist that you would need to meet from others?

Encourage participants to think broadly-not just about the bare essentials to survive - we want to thrive! So skills such as making music or art, telling stories, etc. are all valuable!

- Each person finds a partner and compares lists. Then each pair finds another pair and compares lists. Do this one more time. (*might need to modify depending on how many participants you have*).
- Once you have a group of 6-8 people, have each group generate a list on a poster sheet under the columns of “independent” and “interdependent.” Under independent include their combined assets. Under “interdependent” make a list what key skills, knowledge, or resources they are lacking.

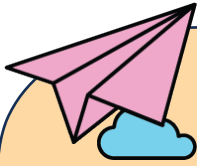


Facilitator prompts the group to debrief:

- Did anything surprise you from this exercise?
- Are you noticing any themes or trends in terms of what skills and resources are shared, and what is missing? How might these trends reflect aspects of the community we live in or our wider society?
- How might technology play a role in building out systems of mutual aid?

10 min





PROMPT ACTION

Facilitator reads:

Now that we've had a chance to learn about the *gemach* and reflect on our own resources, we can put this new knowledge into action and begin to build more mutual support networks within our communities.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- Research *gemachs* in your community. Start with looking up actual *gemachs* that exist within the Jewish community. Then expand your search to include other types of mutual aid networks, such as community fridges, free rideshare programs, and food pantries.
- Recruit 2-3 people to do a similar asset mapping activity, and identify a surplus resource that you can begin to offer as a "*gemach*."
- *Consider the following questions:*
 - Who might benefit the most from this resource you can offer?
 - Who will you prioritize sharing this resource with? Why?
 - How can you ensure that you will share this resource with dignity and respect?
 - What are some immediate steps we can take to try this out?
 - What support might we need from others?
- Begin to spread the word about this new *gemach* that you are launching. If that feels like too big of a commitment, start by joining an existing mutual aid network and offer your time and energy.

10 min





CLOSE WITH INTENTION

5 min



Through this exercise, we've explored the questions that naturally arise for people in moments of crisis - how should I spend my limited time, energy, and resources, and who should I prioritize helping? What even are the things that I am fully equipped to do - places where I am independent - and where do I need others - where am I interdependent? We've looked to the Jewish practice of the *gemach* as a model for mutual aid and community resourcefulness, and we've reflected on the skills, knowledge, and resources that we as individuals may be able to offer the wider community. Confronting the climate crisis has many different components and can often feel overwhelming and disempowering. Through this activity, we hope you have gained more insight into what assets you are carrying with you and can share, and how you can and will likely need to rely on others within your community as well.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- After today's exploration, I now think that if I have _____ I should _____.