

Frequently Asked Questions

Why Start an Exchange?

Some of us can remember a time when family members lived close by and we knew most of the people living in our neighborhoods. Some of us have only heard about it. Helping each other out was a given, something we did for each other every day. From watching someone's kids for a few hours, dropping off meals for a sick friend, participating in potluck suppers and barn raisings... communities were full of exchanges and mutually supportive networks of family and friends. Few people would disagree that times have changed, that these networks have gradually disappeared as families moved apart geographically. We all need family members or neighbors we know well enough to turn to for support. Exchanging is a new form of community, of extending families.

What is an Hour?

It is a currency representing one hour of service. One Hour equals one Hour, regardless of the service. This is a *complimentary* currency to the market economy. It has also been called a *creative* economy.

How do hours differ from conventional money?

Hours are units of Time, not cash. In the market economy, services are priced according to their market value, which fluctuates with supply and demand. Hours aren't meant to replace standard dollars. They are designed to counterbalance the market economy where people who have invested in special training, and received a credential to make their time more valuable. There's nothing wrong with that, it's just taken over too much of our experience of the world. Almost everything is monetized.

Why is everyone's time given the same value?

Putting a price on people's time separates us by stating that some people more valuable than others, based on titles or credentials. Exchanging Hours for services, based on time, establishes an equal value for all participants.

What does it Mean to be a HEP Member?

Everyone has something unique and important to contribute to their community. Hour Exchange Portland gives you the tools to do just that. You will be part of a large network of people who trust each other and value each other's contributions.

Who can join?

Membership is voluntary and is open to people of all ages and abilities. Individuals, families, organizations, businesses and groups may participate. All members must attend an orientation session. Orientations are scheduled four times a month or by appointment. Application forms and reference checks need to be completed before beginning service.

What services can I exchange for my earned Time Dollars?

The list of possibilities is endless. From walking a neighbor's dog, oiling a squeaky door, raking leaves, stuffing envelopes, braiding hair, cooking meals, giving music lessons, running errands to lending professional advice, everyone in a Time Bank has a valuable skill to share.

Can I donate my Hours?

Yes. There are some members who are unable to provide a service due to certain circumstances and times in their lives. Individual and group members can donate their earned credits to another HEP member, or to the Social Capital Fund. This fund disseminates Hours to members in need, by request.

What if I don't have time? Isn't this just one more thing on my To Do list?

Many of the services people exchange in HEP are the things they are already doing every day. For example, those of us who have children are already cooking for them, driving them to activities, and helping them with their schoolwork. Cooking an extra portion of food for someone down the street who is housebound or picking up your neighbor's kids on the way to soccer practice don't add work to your day. Or, if you have a dog and take it for a walk every day, why not pick up your neighbor's dog along the way? For professionals, Exchanging is a way to give back to your community without having to go someplace else on someone else's schedule. For example, if you are a dentist, you could set aside 10% of your appointment calendar for HEP members. Even better, Exchanging helps you gain extra time because down the road, you can spend the Hours you've earned and have someone else do something for you that you can't fit into your schedule or simply don't know how to do!

Are Hours taxable?

No. The IRS does not currently tax exchanges as they occur within a network and are not direct (in the case of barter for one to one exchanges). Also, the unit of exchange is Time – not cash.

Do Exchange programs seek to replace existing social service programs?

No, however Exchanges can provide value to social service partner agencies by providing incentives or benefits for volunteers. Examples are on-site chair massage, catered lunches, “spa” days etc. These can save cash-strapped agencies valuable cash resources, boost morale and build new relationships.

Is an Exchange just a way to justify budget cuts to social services?

Not at all. Exchanging can be a cost-effective tool to more wisely extend precious budget resources or, it can leverage new funds through the demonstration of inkind.

Will Exchange programs compete with paid service-providers?

Our capital economy is structured with professionals and para-professionals in all fields. If an accountant chooses to provide some services for Hours, and some for cash, that is a choice. Lawyers do legal work for pro bono; businesses write off “bad debt” for unpaid bills. There are many creative responses in our economy already. Exchanging is just one in the menu.

How do Exchange programs ensure that members are trustworthy and dependable?

Exchanges are based on trust that people who join want to successfully engage in the network. Members are asked to only provide services that they truly enjoy giving, and to understand the “neighborly” quality of the exchange. They are also asked to be very clear about needs and expectations prior to the exchange. The coordinators help keep members accountable too, as members are strongly encouraged to return all inquiries within 48 hours, and to report any problematic member exchanges should they occur.

How do Exchanges ensure that participants have really earned their service credits?

All earnings are reported by the person who provided the service. They are then tracked via Time & Talents software program. If a member is charged for a service for an amount he/she disputes, he/she may appeal. We recommend negotiating all charge amounts prior to the exchange. This saves *time!*

What is a reasonable time line to grow an Exchange?

Every community is different. We believe in an organic, slow growth measured weekly by good communication among members (are they exchanging? Working in the office with you? Seeking funds and inkind support? How do you handle complaints? It is better to have an energized membership of 50 people than a registry of 200 members with only 20% exchanging.