

# Share

What it is, how it works  
and what the rules are.



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**Share** is part of the Megalopolis project, and was developed and designed during my stay at MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) during the fall semester of 2014.

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## Why Share is needed

Through a free online platform, Share lets users express what they need or want, and connects them with the right neighbor who can help them with their need. At a time when people find themselves interfacing with the world through a screen (be it a phone, a tablet or a computer), this project reminds people how technology can reconnect us in real life. We capture the spirit of volunteerism and direct it to one-on-one and group interactions, to provide social exchanges that share knowledge, increase self-confidence, and foster a sense of community. Through an interactive digital application, users sign up and provide preferences to match them with needs, requests and offers from others.

Share aims to match people that have something to offer to those with a need. This could be anyone though. Safety and responsibility are naturally a concern of this project. Through a rating system, people with bad intentions can be warded from this project and those that are involved get rewarded with good experiences.

This kind of project needs thorough finetuning and balancing. It is thus necessary to start this project in a single city, with geographical and social boundaries. Baltimore proves to be a perfect test bed for Share, because its community is so diverse: both socio-economically, as well as its big, ever-changing student population at the local universities and colleges. The aim of Share is to target a wide spectrum of people, and grow stronger neighborhoods, resulting in a stronger city through a greater sense of community. By giving neighbors agency and reasons to help and meet each other, Share builds a community that is interested in building relationships without the exchange of money being of any importance. This project can be a beautiful celebration of humanity, and prove the kindheartedness of its users.



## Welcome, new user!

Share consists of a online platform with limited offline functions. A person can sign up after downloading the application on their device from either the Google Play store, the App Store, or by going to the website. The user then fills in a form that asks them for personal details.

Asking people for their **First** and **Last Name** makes clear that the whole experience is real. There is no need and certainly no point in hiding behind internet nicknames and aliases when you are going to actually talk to your neighbors in the real world.

Asking for an **Age** is necessary to ward people younger than 18 from this project. For obvious reasons, asking children to meet people they have never met before on their own is not a good idea and should be discouraged at all times.

I am aware that **Gender** can be a sensitive subject. This is why users are allowed to keep this field blank. The reason why it is included in the profile setup, is to allow for the program to create better matches to certain needs.

**Number + Street** and **Zip Code** are obvious fields to fill in: people from the same neighborhoods will be meeting up. The program needs the location of users to match them with their neighbors, which is impossible without a known address. Notice the lack of a city, state or country, as all the platform does is provide services within Baltimore.

An **Email Address** will be used to communicate to the user, and functions as a sort of check-in pass. Even though regular mail is fun too, most people will prefer email to receive notifications from Share.

And lastly, a **Password** is needed to create a secure login to only allow people on their own profile.

After this list of personal information is complete, and the terms and conditions are checked, the person is an official user of the services of Share. Later on, they can edit their personal details, add and remove information, etc.

An interesting question arises about the reality of this project, especially when asking people to input their actual name. How does Share know if the person that has just made a profile is real? It doesn't.

This is of course a problem for an algorithm based platform with no real sense of reality. However, there is a developed system that takes this thought into consideration, to filter out abusers. See more on page 19 to learn more about the reputation and rating system.

New members only have restricted access to the myriad of functions available in this project. This is to protect both them and other returning members from abuse and confusion. One example of this type of restrictions is that they can only choose from certain safe options. Safe options involve meeting more than only a single other person. Once a new member has gained a sufficient reputation, he will be rewarded with access to more features of the app. This gradually introduces the new users to all the possibilities the system without them losing track of what is possible. At the same time this is also meant to stimulate users to be more and more involved to gain access to these features.

## The function of Share

The main features of Share are sharing and requesting of items. To make things easy for the users, all the things that can be requested or shared are divided in to three categories.

The first and most obvious category is **Materials**. Tactile objects, such as nutrition, tools, furniture, or anything that can be called an object, fall under this category. The second category is **Entertainment**, and comprises all things that aren't objects and are related to activities for your enjoyment, such as sports, games, meetings, events, shows, etc. The third and last category the items can be placed under is **Knowledge**, the most abstract of the three. This categories' name speaks for itself however: anything that is knowledge of some sort, be it academic or just basic know-how, falls under this category.

All three categories are divided into more subcategories for the user's convenience. See page 28 for a list of all the subcategories that could be possible on Share.

A user will not always be able to find what they are looking for just by browsing through the categories. This is why there is a filter function where the user can submit their keywords. But, because of this filter function, a category system may seem a little redundant. The system of categories however is very important to ensure users are requesting and sharing a specific thing, and not just anything random that will never be retrieved by the program itself. By placing items into categories, misunderstandings by both users and the application can be reduced to a minimum.

Everything on Share evolves around building connections between neighbors who can be able to help each other out with each other's needs. This is why one of the mainstays of the application is an overview list with items that the system deems of importance to the user. This could be either because of pending requests and shares by the user, or by analyzing previous behavior by the user on the application, looking at the time of usage, etc.

## Getting to share

There are three ways a user can then get in contact with someone else through the app. The first and most important one is by **automatic matching**. For actual matching to work, it is required that a user offers to share or requests an item. Share then uses additional data from its user such as location, timing and the item being shared or requested to create a pending file. After that, the program compares this queued file with other files to find resemblances and other possible points of interest between the two. The key factor that the program takes into account is the distance between the locations of the two. If the system finds a suitable better half, it will connect the dots and alert both users about their possible match.

The second way two users can come into contact with each other is by **actively responding to other people's requests or shares through the overview**. As said before, the mainstay of the platform is an overview, a user-specific compiled list of items that are shared, requested and could be of possible interest to the user. A user can then actively engage with the proposed shares or requests.

A third and last way of getting into contact with an other user is by **responding to someone else's response to one of your shares or requests**. This speaks for itself, the only difference being the other person actively engaging into the conversation.

The application connects the two by giving them a connection platform. This connection is an informative window with a clear context of what the exact request or share of the persons involved were, restricted information about the other person being matched, and suggestions on what to do next.

There are three items on a checklist that can provide clarity to a user as to what item is being shared, what it's purpose is and how relevant the share still is.

*A/ The **category** and possible subcategories the item is filed under. As mentioned before (p12), Share works with a category system to make sense of all the items that can and might be shared and avoid misunderstandings.*

*B/ The **date** the share was posted. This can be very important for certain types of shares, especially when related to events, food or meetings.*

*C/ The **availability** of the item. Is it a keeper or not? An item that can't be kept is perhaps only available at certain times, for example during weekends. This then gets added to this checklist item. This way, users can quickly see if the purpose of the correspondence is to exchange the item temporarily or give it away, for good.*

Ofcourse this last checklist item only applies when the shared item fits in the material category. Entertainment and knowledge are always to keep, as they are moments and experiences, which can't be physically kept only for a while and then returned. When a material is shared, it is also required for the user to provide a picture of the object. In other cases, it is always encouraged to leave some form of photograph of the subject with the request or share, as it provides the other users with a clearer image of what is being shared or requested. Next to the required checklist, a user can choose what additional information they wish to share with a possible match, and a short informative text is always encouraged.

Some private personal information is shared with the other person, meaning that the users can see each others contact information and address after

a match is accepted as being correct. The users can visit each other's profile, displaying a short description, basic information, their locations, stats including reputation and a history of sharing and requesting (see reputation on page 19), and other possible elements the users have shared during profile setup. If a member's reputation is low, they are only seeing the information from the first option (again, please refer to page 19 for more on reputation).

After accepting a possible match, users get presented with the option to view the other's public profile page on Share, or send the other person a message, providing them with a chat window. There, users are invited to arrange a meeting to fulfill the needs of one or both users. From here on out, the application can no longer provide any other assistance. The platform is sometimes location bound (for instance: a group of people requested to play soccer, the app will connect them and suggest a place to play soccer, that is near all the users).

In the occasion that a meeting (most likely under the entertainment category) is organized on a certain place, the app gives information about this place and guidelines on how to get there.

## What about safety?

As we all know, the world is not a fairytale where everyone is nice and compassionate about each other. Sadly, there isn't much Share can do to stop that, but we can try! The goal of this project is to bring people together, get them out of their hubs, their bubbles, and get them socially engaged again. While we can hope that only nice people will join the project, we must be realistic, and take everyone into account: also those with bad intentions.

The users, whose safety is of utter importance, need to be protected from both harassment and abuse by creeps. This is why some limitations are in order, a safety system, to keep track of people's engagement, as well as their cooperation and behavior within the platform. Outside of the platform, general laws apply, but Share can't do much to interfere. What Share does do however, is making sure that creepers get warded from the project, and don't get access to vulnerable users. New members have a lot of restrictions when they first start using the application. Those with good intentions, those that are here to stay, will soon enough be rewarded with more accessibility.

## A reputation system

A new member starts with a neutral reputation of 0 (zero). When the member gets involved in a request and fulfills it, or his request gets a response, the platform will know this by the rating of other or others involved. If the process has run smoothly and the users have actually met, they can state this and rate the experience and the cooperation of other(s).

The new user will receive points based on the average rating of the others involved. Points given can range from **-2** to **5**. This gives the others the possibility to rate the other with a negative score if the other person didn't show up, didn't cooperate or didn't fulfill the requirements that the users committed to.

If the involvement has been great and has been experienced as such by the other users, they can give a positive rating to the member. The positive rating can go as high as 5, meaning that they provided an excellent cooperation and involvement into the project. The average rating given by others then get added to the reputation of the user.

Scores can represent a way of cooperation, and it is suggested to follow certain guidelines when rating your experience with others. Suggestions on what score to give are as follows:

- 2 user didn't show up, though arrangements were made, user completely misbehaved, showed unacceptable behavior towards other users, or pretended to be someone else.*
- 1 user didn't show up, no arrangements were made*
- 0 user didn't show up but gave notice of this beforehand*
- 1 user showed up, but showed no cooperation at all, refused cooperation or showed hostile behavior*
- 2 user showed up, and was sort of involved, nothing more, nothing less*
- 3 user showed up, and was involved, showed friendliness towards others - would like to meet again*
- 4 user showed up and was very involved - lots of fun!*
- 5 user showed up and was completely cooperative. arrangement was easy, perfect experience!*

A user that has received an average rating that is **lower than 2** loses temporary power to rate the others. This only applies for the activity or item that

is being rated. This is to retain people from abusing the system by giving others a low score without a solid reason that is not reflected by the other users. The higher the average score is you received, the faster your reputation will rise, as it gets added to your current reputation value. Low values mean less accessibility.

As said before, a new member starts with a reputation of zero, a low value. Zero however is not the minimum, but if a user's reputation is going below zero can be an indication of something going wrong. Perhaps they are misbehaving, or was it something else? The system keeps track of these instances, and triggers both an alert to the user and kicks in a guarding system. Those people are then put on high alert. If the reputation does not rise again and keeps lowering, precautions are made and the user will perhaps be permanently blocked from Share. Of course, this depends on the severity of the possible cases and the reason for the low rates.

## Caring for the newbies

The rating system on its own has its obvious shortcomings, especially when only two people are rating. What if they both decide to rate the experience and each other a score that lies **below 2**? The rule would be to ignore both of their ratings, which in a sense is a paradox. It would make sense to block both users' score from going through (ie. resulting in a **0** for both) - but this would be counterproductive and, especially if both the rates that are given are below zero, be a reward where none should be given!

One way of solving this is by keeping people who are prone to giving low scores to others away from the platform. That doesn't really sound fair in this context, but it makes perfect sense when there is one more rule added to this idea. Users with a score of less than 15, ie. those who are new, giving low scores, or getting low scores because of misbehavior, can not engage into correspondence with a single other person. They don't get the option in the application to do so. This means that one-on-one exchanges of materials are not possible, but it

makes up for knowing that new users are (somewhat) guarded from creeps as they will be engaging with at least two others. This is to protect the newbies from jumping onto something that they don't want. A gentle introduction in the form of a sports game or an group visit to a comedy show is encouraged. This way, the new users get a great introduction to the happenings of Share.

New members will be matched with experienced users as much as possible, again, to protect the newbies, and filter and target potential wrongdoers. This is of course not always feasible, but it is a goal that can be pursued.

## Rewarding users

Once a new member has been actively engaging in Share and was successfully involved in activities, requests and shares, they are allowed to explore more options and can be involved in the project farther. One of the major milestones is the allowance of one-on-one exchange at a reputation of 15 points, later also follow possibilities to things that require more trust from the users, such as a dinner or a shared meal. These milestones are preceded and accompanied by smaller unveilings, such as more detailed looks at people's profiles when responding to a request or a share.

This technique is helpful to keep users coming back, however lame the word technique might sound in a peoples context. Share does not want to force its users, nor does it want to require its users to return to the application. It's true, though, people need a reward from time to time, a pat on the back to let them know that they're doing the right thing here.

## A final example

Let us try and make sense of all the information, rules, limits and guides that are compiled in this booklet, with an interesting example.

Meet *Frederik*, test-subject for today. He is a 20-something year old, born and raised in New York. Frederik recently moved and currently lives in a small apartment in the Mount Vernon area, with limited utilities available. He would like to get to know more people in his new neighborhood and city. He found out about Share on the Google Play Store while he was browsing through popular free apps. The concept behind the application evoked his interest when he learned that the application was a way to meet and connect with strangers and new people in his area and to create a blooming community in his neighborhood.

Since Frederik moved from New York, he hasn't had the chance to play soccer again. This is why he is using Share, to look for a group of enthusiasts others who are also playing soccer, or are planning on doing regular practices.

After stating his interest in soccer and requesting a group to play soccer with (entertainment / sports / football sports / soccer / team), Frederik learns through the app that there is an established group in his neighborhood that come together regularly to kick the ball around. Emma, a 32 year old woman living only a block away who represents a group of recreational soccer players, has responded to his request and so have three other new people, coincidentally their names are Guy, Jake and Linda. Share connects Frederik with all of them and they arrange a day where he can come join them!

Since Frederik is new to Share, his reputation starts neutral, with 0 points. This low value refrains him from requesting or sharing anything that can only be responded to by a single person, such as Sharing his old globe, which he took from New York, but actually doesn't have a spot for. Frederik hopes to stay active and engaged on Share to give his globe away once his reputation score has risen to 15 points. Shouldn't be too hard with his motivation!

After the activity, and after Frederik scored some amazing goals, the users get a notification from the application on their devices and email to rate the ex-

perience they had with the others. This is important, so they all gladly accept this offer. Frederik gets the chance to rate the others, based on their involvement during both the arrangement and the activity.

Frederik gives Guy (who had to cancel a day before the activity) a neutral score of **0** because he explained everything to the others ahead of time as to why he couldn't make it to the soccer practice. Frederik gives Emma a maximum score of **5** for an amazing time they had, she clearly did well and they had serious fun. Also Jake gets a **5**. Linda gets a 3 from Frederik. While she was fun and cooperative, she just wasn't as cooperative and open to meeting new people, it seemed. Guy can rate the others, and even though he canceled on the event Share doesn't necessarily know this, but his rate is worthless because the rates he got are **below 2**, making his votes not count.

Frederik got a rating of **4** by Linda and a **5** by Emma and Jake. This makes his ratings of the others count, because the average of the ratings he received is higher than **2**. His average received rating for this activity is 4,66! But since Share doesn't like decimal numbers: Frederik now has a reputation of **5**!

## Lists to Share

With so many things to share and request, it might be hard for users to see the forest through the trees. A list of request- and shareables might be in order. Keep in mind that this list of subcategories is only a suggestion draft, is by no means complete, and is not representative to what items, entertainment and knowledge people can actually share.

### Materials

This category consists of goods, objects, tactile and real.

**nutrition:** *beverages, breads, diary products, legumes, plants,*

*fungi, meat, nuts and seeds, cereals, seafood, staple foods, ...*

**household cleaning:** *vacuums, brooms, dusters, brushes, ...*

**toolbox equipment:** *hammers, screwdrivers, bolts, plugs, ...*

**clothing:** *arm- and neckwear, belts and accessories, coats and*

*jackets, dresses, robes and cloaks, footwear and shoes, ...*

**art materials:** *oil-based paints, water-based paints, binders, ...*

**gardening tools:** *rakes and forks, saws, axes, motorized tools, ...*

**entertainment:** *audio players, books, films, family games, ...*

**furniture:** *seating chairs and stools, fauteuils, benches, ...*

**music instruments:** *percussion, wind, stringed, electronic, ...*

## Entertainment

This category consists of experiences, moments and events.

**sports:** *archery, air sports, aquatic sports, athletics, board sports, ball-over-net sports, basketball sports, bat-and-ball sports, basketball sports, bat-and-ball sports, catch games, climbing, cycling, combat sports, cue sports, dance, equine sports, e-sports, fishing, flying disc sports, ...*

**games:** *board and party games, videogames, puzzles, ...*

**upcoming shows:** *cinema, theatre, music, art, cabaret, ...*

**meeting up:** *dining, night out, trip, ...*

## Knowledge

This category consists of expertise, wisdom, and learning abilities.

**arts theory:** *art history, general fine arts, audiovisual arts, design, spoken word, music, dance, poetry and writing, ...*

**history:** *arts, general human history, local history, language, ...*

**language:** *english, mandarin, spanish, hindi, arabic, portuguese, bengali, russian, japanese, punjabi, german, javanese, ...*

**math:** *basic math, algebra, analysis, arithmetic, geometry, ...*

**sciences:** *astronomy, biology, chemistry, geoscience, linguistics, ...*

**common knowledge:** *technology, cooking, gardening, ...*

Please refer to [www.antonlecock.be/share/lists.html](http://www.antonlecock.be/share/lists.html) for a complete and interactive list.





