

Dinner & Conversation:

A guidebook for hosting a productive
community conversation

Dear Community Member,

Thank you for volunteering to host a Dinner & Conversation Event! I hope that this will be an enriching and inspiring experience for all your guests. Included below is all of the information you will need to host a meal, but if you have any questions you can email the host of the dinner you have attended or me, Chloe, at chloehiggins902@gmail.com.

Dinner & Conversation was inspired by many organizations such as The People's Supper and Living Room Conversations. The event can be anything that you wish, the goal is simply to create conversation and bring more people to the table. Additional resources can be found on the websites for the aforementioned organizations:

<http://www.thepeoplessupper.org>

<http://www.livingroomconversations.org>

Good luck with your event and I can't wait to see the great things that come from your bravery to step out and connect with your community. I hope you and your guests feel empowered to speak up and be heard, not just at this event but in all of their community interactions. In the event, I hope your guests are present, vulnerable, and authentic.

Good luck!

Chloe Higgins

STEP 1: CREATE A PURPOSE

In Priya Parker's *The Art of Gathering*, she shares that the first step of having a meaningful gathering is, "Committing to a bold, sharp purpose." That purpose requires specificity and uniqueness. Parker also shares a few tips to create the purpose:

1. **Keep asking why.** (ex: We are gathering for dinner and a conversation. WHY? We need to have conversation. WHY? There are people in our community who feel like they are not part of the conversation... and so on)
2. **What kind of problem might this gathering help solve?**
3. **Reverse engineer.** Start with your intended outcome, then work backward to find a purpose that could help you achieve that outcome.

So, what is your purpose for hosting this Dinner & Conversation event? I will tell you my purpose for hosting the original event and for creating this guidebook to try and keep the events happening. Your purpose may be the same as mine, but I encourage you to adapt it to yourself so that it is more personal.

My purpose: To pilot and test a model that can be used in Nebraska City to start having conversations about how we can help all of our citizens have a sense of belonging and a place at the table._____

Your purpose: _____

STEP 2: LOGISTICS // find a location and set a date

LOCATION

When choosing a location, here's a few things to keep in mind-

- Make sure everybody will be comfortable in this space (for example, if the event is at a church are all your guests comfortable in a church?)
- Acoustics- it's no fun to have a conversation if you can't hear each other!
- Accessibility
- Availability (make sure the space is available for the day of your event and a few hours early so you can set up!)
- Does this space help you fulfill your purpose?

If you are hosting this event in Nebraska City, here are a few ideas of a location to get you started:

- The Blockhouse (a new event space on the corner of 5th and Central, across the street from Lil Ted's. This is where I hosted my event!)
- Church
- Library
- Your home
- Your workplace

DATE

You have two options:

1. Choose the date then invite your guests
2. Send a Doodle Poll (<https://doodle.com/make-a-poll>) to your guests and see what date works best for them
 - a. *This option is best if you want specific guests to attend*

STEP 3: INVITE PEOPLE // guest list and invitations

GUEST LIST

- 10-15 people (including yourself) is the ideal number for this type of event
- Invite a mix of people that you know well and people that you do not know
- Think about inviting people who you do not normally see at the table
 - Ask your guest that you know well for suggestions of more people to invite
- Think about how the people you are inviting can help you fulfill your purpose

INVITATION

Here is a sample invitation and graphic that was emailed out. Feel free to change as needed to fit your event and your purpose.

You are invited to attend a Dinner and Conversation event in Nebraska City.
The purpose is to _____. The intended outcome is _____.

This meal will take place on _____ at _____. A main dish will be provided but feel free to bring a side dish if you'd like. Expect a lightly structured conversation, but mostly just be ready to learn more about other community members.

After dinner, we may ask for your feedback to figure out how we can continue hosting these dinners in Nebraska City.

RSVP and ask any questions to _____

[Side Note- decide if the main dish will be provided or if you would like the entire event to be potluck-style! Don't forget to include that information in the invite]



JOIN US FOR

DINNER AND CONVERSATION

BRING A SIDE DISH (OPTIONAL) AND COMMUNITY STORIES TO
SHARE

JULY • 29 • 2019
6PM ONWARDS
THE BLOCKHOUSE (ACROSS FROM LITTLE TED'S)

STEP 4: CREATE A PLAN

SCHEDULE

*Day before the event: Send a reminder email with any additional information and the conversation agreements***

4:30- Arrive to the venue and set up

6:00- guests start arriving

6:30- Event Begins

- Have everybody get food and sit down (if it's buffet-style)
- Introduction*
- Read the conversation agreements**

6:40- Introductions- tell us your name and FIRST QUESTION

7:10- SECOND QUESTION

7:40- THIRD QUESTION

8:10- Closing***

***introduction**

- Logistical things- Where are the restrooms? Can guests get up to get more food during the conversation? Will there be dessert? Who provided the space, should they be thanked?
- Explain the purpose and background of this event
- Give a quick explanation of the structure for the night

****conversation agreements**

For my event, I placed this on each person's plate before the event. During my introduction, I asked one of my guests to read the agreements aloud as something for each person to keep in mind throughout the night (found at the end of this section).

*****closing**

I like to propose a short toast at the end of the event that sums up what was discussed that night, for example, "To community!" or "To diversity!" or "To growth!" etc. You can also debrief at the end of the event by asking guests what was meaningful, what they learned, etc.

Dinner and Conversation

Agreements

**BE CURIOUS AND OPEN TO
LEARNING**

**SHOW RESPECT AND
SUSPEND JUDGEMENT**

**BE AUTHENTIC AND
WELCOME AUTHENTICITY**

**BE PURPOSEFUL AND TO THE
POINT**

BE PRESENT



STEP 5: QUESTIONS

I would suggest asking three questions. Think deeply about how these questions will work at the table and how they fit your purpose. Here are a few options, and more can be found at the sites at the beginning of this guide.

1. Who are your people? What places or communities do you go to when you need to release and restore yourself?
2. Tell us about a moment in which you were made to feel unwelcome or misunderstood.
3. Describe a time when you felt the opposite: profoundly welcome and respected. What was it that made you feel that way?
4. Tell a story from your upbringing that gives a picture of your first experience with community.
5. What makes talking about politics hard for you or has made it difficult in the past?
6. Describe an experience when you were made to question something you'd held as a certainty.
7. What's one thing that could change that would help you feel more seen and heard with your full self in this community?
8. Who taught you to exercise your voice in the world? How?
9. Who or what has influenced the way that you show up in the world?
10. Tell about a recent experience that gave you hope.
11. What are your concerns and hopes for your community?
12. What sense of purpose/mission/duty guides you in your life?
13. When have you experienced resilience in your life or observed it in others?
14. How do we increase our social and emotional intelligence?
15. What are the key characteristics of your healthiest relationships?
16. How do you make your connections with others strong? What weakens or diminishes our connections with each other?
17. What is your personal commitment to creating the community you want?

Think also about what your response might be to these questions.

“If you are hoping to help your guests be more real, you need to be real yourself. When I host these dinners, I make sure that [every person] has my full attention throughout the dinner. I listen deeply and show the kind of self that I am asking them to show me.”

- Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering*

STEP 6: THE EVENT

Things to remember/make sure are available (many are optional, create your own list!):

FOR THE EVENT SPACE

- Tables
- Table for food
- Chairs
- Tablecloths
- Centerpieces
- Silverware
- Serving utensils
- Plates
- Napkins
- Cups
- Conversation Agreement print out
- Main dish/food you agreed to bring
- Drinks
- Dessert
- Cleaning supplies
- Nametags
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FOR THE HOST

- Notes or a script
- Your list of questions
- A way to keep track of time
- The conversation agreements
- The purpose!
- Keep the conversation going
- Connect your guests
- Anticipate points of conflict
- Be an active listener
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STEP 7: AFTER THE EVENT

- Clean up! Be a good steward of the space you are using and make sure it is as clean as when you arrived. Send a thank you to the owner/manager of the location if applicable.
- Send out a follow-up email
 - I used this survey: <https://forms.gle/ZrhNpBC8HHV5xsAj6> and sent it to each of the event attendants. This provides some examples of questions you can ask.
 - Ask your guests (this can be via a survey) if they would be interested in hosting an event like this. Send them this guide and provide your expertise!
- Keep it going. I challenge you to think about what you learned from this event and how you can use those lessons moving forward.
- Thank you! Thank you for taking the step to host an event like this and for creating an environment that was safe and welcoming for all who attended. Your leadership is so appreciated and our community is blessed to have people like you.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR YOUR EVENT

- Give it a theme! Maybe it is hosted around a holiday or special event. Maybe you just want to discuss something specific. This is a great way to make the event unique.
- Tell each guest that the dish they bring must have a story behind it. Allow each guest to share the story.
- Read the book *The Art of Gathering!* I know I talked about it a lot, but it really is a great read and provides some incredible insight for this type of event.
- Offer a prayer at the beginning and/or end of your meal
- Challenge yourself to create diversity- whether that be in age, race, gender, etc. Bringing in more unique perspectives will create an even more interesting conversation!
- Read an inspirational quote, poem, or passage from a book at the beginning of the dinner to help people's minds start working and to set a tone for the night.
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NOTES