

Part 1: Simple “Getting to Know One Another” Activities

All strong relationships have to start somewhere: a simple smile, a shared laugh, a common interest. These small connections are part of a foundation that is essential to building stronger, deeper relationships. The activities in this section are some fun and effective ways for your team members to get to know one another.

TIPS: HOW TO HOST SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY DINNERS

One KLCC II site used a community dinner to launch its new program for collective leadership and a just community. Because the group was so large, everyone wore a nametag. The organizers lined the walls of the gathering space with butcher paper and encouraged guests to write their own definition of “just community” on the paper. The event grew from a simple, commonsense idea, but the dinner was a huge success: The food was local and delicious, the organizers created a true sense of space for the newcomers, and everyone who attended received sufficient information about the program.

Community dinners can serve many functions. You can use dinners as a recruitment tool or to create ownership in an established group. These events are about building relationships, creating awareness of your group’s work in the community, and learning about one another in an informal setting.

Tips for hosting a successful – and fun – community dinner:

- **Goals.** Identify your goals for the dinner, for example, to create better relationships, to sell your program, to bring more people to the table (literally).
- **Agendas.** Create an agenda for your time together, even a simple one. Agendas help you clarify what’s most important, keep everyone on track, and ensure that everything you want to happen during the dinner gets done. Agendas also help those with a visual learning style. Your agenda might include an icebreaker or time to work in small groups.
- **Food.** If you’re preparing food, ask community members what they would most like to eat. If you’re ordering food, try a local restaurant or caterer. If you know ahead of time who’ll be attending, potlucks can be a lot of fun and help create a sense of community. Make sure everyone has something to eat (and enough of it) – that there’s food for members who are vegetarians, vegans, or have special dietary restrictions. But remember: Simplicity is great – never rule out pizza!
- **Comfortable atmosphere.** Although food is clearly a crucial part of a meal-centered event, your gathering is really about making people feel welcome so that they can begin conversations about ways to create change. Make sure you have someone at the front door to greet people as they arrive. If this is a new group, use nametags. Scatter organizers throughout the group to circulate and make sure that no one is left out of the conversations. Mingling before everyone sits down to eat gives you a chance to collect contact information on a sign-in sheet so that you have it for future functions.

- **Welcome and introductions.** Make sure to welcome members and state the purpose of the community dinner (usually before guests eat or after they have their food). Introduce people the community needs to know. If there's an agenda, point it out for those people who like to follow along. Icebreaker activities are best done before guests start eating – no one likes to talk with a mouth full of food. (For icebreakers, we liked **One-on-One Interviews** on page 93.)
- **Collective ownership.** Mix up the facilitation among several people to create a sense of collective ownership. Use young people as much as possible in the facilitation. Be sure to have a back-up plan for facilitation, and pay attention to the cues your group gives so that you can meet its needs.
- **Wrap-up.** Conclude your dinner with “next steps” that you want to take as a group and a discussion of how to use the skills of those present. In a smaller group, a reflection exercise may be appropriate. Explain that this opportunity for youth and adults to come together, learn, and share with one another deserves a chance for reflection and celebration. (**Head, Heart, and Feet** on page 94 is one of our favorite reflection exercises.) When you thank dinner attendees for joining you, be sure to ask for comments or questions they may want to share.
- **Follow-up.** If possible, find a way to bring everyone back within 2 weeks to keep momentum going and to create a cohesive group. After recruitment, your group truly has a world of opportunities, but this can be overwhelming for both members and organizers. To help people feel that they're making a difference, some groups followed their community dinner with an action-oriented activity such as cleaning up a park or painting parts of the neighborhood. After activities like these, groups are able to think about the broader issues in the community that they hope to change.