



Recipe for Unity: A Discussion Guide for Powerful Conversation

A Project of UnidosUS's Rise Above Initiative





Guiding the Discussion at Your Meal

You've set the table, your guests are arriving. Now what?

The following discussion guide can be used to prompt conversation among Recipe for Unity attendees. It includes thought-provoking questions and discussion topics centered on how diversity makes our country stronger – for use with an assortment of audiences, including public servants, community members and business leaders.

Why are we gathering together?

Set the tone by welcoming everyone and providing background to the Recipe for Unity event.

Welcome

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us for [city's] Recipe for Unity event. Before we get started with introductions, I'd like to give you some background on Recipe for Unity.

Despite what we hear every day, most Americans overwhelmingly believe that diversity makes us stronger. Last year, UnidosUS launched the Rise Above initiative to encourage Americans to “rise above” racial, political, and policy differences – and unite around a positive vision of the future. Today's event is based on a model created by Nashville-based [Conexión Américas](#) and [Dirty Pages](#) in Nashville. They realized that food is a great way of bringing people together, to share stories and cultural traditions. And we loved the model so we wanted to create a space for folks to learn more about each other, over a delicious meal, of course.



We encourage you all to take photos and tweet about your experience today using #RecipeForUnity. We'd also love for you to tag @WeAreUnidosUS and @[Host Organization Twitter handle] to help us keep track of the online conversation. You can also find our event hashtag and social media handles posted around the room for reference.



Who is in the room?

Ask each participant to take a few minutes to share their name, a little about who they are, the dish they brought and significance of the dish to their family or community. Set a time parameter based on the amount of people in attendance.

Discussion prompts

Conversation will most likely happen organically as guests share their stories. If there is a lull, here are some prompts to keep the discussion going.

- When you heard people in the room share the significance of their dishes, did you find you had a similar story or family tradition? What surprised you?
- The textbook definition of diversity is the inclusion of different types of people in a group or organization. It is also defined as the collective mixture of differences and similarities that includes individual and organizational characteristics, values beliefs, experiences, backgrounds and behaviors. It encompasses our personal and professional histories that frame how we see the world and collaborate with each other.¹ How are these definitions reflected in the food you brought, or in your family or community?
- How do you ensure that diverse perspectives are heard in your family or workplace?
- Can you tell us about a time where you felt your personal opinion was ignored or not valued? Why did it make you feel this way?
- Are there parts of your identity that you feel you need to hide from people outside of your family? If so, what are those?
- Have you or someone you know ever experienced discrimination in your community or workplace? What happened? And how was it handled?
- Thinking about your social identity, has there ever been a time where you've felt like you were at a disadvantage compared to someone else? How did that make you feel?
- How has diversity – or the lack of it – played a role in your personal or work life?
- Differing opinions may lead to conflict. How have you addressed these challenges?





- What can you do to help make sure that different perspectives and values are represented in your family or community?
- What is one way that you've seen diverse perspectives make your family or community stronger?
- Why is it important to acknowledge and celebrate what makes us unique while encouraging collaboration?

Breaking awkward silences

Use these tips to get the conversation going after an awkward silence.

- Ask participants to share their favorite aspect of their community.
- Model storytelling by sharing about your own family or community.
- Go around the table and have everyone share their favorite food from a culture that's different from their own.

Handling difficult moments

In the rare event that a conflict arises during the discussion, use these steps to help facilitate the conversation and get back on track.

- Acknowledge that your guests are in a vulnerable position after sharing their personal stories and experiences. Challenging moments like the one that just happened are important parts of the conversation around building stronger, more unified communities.
- Reiterate that this room is a safe space for guests to share their thoughts and experiences – regardless of what side of the political spectrum their views fall under.
- If appropriate, ask folks to brainstorm next steps for the conflict at hand.
- Move the conversation to a productive place by asking people to share how they could use dialogue to address conflicts like these in their families or communities.
- If a guest says something offensive, do not argue with them. Keep in mind that everyone is entitled to their own opinions. For a more fruitful conversation, empathize with them and ask about why they feel this way.
- If the conversation veers off topic, use the following phrases to come back to original topic at hand:
 - While this is an important discussion, we're here to discuss how diversity makes our communities stronger.
 - This conversation is important and should continue after the event. For now, let's go back to [the topic at hand].



- We appreciate the passion you have for this issue. Let's discuss ways that our communities can come together in difficult times.

Wrapping up

The conversation does not end here! Have guests reflect on their experience. Ask each participant to describe how the conversation made them feel using one word and close out the event with encouragement to have people keep thinking about continuing these dialogues:

- How can you bring this conversation back to your neighbors?
- What is your hope for a stronger, more united [city]? What's one way you can help to make this happen?
- How do you plan to keep in touch with some of the people you've met tonight?

Collect Stories at Your Event

The following guide will help you collect stories that amplify the success and importance of the Recipe for Unity events as part of the Rise Above initiative. As you hear participants speak about their dishes and tell their stories, make note of particularly compelling stories or stories that find common ground. After folks have shared, you can ask to interview the tellers to learn more or to interview together participants who felt a particularly strong connection. Make sure each person who agrees to an interview feels comfortable during the process. You may want to find a separate, quiet space for the conversation. Follow your gut. If the conversation strays from the interview guide below, that is okay. The guide is just that, a guide, and you don't have to ask every question below.

Story Interview Guide

- What dish did you bring with you today? Describe it for us.
- How is your dish significant to you, your family, your community or your culture?
- Did you find that your story or dish related to another participant's tonight? Did you have similar stories? What was the other person's dish? What was the common thread?
- If there is one thing you'd want others to know about who you are, what would it be? Why is this important?
- What was your biggest takeaway from Recipe for Unity? Did you learn anything you didn't expect to?
 - Do you feel more connected to your community after attending this event? How so?
 - How has diversity made your family or community stronger?



- What is your vision for the future of [PLACE] or the U.S. as a whole? What steps must we take to make that vision a reality?

ⁱ [Adapted from CommonHealth ACTION and Washington State Human Resources, n.d.](#)