



# Recipe for Unity: A Toolkit for Organizing Meaningful Events

A Project of UnidosUS's Rise Above Initiative





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## The Inspiration for Recipe for Unity

Our country is facing a time of unprecedented division with political and racial discord at its height. But there is good news: Most Americans still overwhelmingly believe that diversity makes us stronger and helps us navigate a complex world.

Tapping into this belief, UnidosUS is joining hands with local communities and national partners to host events across the country that bring people together across divisions. The events are part of the Rise Above initiative, a campaign to encourage Americans to “rise above” racial, political, and policy differences - and unite around a positive vision of the future. They are based on a model created and pioneered by Nashville-based [Conexión Américas](#) and [Dirty Pages](#), using commonalities across diverse food traditions as a vehicle to bring diverse groups of people together.



In March of 2018, Rise Above and its partners hosted similar events called Recipe for Unity in Tampa, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Memphis, Tennessee; Durham, North Carolina; and Alexandria, VA. Through these events, we brought together everyday Americans, from all walks of life, to begin building shared experiences through dinner and conversation.

The meals reflected the American mosaic - grounded in the local community - and created a space for attendees to share their stories, spark a growing dialogue and ultimately empower community members to host their own events in the future.

From those events, we developed this toolkit to assist others who want to host their Recipe for Unity events. To learn more about Recipe for Unity and the Rise Above initiative, please visit: [www.weriseabove.us](http://www.weriseabove.us).

## Organize Your Own Recipe for Unity Event

Interested in organizing your own Recipe for Unity event? We’ve got you covered. The guide below will help you strategize about a date and location, consider who to invite, design a successful event and more.

### Find a Location and Pick a Date

First, you will need to research locations that could host around 25 people at one table together and would be welcoming to people from all backgrounds. Local community centers or churches often have rooms that could accommodate your event and may even have commercial kitchens that would enable you to keep the meals warm. Newer establishments and local hot spots invested in the community are also often willing to host an



event free of charge for the publicity and exposure from promoting the strength of diversity in their communities. **In the [Tools for Outreach](#) section, you will find a template pitch for a local partner to support your event and join the host committee.**

Think strategically about the time of day and day of the week that will best suit your potential participants. When you put together the list of possible participants, consider what days of the week or times of day would attract the most attendees. If you are including folks who work at night, a weekend brunch might be more suitable. Many of the Recipe for Unity events have taken place over dinner in the evening but you might find a weekend brunch more accommodating in your community.

## Who to Invite

To create a successful event, you need to invite guests with diverse voices and experiences so they can provide a wide range of foods and stories around the table. It is important to consider all possible attendees from different races and ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religions, political ideologies, and more.

Encourage participants with teenage children to bring them along. Some of the best participants we had were younger and brought a different and important perspective to the conversations. In order to maintain the intimacy of the event, limit the number of attendees to 20 to 25 people so everyone has enough time and space to share. You can streamline the invitation process by asking four to five organization partners to join your host committee and commit to bring five individuals each to the event. **In the [Tools for Outreach](#) section, you will find a template invitation to attend the event and/or join the host committee.** You



could also consider prominent local voices like a local elected official, church leader, chef, or business owner, who might attract media coverage for your event, but those individuals may intimidate others from participating or diminish the community feel of the event.

You might also consider inviting a local journalists or photographer to cover the event. If you do, in your invitation to guests, let them know that reporters or photographers will be present to take photos during the event, which may be shared on social media, your organization's website, or news articles. Also inform guests that you will be collecting stories and taking videos after the event to document its success for online audiences. Some guests may not feel comfortable having their photo or video taken. By notifying guests in advance, you can anticipate any photo- or video-related issues which may occur during the event.

Once the guest list has been finalized, spit the participants into five distinct groups. Assign each group a type of dish to bring (appetizer, side dish, main entrée, dessert, etc.). Assure them that they will each only have to make enough food for eight to 10 people. That will supply plenty of food for the 25 guests in attendance. Make sure guests know that the beverages will be provided by the host.



While asking folks to bring a dish that is significant to them is ideal, if bringing a dish presents a challenge, consider having the meal catered by a local restaurant and ask participants to bring a recipe instead. Take the following items into consideration when deciding between catering and asking participants to bring a dish:

- Do your guests have the resources to cook enough food for 10-15 people?
- Depending on the day and time of the event, are your guests able to cook the meal in time?
- Are you inviting anyone whose religious beliefs may prohibit them from eating dishes prepared by others or with certain ingredients?
- If you have vegetarian guests or other with dietary restrictions, how will you accommodate their needs?



## The Meal

The guidelines below are recommendations based on the experiences of previous event organizers but feel free to adapt them to the needs of your location and guests. Before the event, consider the following recommendations.

- The event will last about two hours. Be sure to allow yourself plenty of time to set up and break down the space.
- Playing background music is a great way to create a welcoming atmosphere.
- The room and table setup can reflect the diversity of the community. Past organizers have mixed and matched plates and napkins to display a patchwork of color and texture. Others considered placing welcoming art pieces around the room to give it a homey and informal feeling.
- To facilitate conversation, align the seating arrangements so that guests can see and hear everyone around the table.
- Upon their arrival, kindly ask guests to fill out a registration form and sign the photo release form. If a minor is attending the event, have their parent or guardian sign the photo release form at the event or in advance.





- Label the dishes with information including the name of the dish, what cuisine it is from and its ingredients.
- Make sure the #RecipeForUnity hashtag is visible and ask participants to post during the event if you are interested in social media coverage. We found that putting a simple sign the hashtag next to the centerpieces on the tables worked well.

During the event, keep in mind these recommendations to facilitate conversations among guests and contribute to an open ambiance.

- The host should welcome guests by offering beverages and encouraging them to mingle with other guests. Arrange all the dishes on a buffet-style table so guests can see the variety of food.
- Once everyone has arrived, the host should encourage the group to grab plates from the table and choose from the range of foods at the buffet. Remind them that to contribute to the goal of the dinner, guests should not sit next to anyone they already know.

- Once everyone is seated, the host should welcome the guests and explain why everyone has come together. Then 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.



- As guests share their dishes and personal stories, conversation tends to grow organically as other guests find commonalities in what they hear or have experienced in their own lives. Just in case, be prepared with a set of questions to ask if the conversation does not flow naturally. Consider questions like: “When you heard folks in the room share about their dishes, did you find you had a similar story or family tradition? Did anything surprise you?”
- Once everyone has shared, encourage guests to get second helpings, bring them more beverages, and act as a facilitator when needed to keep the conversations going.

At the end of the event, follow the recommendations below to keep the conversations and engagement going even after the event.

- As a wrap-up activity, go around the table and ask each guest to describe how they are feeling with one word.
- Have guests fill out a card offering them ways to stay engaged, host an event in the future, and help recruit new guests for the next event in their city.



- Make sure to have containers on hand for leftovers. Past organizers have found that everyone wants to take the new dishes home to share with their families.

## Tools for Outreach

### Local Host Partner Email

Hi [insert name],

Social media can oftentimes paint the picture of a hyper-divided country - but the American reality is different. Americans overwhelmingly believe that diversity makes us stronger, and helps us innovate, solve problems and navigate a complex world.

In partnership with community leaders and local organizations, UnidosUS launched the Rise Above initiative, a campaign to strengthen the ties that bind us as a country by elevating everyday actions - big and small - that help neighbors and communities thrive. Over the past year, our campaign partners developed activities to encourage Americans to “rise above” racial, political, and policy differences, ignite problem-solving, and unite around a positive vision of our shared future. One of those activities was Supper United - a community dinner that created space for people to break bread, share experiences and get to know others within their own communities.

This coming March, Rise Above is joining hands with local and national partners to host Supper United events in multiple locations, including [insert city name], as well as [insert remaining cities]. Through these events, we hope to bring together everyday Americans, from all walks of life, to begin building shared experiences through dinner and conversation. The meal will reflect the American mosaic - grounded in the local community - and create a space for attendees to share stories, learn about each other’s experiences, and engage in a dialogue that taps the strength of that diversity. Local and national media will also be present to interview attendees willing to speak or offer quotes. Additional tools and videos will be created from these dinners, to help organizations and individuals in other communities organize similar events in the future.

We are reaching out to you to offer the opportunity to partner in the [insert city name] event by providing a [catered meal, lending a space or other forms of in-kind support]. Your participation would give tangible form to your company’s commitment to build stronger, vibrant communities that reflect the America we love. Partners will have an opportunity to be listed as co-host of these events and be noted in outreach materials.

Together we can build an accurate “**Story of Us**” and who we aspire to be as a country, a story that:

- Recognizes the strength in our diversity and accurately sees it as one of our greatest national assets;
- Has a place for every one of us, regardless of color, accent, or origin, orientation or affiliation; and
- Brings our people together to tackle our challenges and generate real solutions.

We hope you can be a partner in this important effort. Don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.



Thank you,  
[Name]

## Invitation for Organization to Recruit Event Participants

Hi X,

We at [insert your organization] have teamed up with UnidosUS and the [Rise Above Initiative](#) to host a dinner on [insert date] at [insert event location and time], and we are hoping that [insert their organization] can be a part of it.

Our dinner is one of a series of events called **Recipe for Unity** happening across the country in 2018. Through these events, we hope to provide an opportunity for residents of [insert city] from all backgrounds to break bread, share experiences and get to know others within their own community. The meal will reflect the American mosaic - grounded in your local community - and create a space for attendees to “rise above” our political and racial differences, and unite around a stronger, shared vision for the future.

**We’d love your help making our Recipe for Unity gathering a success by:**

- Identifying **four to six of your members who would like to be involved** and would commit to attend the [insert date] potluck - and, of course, to bring a dish! Please indicate whether your members are able to bring an appetizer, main course or dessert.
- Encouraging your members to each **bring one dish** connected to their **family stories, cultural traditions and favorite memories.**

We expect to have between 20 and 25 people for dinner, so each participant’s dish should serve around 10 people.

We hope you’ll help us fill the Recipe for Unity table on [date]! If you have any questions as you identify and invite members on our behalf, don’t hesitate to reach out.

Thank you,  
[Signature]