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DEMOCRAT STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Neighborhood Potluck Guide

What?

Neighborhood potlucks are great ways to build community with your neighbors. Some people in the area have weekly “drinks on the corner,” Friday night spaghetti dinners, potlucks many Sundays, February chocolate parties, and more.

Why?

Potlucks and other neighborhood gatherings are great ways to build community strength and resilience! Knowing your neighbors makes our great neighborhoods even better! Once you start gathering regularly, together you might decide to raise money, invite guest speakers, go to protests, write postcards, water plants when your neighbor goes on vacation, or have a camp on the block for the kids in the summer. The sky is the limit! Your neighborhood might decide to take political action together or be purely social. You might have monthly restaurant outings, go for a hike, or volunteer together - whatever the case, knowing our neighbors is important and good for all of us. Creating connections and shared experiences enriches all of our lives and lies at the foundation of community and social change.

How?

You are probably already doing this; you plan a birthday party, invite friends over, and then follow up to see if they can make it. The idea behind neighborhood potlucks is fun and straightforward: Invite your neighbors over for dinner. Then do it again! Make it a weekly or monthly event. Rotate houses. Here are some steps to get started:

1. Make invitations and deliver them to the houses on your block/street/area. (A template you can edit is attached at the end)
2. Invite me or let me know the potluck is happening (if you would like) by filling out [this form](#). If you let me know this is happening, I can probably help invite your neighborhood by passing out invitations, if you'd like. We can also help answer questions and provide other support if helpful.
3. Decide if you want to have an activity or fundraiser; some suggestions are below.
4. Connect with a neighbor to see if they will host the next one; decide if this will be a monthly or weekly event for your block/street/area.
5. Take a picture and e-mail to info@rebeccakislak.com if it's ok to add to my gallery of neighborhood gatherings!
6. Make an e-mail list or group chat.
7. Repeat!

Ideas for additional potluck activities (I will update as I hear what great ideas people have around the neighborhood!):

1. **Write postcards** to thank someone for doing something, or to ask someone to do something. Part of the activity at the potluck can be deciding who the group wants to write to! But it's a good idea to come with some ideas to start with. Write to state legislators? City councilors? Members of Congress? Did someone in the news do something great? Do you want to advocate for change? All great ideas to write post cards about! Materials needed: Post cards, pens, post card stamps, and a phone or computer to use to look up addresses.
2. **Raise money** for local organizations. Print out QR codes, and some information, about the organizations you picked. Maybe your neighborhood will decide that everyone who wants to will donate \$5 every potluck, and the host gets to pick what organizations to highlight. Some suggestions for organizations supporting some communities that are impacted by federal policy changes:

[AMOR](#) (information)

[Link to donate](#)

[TGI Network](#) (information)

[Link to donate](#)

3. **Invite guest speakers.** Who does your neighborhood want to hear from? What does your neighborhood want to learn about? Rhode Island is a small state and our neighbors are incredibly knowledgeable and engaged. And your local elected officials will generally want to come if you have 10-15 people over. If you have someone you want to invite but don't know how to reach them, let me know and I'll help!
4. Have a **book group or poetry reading**. You can do this once, or regularly. Pick a book for everyone to read and discuss. Or everyone can bring a poem (their own or one they like) to share.

Example Potluck Agenda

6pm - 6:30 pm: Guest arrival mingling/eating

6:30pm: Brief introductions and icebreaker (or, if first meeting, spend ½ hour on this! Or most of the time!)

6:45 - 7:45 continued eating and activity or guest speaker (optional)

- Postcard writing? Do you need to discuss who you're writing to? Or just start passing around the cards and lists?
- Raising money? Say something about the group(s) and make sure to have QR codes ready.
- Have a guest speaker? Now is the time to introduce them!

7:45pm: Goodbyes, next steps, next potluck, set up e-mail list, etc.

Tips:

Consider asking people to bring notecards with ingredients listed for their dish.

Consider whether it's a potluck for dinner, dessert, or if you want there to be a theme?

Icebreaker ideas

1. Introduce yourself with your name, pronouns and an adjective that describes you that begins with the first letter of your name.
2. What is your favorite [spring/summer/fall/winter] activity to do in Rhode Island?
3. Favorite/recent favorite book/movie/TV show.

Potential Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite activity or feature of our neighborhood?
2. When did you move to the neighborhood?
3. What brought you to the neighborhood?
4. What are the issues that you see facing our neighborhood?
5. What changes would you like to see in our neighborhood?
6. What resources are you aware of in the community that address any of these issues?
7. How can our neighborhood collectively support existing resources or work collaboratively to develop resources?
8. How do community networks impact resource availability?
9. What can you commit to contributing within your community? How can this group support you with this commitment?
10. Do you want potlucks to be informal gatherings? To have agendas? What do you want to do more of?
11. Do you want a neighborhood e-mail list?

More information about why I'm doing this, or the story of how potlucks have changed my life.

I am receiving a lot of questions about "what can I do in this moment?" My first answer is always "have potlucks or regular gatherings with your neighbors." Always. Weekly if possible! Make it a postcard writing opportunity, a time to sort through volunteer opportunities, a time to make phone calls together, a time to invite community leaders to meet with you, a book group, a poetry reading. Gathering with the same people and sharing a meal builds community and who knows where it might go from there?

I can draw a line from small living room gatherings to ending up on my amazing block to my decision to run for office, and now that amazing block supports me in my leadership (together with all of my fantastic constituents!). Right after Joanna and I moved to Providence for her medical residency with Brown Family Medicine program 23 years ago, the spouse of another resident started a parenting support group. And the parenting group started a group called "MamaAct!" We met in homes and talked about issues of importance. I remember one meeting when then-State Senator Elizabeth Howlett (Roberts) came to talk about her campaign for Lt. Governor. We met our now neighbors through MamaAct, before any of us were parents, and eventually we moved next door to them. My neighborhood has been having regular potlucks for years. We sometimes write postcards together, have poetry salons, or book groups. It is the center of my social and my organizing worlds. I wish for you similar neighborhood experiences! What can you do in this moment? Organize potlucks!

Some people on other blocks have also been organizing neighborhood gatherings, so I know that my fabulous block is one of many fabulous blocks all over our amazing district. Are you having weekly or occasional spaghetti dinners? Chocolate parties at Valentine's Day? Movies on your garage door?

A part of me wonders if I'm saying "have a potluck" because I want you to invite me! And thank you to those of you who have, I've had a great time! And if you invite me and I can come, I'll be there!!!

But more than invitations, I want to invite us to face these difficult times together. The laughter, joy, and community created through our gathering is the foundation of building community resilience. The more we gather, the stronger we will be and the more we will accomplish.

Neighborhood Potluck!

Where:

When:

Why: Let's get together!

What can you bring: [desserts, dinner, brunch, vegetarian? Theme? Suggest bringing notecard with ingredients?]

Any additional information here (do you want to provide information about any additional activity here?)

RSVP: let me know you're coming!

Text:

Email:

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