

Neighbor Gatherings Toolkit (V1 | C'ville)

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS THE TOOLKIT WE USED IN CHARLOTTESVILLE. IT IS NOT RELEVANT FOR CONNECTIVE TISSUE'S NEIGHBOR GATHERING MICROGRANTS.

OVERVIEW

We've compiled this toolkit to help you, as hosts and facilitators, prepare for and run a fun gathering with your neighbors. We intentionally created this document to be comprehensive but not overwhelming; it includes the components — a checklist, facilitation guide, comms templates, and FAQs — that we thought would be most helpful to you. Everything included in here is intended to be a resource to support you, not a how-to guide or prescription for how you must go about planning and running your gathering.

If you have feedback on anything that can be clarified, improved, or added, please let us know by contacting Sam (tyv7yr@virginia.edu) and we will do our best to incorporate your suggestions.

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Checklist

A start-to-finish checklist for receiving microgrant funding, planning and hosting your gathering, and reporting out on how it went.

PHASE 1: BEFORE YOU RECEIVE FUNDING

Develop your initial guest list.

Identify neighbors you want to invite — both those you know well and those you haven't spent much time with. If helpful for initial outreach, [here's a brief blurb](#) that includes some background on the gathering series.

Align on a date and time for your gathering.

Determine the dates and times you're available to host and confirm times that work with the neighbors who you'd like to invite. Align on a date/time that works best for you and an initial group of your neighbors (Note: this doesn't need to be your final guest list).

Decide on a venue for your gathering.

Select the venue for your gathering. It can be your place, a neighbor's place, or a community venue. Be sure that whatever location you choose is accessible, can accommodate your group size, and is reserved in advance (if needed).

★ MILESTONE ★ *Submit the microgrant confirmation form.*

Once you've aligned on the date/time, location, and a tentative guest list for your gathering, submit the [Microgrant Confirmation Form](#). Forms must be completed no later than **Monday, March 17th** to be eligible to receive funding.

Next Steps:

If your application is approved, we will provide:

1. Microgrants via a digital VISA gift card and send them directly to the email you provide.
2. Information on the date options for attending one of our orientations for planning and facilitating your gathering.
3. The opportunity to join a peer-to-peer digital group to learn about what others are doing and ask questions.

Please feel free to email Sam Pressler (tyv7yr@virginia.edu) with questions.

PHASE 2: AFTER YOU RECEIVE FUNDING

Before the Gathering (~2-4 weeks prior)

Send invitations to add'l guests and confirm guests you've already invited.

Every gathering and dinner will be different, and you are welcome to include whatever information you'd like with your invitations. However, we recommend including a few key details:

- **Context:** Context on your specific dinner or gathering. If helpful, [here's a brief blurb](#) that includes some basic background on the gathering series.
- **Logistics:** Where and when the gathering is taking place.
- **Restrictions:** Questions about any dietary restrictions guests may have and any accessibility accommodations they may need.
- **Expectations:** Any expectations of guests for participating in the gathering (e.g., bringing food/drinks).

Considerations:

- You may use an invitation platform like [Evite](#), [Partiful](#), or [Paperless Post](#) to assist with sending and tracking invitations.
- If you don't use one of these platforms, that's fine — you'll just want to have a place where you can track responses.
- You may need to (a) send follow-ups to confirm those you've already invited and (b) continue inviting new guests until your gathering is full.

Fill the support roles for your gathering (optional).

Decide on the support roles — organizer, facilitator, and note-taker — you would like to include for your gathering (you can find [an overview of each here](#)). As the host, you are welcome to fill all three if you'd like. If you decide to invite others to help with specific support roles, reach out to confirmed guests about taking on these roles until you fill them.

Attend the orientation for the gathering series.

Join one of our virtual orientations for the gathering series on Thursday, March 6th at 12PM ([register here](#)), Tuesday, March 11th ([register here](#)) at 5PM, or Tuesday, March 18th at 5PM ([register here](#)). During the orientation, we will review the preparation materials, discuss key points for facilitation, and create space to address any questions you have.

Notes:

- The orientation will be recorded for those who cannot make either time; however, we encourage those who can make the orientation to join.

- All those filling support roles for your gathering should do their best to attend the orientation.
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Before the Gathering (~1-2 weeks prior)

Develop loose flow/agenda for your gathering.

You'll want to create a loose flow for how your gathering will go. This need not be rigid — just a general structure for welcoming guests, introductions, getting into the substance of your gathering (e.g., dinner, activities, conversation), and bringing the gathering to a close. You can consult [the facilitation guide](#) for inspiration on structure and facilitation.

Confirm any additional logistical needs for gathering.

Determine final logistical needs for gathering, such as food, drinks, supplies, and the like. Coordinate with guests to confirm *who* will help with *what* responsibilities for your gathering. If you are meeting at a community venue (restaurant, park, etc.), be sure to confirm reservations in advance (if you need them). You may want to organize this information in a spreadsheet or doc.

Send confirmation/reminder message to guests.

About a week before the gathering, you'll want to send a confirmation/reminder message to your confirmed guests. You can approach this message however you'd like; however, we suggest including reminders of a few key details:

- **Context** on/expectations for the gathering as a refresher
 - **Intentions** and **norms** for the gathering ([see template here](#))
 - **When** and **where** the gathering is happening
 - **Responsibilities** for logistics and roles
 - A **guest list** that includes who is joining (if you'd like)
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Day of the Gathering

Send out a brief reminder.

Send a brief reminder message confirming the key details on the day's/evening's gathering. Consider providing directions for parking at/entering the venue, who to contact with last-minute questions, and any other logistics you feel would be pertinent to guests.

Set up for the gathering.

Set up the venue (i.e., food, drinks, utensils, furniture, supplies, etc.) as needed for the gathering. If you're in a public space or community venue, make sure that your location and set up is clearly visible to guests.

★ MILESTONE ★ *Host your gathering and have fun! Also, take a group photo.*

Welcome guests to your gathering, set your norms/intentions, engage with the theme, and have a great time together! Feel free to [consult with the facilitation guide](#) in advance of your gathering. You can reference it if needed during the event, but we encourage you to avoid using it as a script. It's really just there to be inspiration and a loose structure for you.

Before your guests leave, take at least one photo of the group! Prior to taking pictures, be sure to confirm with all guests that they are comfortable with being in the photos. If any guests are not comfortable, they do not have to be photographed. Still, be sure to take at least one photo, as you'll be required to share this with us in the post-gathering form to confirm that your gathering happened.

PHASE 3: AFTER THE GATHERING

Send a post-gathering message.

Within a few days of the gathering, send a message to all the guests who joined you. In the message, consider including:

- A note of gratitude for those who attended and contributed
- Photos you took during the gathering
- A summary of any high-level notes/takeaways from the convos
- Any concrete follow-ups, actions, or commitments that were floated or agreed upon during the gathering

If you have permission from your guests, you may also consider sharing the contact information of those who attended (for further conversation).

★ MILESTONE ★ *Complete the post-gathering form.*

After the dinner, please fill out [the post-gathering form](#). In the form, you'll be asked to share the photo(s) of your gathering along with some of the high-level notes, takeaways, and follow-ups from your conversation.

NOTE: We're currently exploring the possibility of hosting a group debrief after the gathering series. We're also considering an event at [Tom Tom](#) for people who want to reflect on their experience hosting. We will update this section accordingly.

Facilitation Guide

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The gatherings are intended to be fun and easy to organize! To lighten the load, we suggest each gathering have up to two roles* to make it a success:

1. The **Host/Organizer**, who helps to organize and plan the gathering, coordinating invites, food/drinks, communications, and receiving/distributing funding. Most of the to do's in the checklist would be the responsibility of this role.
2. A **Facilitator**, who loosely facilitates the gathering discussion. This includes setting norms and orienting the conversation toward the guiding theme, both of which are detailed in the facilitation guide below.

* Notes:

- **On Notes:** We'll expect hosts to report back the key reflections from participants on the theme. As a host, you can do this from memory or you may identify someone to take light notes during the gathering.
- **On Roles:** The host/organizer and facilitator do not necessarily need to be two separate people. As the host/organizer, you can also serve as the facilitator (and take notes if you choose). It's your call.

FACILITATION GUIDE

We assembled this facilitation guide as a resource to prepare for structuring and facilitating your gathering. Take everything in here as guidance and inspiration, and not a set of things you must do or questions you must ask. However, most good gatherings will likely have three main components:

1. An **opening** that grounds guests in the intentions and norms of the space and invites them to meet each other.
2. A **conversation** or **set of activities** that connect with our theme of *“possibilities for our shared place.”*
3. A **closing** that calls guests to action, includes a group picture, and recaps next steps.

While this guide is meant to be applicable to different types of gatherings, it probably applies most to a shared meal. If you’ve proposed your own gathering, you are welcome to adapt this guide to the context as you see fit so long as you maintain a loose connection to the theme of the gathering series.

Should you have any questions in reviewing this guide — or suggestions on how to improve it — don’t hesitate to reach out in the Slack group or via email. This is all a work-in-progress and we’re excited to learn alongside y’all.

The Opening: Intentions, Norms, & Intros

Intentions & Norms

You may want to start your gathering by asking if the group has any questions about the intentions and norms that you shared in advance ([linked here](#)). If you’d like, you may print these for guests to briefly refer to when the gathering begins. The goal here is not to slow the event down or make guests “eat their spinach”; it’s only to ground them in the space y’all are trying to hold. Use your discretion on what feels like the best approach for your gathering.

Intros

You’re welcome to handle intros however you think fits best with your gathering. But, at some point in the beginning, your guests should have a chance to know who is in the room with them.

In the bullets below, we include a few options you can use for intros. You can choose the ones that most resonate (probably no more than 3), or you can choose an entirely different intro approach. It's your call.

Choose 1-3 of these questions:

- What's your name?
- Where did you grow up?
- What's a memorable experience you had in your childhood neighborhood?
- Why did you move to this neighborhood (or community)?
- How long have you lived in this neighborhood (or community)?
- What's your favorite thing about living in this neighborhood (or community)?
- What's your favorite season in this neighborhood (or community)?
- What's the most fun thing — or weirdest thing — you've ever experienced in this neighborhood (or community)?
- What's the most neighborly act that someone has done to you — or you've witnessed happen — in this neighborhood (or community)?
- When have you felt most at home in this neighborhood? Why?
- Have you experienced a moment when you felt you really belonged here? What happened? Why did it make you feel you belonged?

Note: If you're having a big gathering or a gathering where people will pass through at different times, you probably won't be able to do organized intros at the outset (and they may not be a fit for your event). Feel free to use your discretion on how you open your event and get neighbors a chance to connect with each other.

The Conversation: Theme & Guiding Questions

Theme

The theme of the gathering series is ***“possibilities for our shared place.”*** We chose this theme to be intentionally broad and open to interpretation. You can allow the conversation to flow naturally — it can and should go off track every now and again. But, throughout, encourage guests to return to two core pillars: (1) possibilities and (2) their shared place (e.g., block, neighborhood, city/town).

Guiding Questions

You may not need any guiding questions as a facilitator to get at this theme — and that's great! Your priority should be for the conversation to feel easy and natural, and to go with the flow of the gathering. There's no need to impose structure if the conversation is taking off on its own!

However, if you feel like you need a little bit of guidance, we've put together some questions for you to draw on. These questions are meant to be an inspiration and starting point, not a script. Use them, adapt them, or ignore them as you wish:

Questions On Possibilities

- If you think ahead 30 years, how do you want future generations to experience this place?
- What's your greatest hope for this place?
- How can this place become the type of neighborhood or community you'd want your children, grandchildren, or neighbor's children to grow up in?
- Do you have a big, bold idea for this neighborhood or community? If so, what is it?

Questions On Improvements

- What would it take for this place to feel more like home?
- What is this neighborhood (or community) missing that you feel it needs?
- What do you wish we did more of in this neighborhood (or community)?
- What's something we can do or create in this neighborhood (or community) that would make it a better place for everyone?
- If you had a magic wand, what is one thing you'd change about your neighborhood experience?

The Closing & Next Steps

As you close your gathering, we encourage you to wrap with a closing question or reflection that moves people to action, commitment, or some tangible next step (i.e., hosting another dinner, organizing a neighborhood clean up, throwing a block party, etc.) We've included a few ideas for a closing question below. You're welcome to use them, adapt them, or come up with one of your own.

Choose 1 closing question:

- What's one thing we can do — either individually or collectively — to begin realizing the possibilities we explored together?
- What's one action or tangible next step you want to commit to taking coming out of this gathering?
- What, if anything, should we do next as a group? When can we commit to doing this? Who else should we involve?

One additional note: You can be creative on the medium here, too. Guests may continue to share aloud around the table. Alternatively, you can encourage them to write their responses on a piece of paper and then share with the group.

Beyond the closing question, here are a few other steps to consider as you close:

1. **Group Pic:** Take a group picture (if you haven't already) to be submitted in your after-gathering form.
2. **Gratitude:** Thank your guests for joining and contributing to the gathering!
3. **Recap:** Summarize next steps/follow ups from the gathering, particularly if there were any individual or group actions that y'all committed to.

Comms Resources

SHARABLE BLURB

**\$100+ microgrants for neighbor-led gatherings anchored on the theme:
“Possibilities for our shared place.”**

The [UVA Karsh Institute of Democracy](#) and [Connective Tissue newsletter](#) are providing microgrants (of up to \$120) for Charlottesville area neighbors to host gatherings with fellow neighbors. The purpose is simple: enjoy a shared meal or activity, get to know each other better, and imagine what’s possible for your shared place. The gatherings are meant to be fun, communal, and very loosely facilitated. Reflections from the series will be shared at two summits on the theme of “civic possibilities” — one at [Tom Tom](#), one at [Democracy360](#) — and will shape a second set of community gatherings over the summer.

INTENTIONS & NORMS

Here are the intentions and norms suggested by the organizers of the neighbor gathering series. They’re not hard and fast rules — they are purely meant to ground us in the purpose of our gathering and how we expect each other to show up. Feel free to give these a quick review in advance of our gathering.

Intentions: What is the purpose of our gathering?

- Fun: Have fun! This gathering shouldn’t feel like a homework assignment. Prioritize having a good time with your neighbors and the rest will follow.
- Connection: Get to know your neighbors! This gathering is a great excuse to build or deepen relationships with the people who share your block, neighborhood, and community.
- Possibilities: How often do you have the space to step back and imagine what’s possible for the place you live? This gathering is an opportunity to do just that.

Norms: How do we expect each of us to show up?

- Curiosity: Approach your neighbors with curiosity. Don’t just wait for others to finish talking to get your point in, attempt to actively listen.

Ask questions from a place of curiosity, not judgment. Abstain from offering advice unless it's asked of you.

- Neighborliness: Assume your neighbors are acting in good faith. Approach your neighbors from a place of kindness, charity, and hospitality.
- Presence: Be fully present for the conversation. Refrain from checking your phone, and if you need to make a call or send a message, step out of the space to do so.
- Airtime: Be cognizant of the amount of airtime you're taking up in the conversation. If you've talked a lot, take a step back and let others jump in. If you haven't talked much, consider jumping in!
- Local: Stay local. It's easy to get caught up in conversations about things happening at the national level and beyond. It's rare to have a chance to focus on what's right around us. Let's stay as grounded as we can in **this place**, paying particular attention to our experience of our local community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Beyond the sharable blurb above, we've developed several other communications materials. You can feel free to use any of these materials in your outreach if you feel they would be helpful:

- A [Two-Pager](#) that includes the *what*, *who*, *when*, *how*, and *why* for the neighbor gathering series.
- A [Flyer](#) that provides a briefer overview of the neighbor gathering series.
- ... and more to be added as we develop them.

FAQs

PROGRAMMING FAQs

What is the theme of the gathering series?

The theme of the gathering series is included on the [two-pager](#): “Possibilities for our shared place.” The theme is intentionally expansive: what’s important is anchoring the conversation to your *particular place* (not abstract, national ideas) and approaching the theme with an openness to *imagining possibilities*. As noted in the facilitation guide, your entire gathering does not need to tie to the theme and should flow naturally. However, you should aim to loosely connect at least some of the conversation to the theme.

Are any topics off-limits for the gathering conversations?

By design, these gatherings are *not* about politics. Because these gatherings are about our shared particular place, conversations about our national politics are off-limits — they draw attention to the national and distract our focus from the proximate. If national politics comes up in your conversation, simply remind guests of the norms established at the start and redirect the conversation, drawing on the facilitation guide as necessary.

What type of support will I receive as a host or facilitator?

A lot of the support is in this toolkit! We’ve given you a checklist, facilitation guide, and FAQs in this document. You will also participate in one of the orientations that we are hosting, and you can join a digital group to ask questions of your peers who are participating in the gathering series. Finally, you may reach out to us at any time with questions (tyv7yr@virginia.edu).

LOGISTICS FAQs

When do the gatherings need to be held to qualify for funding?

All gatherings must be held between March 13th and April 26th.

What is the minimum size required for the gatherings?

We suggest dinners have six to eight/ten guests. People planning other types of gatherings are welcome to have more guests if it fits the gathering’s form.

What do you consider the “Greater Charlottesville Area?”

We’re being intentionally loose with our definition. If you live within 30–45 minutes of Charlottesville, we consider you part of the area. Those living closer to Richmond, Lynchburg, Harrisonburg, and the like would not be considered part of the Greater Charlottesville Area.

Where can I host my gathering?

If you’re hosting a dinner, we encourage you to host it in your home or the home of a neighbor. You may also host it at another community venue like a restaurant if that’s the best option for your group. If you’ve proposed your own gathering, feel free to host it wherever fits best with the type of gathering that you have proposed.

Who can attend the gathering? Are there any requirements for who I can and cannot invite?

Invite your neighbors — people who live in or near your neighborhood. We’re not going to verify that everyone who attends is a neighbor; however, we really encourage you to use this as an opportunity to come together with neighbors you know *and* neighbors you don’t yet know well. Ideally, this is not just a gathering with friends and family that you would’ve had with or without the microgrant opportunity.

What if my guests want to invite other guests?

Depends on the gathering! If it’s a dinner with a cap on size (i.e., 8, 10, 12, etc.), then you’ll want to coordinate with your guests on additional invites so you don’t go over your capacity constraints. However, if you have no cap on size, feel free to encourage your guests to invite others. In this case, be sure they know that the goal is to invite neighbors, not just anyone they want.

Can we include children?

Yes! It’s on you to determine if your gathering is a kid-friendly event or not. Either way, consider communicating expectations with your guests around whether and how kids can be included in the gathering.

What if we have to postpone/reschedule the event?

Things happen. If you have to postpone the event, no worries. However, be sure to communicate clearly with your guests about postponing and identify a new date to reschedule. It is okay if the rescheduled date is outside of the original date range for the gathering series. However, please reschedule within one month of the original date. If you are no longer able to use the microgrant funds (we hope this isn't the case), please reach out to us immediately.

FUNDING FAQs

How will I receive my microgrant?

Due to UVA policies, we will distribute confirmed microgrants in the form of digital VISA gift cards, which will be emailed to you once we confirm your microgrant.

How should I split costs with other guests?

It's up to you! You may cover all the costs of your gathering if you choose. If your other guests contribute to your gathering (e.g., bringing food), you can work out reimbursements with them. We suggest you consider the gift card as cash that can be spent (almost) anywhere, and then, if needed, you can reimburse your guests with your own cash.

How will I need to report on funding?

We'll ask you to complete a brief reporting form after you host your gathering. In that form, we will ask for a group photo from the gathering, along with some of the high-level notes, takeaways, and follow-ups from your conversation. We will not ask for receipts.

NOTE: We will be continuing to develop these over the next week based on the questions we've already received and those we receive in the coming days.