

# BUILDING MEANINGFUL CONTACT

A  
HOW-TO  
GUIDE



WELCOMING  
REFUGEES



**Welcoming** Michigan  
Building Immigrant Friendly Communities





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# INTRODUCTION

Personal experiences and relationships help shape our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. While facts contribute to how we form opinions, it's experiences that provide an opportunity for individual transformation. Today, many people in communities may not know someone who is a refugee, let alone have a significant relationship with one. Language and cultural barriers can get in the way of these relationships forming organically. This may leave refugees feeling isolated and misunderstood, and receiving community members may be more likely to be fearful or concerned about their community's changing demographics if they don't have meaningful connections with people from different backgrounds than their own. A large body of research confirms the importance of contact building—finding ways to bring people together for shared opportunities—in order to create greater social cohesion. While contact building work has been underway for years, these efforts are becoming more creative, more nuanced, and more important than ever.

This how-to guide explores lessons learned from promising models for contact building from across the United States, and delves deeper into a series of activities that the nonprofit Welcoming Michigan conducted in Macomb County, Michigan. By focusing on one example in particular, readers are able to learn step-by-step how to plan, implement, and follow up on a contact building event. We walk you through Welcoming Michigan's planning process and include a sample agenda, invitation, participant survey, and activity materials. By learning in-depth about Welcoming Michigan's model, you can replicate its approach or use a similar planning process for your own contact building efforts.



## Intergroup Contact Theory

Gordon Allport developed intergroup contact theory in the 1950s, believing that interpersonal contact is one of the best ways to reduce prejudice between people of different backgrounds. Under the right conditions, anxieties people may have about each other will subside and deeper relationships will form. Some of the prerequisites for meaningful contact include planning activities where participants have equal status, work on common goals without competition, and have opportunities for personal interaction.

While social psychologists agree on the importance of contact theory, less consensus exists on how much contact is needed to spur individual change, what level of contact is meaningful, and a host of other specifics. Most would agree that more frequent contact and deeper contact is best, but contact building efforts face a number of hurdles, including their time and resource intensity.



## ABOUT THE MACOMB COUNTY PROJECT

Throughout this guide, this symbol will indicate specific examples from Welcoming Michigan.



Welcoming Michigan seeks to build mutual respect and understanding among foreign-born and U.S.-born people across the state of Michigan. Macomb County is a community ripe for contact building work. Located in the Detroit metro area, Macomb has experienced both rapid demographic change and a backlash to that change. As of 1990, the U.S. Census reported that Macomb County was 96% white. Today, Macomb County is home to more than 90,000 immigrants, making the county 10.6% foreign-born. Macomb has also seen increases in its overall African American, Hispanic, and Asian populations according to the U.S. Census. One city in Macomb County, Sterling Heights, is home to the second-largest foreign-born population in Michigan, including many refugees. As demographics have changed, local governments and nonprofits in Macomb have worked to expand access and foster a welcoming climate. At the same time, as in many communities seeing high rates of demographic change, the Macomb community has experienced challenges to building social cohesion and ensuring everyone feels they belong, especially as some longer-term residents have reacted with fear and opposition.

In this featured project, Welcoming Michigan's goal was to promote contact and relationship building between U.S.- and foreign-born community members, with an emphasis on inviting new partners to participate. For each of its three contact building events, Welcoming Michigan reached out to a different audience: faith institutions, public safety departments, and civic groups such as the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. They also invited refugees and immigrants, children of refugees and immigrants, and refugee and immigrant allies. An average of 28 participants attended each two-hour event, with one event hosted per month over a period of three months. Welcoming Michigan's events were paired with a Welcoming America training on positive communications and follow-up coaching for local governments and their partners.

Welcoming Michigan's events started with sharing a meal, group agreements, and an icebreaker, and then moved into the "Fast Friends" procedure<sup>1</sup> described on [page 15](#). According to a survey conducted at the end of each event, the Fast Friends activity made it easy for participants to converse with someone they didn't know, enabled them to find commonalities despite differences, and made them reflect more deeply about both their neighbor's identity and their own. Welcoming Michigan's contact building events provide a model for how to effectively bring in new audiences and build relationships between newcomers and receiving communities, and how to pair contact building with other elements of a welcoming approach.



# FIVE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL CONTACT BUILDING EVENT

## 1. Ensure a Diverse Turnout

While achieving good turnout for your event is never guaranteed, there are a number of ways you can help increase your chances of achieving strong participation. These include:

- **Work with existing community partners to help plan the event.**

Engaging a diverse team of partners will bring different ideas, resources, and community connections to the table.

- **Have an intentional refugee outreach strategy.**

Consider when refugees are available (perhaps on the weekends or in the evening) and plan events accordingly. Plan around religious holidays, and be sensitive to demands on refugees' time. Since the same refugee leaders are often tapped for multiple opportunities, compare calendars with other organizations and space out your events. Engage partners and respected leaders from refugee communities early in your planning. If they are excited about the contact building event, and have a chance to help shape it, they are more likely to help get the word out and connect you to other refugee participants.

- **Have an intentional receiving community outreach strategy.**

Think about the people in your community who would benefit from more contact with refugees and other immigrant groups. Who are they connected to already, and who do they trust? Will partnering with a faith group help you recruit diverse receiving community members? Perhaps a school or institution of higher education will give you inroads to this community. You need to put extra effort into receiving community recruitment. Otherwise, you risk only having your existing allies and partners turn out, which doesn't help you achieve your broader goals.

- **Make sure the event sounds engaging and appealing.**

You won't attract a new, diverse set of people to your contact building event unless it appeals to their interests. There should be a hook—a shared concern, interest, or hobby. Otherwise, people will not give up their valuable free time for your event. Remember that just because an activity sounds appealing to you, that doesn't mean it is appealing to your audience. The goal is to get new people engaging with each other, not the folks who are already active with refugees, so push yourself on finding engaging activities to promote.



**Welcoming Michigan held its events in the early evening and morning hours on weekdays, which gave people working day and night shifts different opportunities to participate.**





**In Welcoming Michigan’s case, a local school district offered meeting space.**

**Welcoming Michigan’s invitation emphasized connection, strengthening relationships, and getting to know one another—see their sample invitation on [page 13](#).**

**We suggest extending invitations by phone and offering to give a brief explanation. Also try offering in-person invitations at community group meetings.**

**Discuss group agreements like the Circle of Trust Touchstones,\* developed by the Center for Courage & Renewal. Icebreakers like the Human Bingo game on [page 14](#) give people a chance to meet everyone in the room and have some fun.**

## 2. Design an Event That Places Participants on Equal Footing

While refugees have very real needs, contact building events are best when they aren’t designed around a charity model. For developing meaningful connections, it’s better to for participants to be working on a common interest “with” someone rather than doing it “for” them, as is often the case with a needs or aid-based approach. Participants might come together as equals for conversation, a shared activity, and a transformational experience. Some examples of events that lend themselves to this kind of approach include:

- A conversation such as the Fast Friends procedure, in which people have the opportunity for deep listening, sharing, and understanding
- Working together in a community garden
- Painting a community mural
- Working together at a soup kitchen to feed the homeless

## 3. Create a Safe Space for Listening and Understanding



A contact building event that draws in new people who have little experience with each other can produce anxiety among participants who may not know what to expect. Take care to choose a neutral space that is convenient for participants. Make sure you set the stage for a welcoming, comfortable environment at all points. That includes:



### • During the recruitment phase.

Be sure to describe the event as a comfortable, safe space so that this expectation is set from the beginning. Use neutral, accessible language.



### • During the preparation phase.

Depending on your activity, you may need to do some pre-work with participants to ensure people feel comfortable at your event and are coming to it with an open frame of mind. You may want to meet one-on-one with participants ahead of time, to help them know what to expect and to address any concerns they may have.



### • At the beginning of your event.

Give an orientation or overview to all participants and consider developing some group agreements together so that there is a shared set of expectations around behaviors. This is especially important for dialogues, when people will be opening themselves up, and you want to ensure it is a respectful environment for all. Also, before the main portion of the event begins, start with an icebreaker or warm-up activity. This helps participants who don’t know each other start to build a level of psychological safety before proceeding with a deeper level of engagement.

\* © Center for Courage & Renewal, founded by Parker J. Palmer

- **Throughout your event.**

Choose an experienced facilitator to help guide the discussion and have a plan in place to immediately address, in calm and respectful ways, any violations in your group agreements. Don't let problem behaviors slide or they may escalate among the group. Don't be afraid to revisit group agreements and add new ones if it seems that you've missed something important that the group needs clarity around.

- **At the end of your event.**

Provide an opportunity for participants to share their impressions from the activity and reassure people that their experiences will remain private and not shared outside the group.



On [page 17](#), see how Welcoming Michigan created a space for reactions at the end of their event.

#### 4. Continue the Relationship

The most transformative relationships are those that are ongoing. Rather than make this just a one-time event, think about other ways to keep people engaged. Perhaps you can be ready with other events that participants can sign up for or actions they can take during Welcoming Week or World Refugee Day. Encourage people to exchange contact information and stay in touch over social media. Consider a reunion event that will bring the group back together again. However, be realistic about how much time and effort your participants can commit to.



For example, Welcoming Michigan told participants they would keep them informed of similar opportunities to engage with their neighbors in the future. At Welcoming Michigan's events, several pairs of participants exchanged information and planned to get together after the event.

#### 5. Pair Contact Building With Other Elements of a Welcoming Approach

Contact building works on a person-to-person level to increase connection and decrease prejudice. For a whole-community approach to inclusion that shifts norms and changes the culture of welcome, it is important to work on both an interpersonal level and a systems level. Check out [Welcoming Refugees](#) and [Welcoming America](#) for tools and trainings to support community planning efforts, leadership development, positive messaging, and more.



In Macomb County, Michigan, Welcoming Michigan paired its contact building events with a workshop and follow-up coaching led by Welcoming America on positive communications for local government leaders and partners.





# RUN OF SHOW

## for Contact Building with Fast Friends Procedure

### Fast Friends Community Gathering Run of Show

#### PEOPLE POWER

- At least two staff or volunteers of the hosting organization
- At least one of these helpers should be comfortable leading the Fast Friends activity

#### PARTICIPANTS

- 15 to 20 newcomer residents
- 15 to 20 longer-term residents
- Aim for an evenly matched number to ensure equal pairings

#### MATERIALS

- Signage to direct participants to the event
- Sign-in sheet
- Pens
- Blank name tags
- Markers for name tags
- List of partner pairings made ahead of the event if possible
- Printed group agreements
- Fast Friends questions printed on slips of paper, organized in envelopes
- Printed Human Bingo sheets
- Printed evaluation surveys
- Photo release (if taking pictures you will use after the event)
- A way to play music
- A meal, snacks, and/or beverages
- Any additional welcoming resources or sign-ups you want to make available to participants





# SAMPLE AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	TASKS
6:30 AM–7:30 AM	Set up at venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare for 30 participants seated at tables of four to six people, plus two tables for food buffet</li> <li>• Exterior signage: yellow arrows by road and parking lot</li> <li>• Interior signage: on wall by door and in room</li> <li>• Set up one table with welcoming resources</li> <li>• Set up registration table outside of room or near door: registration list, sign-in sheet, photo release, blank name tags, and markers</li> <li>• Place printed group agreement and pen at each seat</li> <li>• Turn on background music</li> <li>• Have handouts ready to pass out later: Human Bingo, Fast Friends questions in envelopes, evaluations</li> </ul>
7:30 AM–7:45 AM	Registration and breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome participants as they arrive: sign in/photo release, name tag</li> <li>• Direct participants to food and beverages</li> </ul>
7:45 AM–8:00 AM	Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Welcome and thank you for making time to join us today at this community gathering. Please help yourselves to food, and bathrooms are located in the hall.”</li> <li>• (Introduce event coordinators and give a brief overview of the purpose of the event and your organization.)</li> <li>• “We’ve heard from residents that it is difficult to meet people when you just pass them on the street or in the grocery store, so we are hosting opportunities for folks to get to know each other and build stronger working relationships. The deeper our relationships are across the community, the more we can work together to address local issues.”</li> <li>• “First, let’s start with some brief introductions. Please say your name and one thing you like about where you live. I’ll go first ... [model for the group].”</li> <li>• “Thank you. Now please take a moment to review the handouts at your table titled ‘Group Agreements.’ Because we will be having conversations today with people we’re just getting to know, this is a list of guidelines for how we want to treat other, e.g., with respect, suspend judgment, turn to wonder, etc. Is this something we can all agree to? What would you like to add?”</li> </ul>
8:00 AM–8:15 AM	Icebreaker activity: Human Bingo <a href="#">(see page 14)</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Let’s get started with our first activity.” (Explain the rules, then pass out the Human Bingo handout.)</li> <li>• “Who has played Human Bingo before? When I say go, everyone will stand up and walk around the room, introduce yourself to someone and ask one of the questions on the handout, writing the person’s name in the square. The goal is to get five in a row. There are prizes for the first ones to yell ‘Bingo!’”</li> <li>• (Before the next activity, complete the partner pairing list after any late arrivals.)</li> </ul>
8:15 AM–9:05 AM	Fast Friends discussions in pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Hope that was fun, and helped you get to know each other a little better. Now we’re going to pair you to learn more about one another. Each pair will receive three envelopes. Inside each envelope are questions for Round 1, Round 2, and Round 3. We’ll announce when it’s time to move to the next round. You will stay with your same discussion partner for the entire time. You’ll start by reading the instructions together in your Round 1 envelope.”</li> <li>• (Pass out envelopes with Fast Friends question sets.)</li> <li>• Round 1: 8:20 AM / Round 2: 8:35 AM / Round 3: 8:50 AM</li> </ul>
9:05 AM–9:15 AM	Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’d love to hear how that experience went for everyone. Without sharing anything confidential you talked about, what was the experience like? Was it fun? Uncomfortable? What surprised you? What was challenging? Please say your name first and a little about how the experience went for you.” (Take notes.)</li> <li>• (Share information about future activities or actions participants can take part in.) “We’d be happy to do this activity with more groups of people, so please let us know if you have suggestions for other community groups you’re a part of.”</li> </ul>
9:15 AM–9:30 AM	Closing and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Pass out evaluation.) “Thank you for coming and sharing your stories. We encourage you to stay connected with one another and continue these great conversations that you started here today.”</li> </ul>

**TIP:**  
Serve food right away so participants can eat and chat while everyone is signing in.

**TIP:**  
Start with an interactive group activity that gives everyone a chance to speak and builds the group’s comfort level for sharing personal information.

# PLANNING PROCESS AND TIMELINE

## for Contact Building Events

**Welcoming Michigan held three events, with the goal of reaching a different new audience for each event. Having built relationships with community partners over several years, at Welcoming Michigan, one staff person worked full-time on the project over four months.**



The timeline for planning and executing contact building events in your local community can range from four months to one year, depending on how many events you would like to organize, the staff or volunteer capacity you have in place, and the strength of your relationships with target audiences.

### The Players

- Staff or volunteers of a trusted community organization that will serve as the lead coordinators and facilitators at the event(s).
- Community partners who can help plan the event.
- Community partners who can invite newcomer residents to the event.
- Community partners who can invite long-term residents from target audiences, or provide introductions to new partners who can do so.

### Timeline

#### 12 MONTHS OUT:

Identify current staff or volunteers and/or hire staff as needed. You will need dedicated staff, interns, or volunteers to carry out a significant amount of outreach and to handle logistics for the events.

#### 10 MONTHS OUT:

Hold a planning meeting with your local community partners to:



- Identify new target audiences your local community would like to invite by reflecting on the work the group has done to date. Questions for discussion: Who have we not connected with yet in our local community? Who might be interested in participating in a contact building event?
- Identify who among your network has contacts that could be leveraged for reaching some of the new partners you would like to invite. Who has existing relationships? Who knows someone else who could help make the introduction? Who does the new partner listen to and respect?
- Decide the type of activity you will use to foster social contact.

**Welcoming Michigan considered local government staff, local law enforcement agencies, faith community leaders, civic organizations, nonprofits and social service providers, K-12 school staff, college and university staff, and chambers of commerce. Welcoming Michigan honed in on new partners from law enforcement, faith communities, and civic organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary clubs.**

### 8 MONTHS OUT:

Begin reaching out to your target audience groups to build relationships and interest. Start building a rapport and finding the best way to work together.

### 6 MONTHS OUT:

Reconvene your local community partners to discuss how they can get involved:

- Make key introductions to new partners.
- Sponsor or coordinate the event food, venue, or supplies.
- Serve as a conversation partner at the event(s) or recruit additional community members.

### 5 MONTHS OUT:

Secure the date, time, and venue for the event(s).

### 2-3 MONTHS OUT:

Issue formal invitations to your new partners, and recruit refugee and immigrant residents to serve as conversation partners.

### 1 MONTH OUT:

Arrange for food and event logistics.

### 2 WEEKS OUT:

Make final phone call and email reminders.

### AFTER EVENT:

Send partners a thank you message with ways to stay involved.







## OUTREACH PLAN FOR ENGAGING NEW RECEIVING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community partners had often told Welcoming Michigan that residents did not get to know each other in a meaningful way across lines of difference unless someone created an opportunity for them to do so. Therefore, Welcoming Michigan specifically set out to reach residents who had not engaged with Welcoming Michigan or its community partners before. Its target audience was participants who were either untapped or unsure, curious rather than hostile to the invitation. To reach this goal, Welcoming Michigan recommends both working through existing community partners for introductions, and also cold calling. Some of the organizations Welcoming Michigan cold called did not respond. On the other hand, Welcoming Michigan successfully connected with others who were enthusiastic and eager to engage.

**Welcoming Michigan made inroads when a local government partner had a relationship with two Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. Mentioning that connection helped when Welcoming Michigan reached out to explain the opportunity. After initial contact, one Rotary club asked Welcoming Michigan to present at one of its meetings to provide more information and invite its members to the event.**

**A community partner who coordinates trainings for law enforcement also helped Welcoming Michigan connect with local police departments.**



When possible, work through existing community partners and relationships with people who can broker introductions to new partners.

For target audiences you don't have connections to:

- Ask community partners for tips on approaching your target participants. Community partners who cannot make an introduction may still have insider knowledge or familiarity with your target group.
- Gather contact information and group meeting information from websites or social media, and draft a long list of potential invitees for each target participant category.
- Begin with emails or mailed written invitations, and follow up with phone calls. Ask to have an initial conversation to discuss potential partnerships and explain the contact building opportunity. Explore the possibility of going to a group meeting that is already scheduled.
- Try to connect with organizational leaders directly, and then extend the invitations to other members of their leadership team or their congregations, in the case of faith leaders.

Regardless of whether you have a clear path to invite a new community partner to your event, allow plenty of time for outreach. It can take months to build relationships to the necessary level for new partners to accept an invitation.

# SAMPLE INVITATION

## to a Contact Building Event



Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Dear Community Leader,

Welcoming Michigan invites you to attend a community gathering on **Thursday, June 7.**

Welcoming Michigan is dedicated to building thriving communities where all community members feel welcomed, included, and respected—for both longtime residents and newcomers alike. As an esteemed community leader, we'd like to invite you to meet and get to know fellow community members in Macomb County. We also extend this invitation to other members of your leadership team or organization.

We hope these gatherings will provide opportunities for residents and community leaders to connect in new and different ways, and build the meaningful relationships that are essential for a strong, connected community. We will share a meal together and enjoy some fun activities as we get to know each other and develop greater mutual respect and understanding.

We invite you to join us at the upcoming gathering to get to know your fellow neighbors:

**Thursday, June 7, from 7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.**  
at Macomb Intermediate School District  
44001 Garfield Rd, Clinton Twp, MI 48038

RSVP: Kindly confirm your attendance by **Monday, June 4**, to Denni Middleton by phone or by email.

Breakfast will be served, so please let us know if you have any dietary restrictions.

We greatly appreciate your time and energy to help foster new connections and strengthen relationships in the community.

Thank you for the important work you do and we look forward to connecting with you soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Sauvé".

Christine Sauvé  
Welcoming Michigan Director

# SAMPLE WARM-UP: HUMAN BINGO

## Human Bingo

Find someone who does the following. When you have five in a row, yell “BINGO!”

Speaks two or more languages	Has traveled outside the U.S.	Has tried Indian food	Knows how to play a sport	Visited a religious institution other than their own
Has watched an international film	Has family in another country	Likes to sing	Has tried Polish food	Takes care of an older relative
Likes to garden	Likes jazz	Likes where they live	Plays an instrument	Has a friend of another religion
Can name one Native American tribe	Has a pet	Volunteers in their community	Has three or more siblings	Has next-door neighbors of another race
Likes spicy food	Has children	Has a tattoo	Knows how to sew	Wants to learn more about someone in this room



# FAST FRIENDS ACTIVITY

The Fast Friends procedure is a series of questions designed to help people get to know each other through successively more personal conversation prompts. Research supports the effectiveness of Fast Friends for reaching this goal. Fast Friends is a fit for contact building events where the purpose is deep, meaningful engagement that creates closeness.

Both the original Fast Friends procedure<sup>2</sup> and the expanded Fast Friends procedure<sup>3</sup> use get-to-know-you questions from *The Book of Questions*.<sup>4</sup> The full list of questions used in the Fast Friends procedure is available on various websites, including the [University of Berkeley's Relationships and Social Cognition Lab site](#). You might also pull prompts from [More Than One Story](#), a powerful card game based on questions that encourage storytelling. Whichever prompts you use, be careful to avoid questions that may be sensitive for people who have experienced trauma.

## Sample Fast Friends Questions

- Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
- When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
- If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?
- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
- What do you value most in friendship?
- Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
- Make three true “we” statements each. For instance, “We are both in this room feeling ...”
- Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you’ve just met.
- Share a personal problem and ask your partner’s advice on how they might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

## Nuts and Bolts

- Pair U.S.-born residents with residents born in another country.
- Try to pair individuals who do not know one another already.
- Allot 15 minutes for each of three rounds of conversation questions.
- Facilitators hand out Round 1 envelopes with printed questions to each pair.

“

I learned that we all are more similar than you would think. We all share the same values.

”

“

I thought he would be boring and we’d have nothing in common; turned out we are exactly the same.

”

“

We both are judged by our appearance— woman wearing a [pastor’s] collar, woman wearing a hijab.

”

“

This was a great way to let your guard down and get past the barriers people put up. Everything opened right up after that first question. As police officers, we’re always so afraid of offending people, saying the wrong word.

”

- During the first 15 minutes, partners take turns asking each other the questions in Round 1 above. Each person answers each question, but alternate the order, so that partners take turns answering first.
- After 15 minutes, facilitators announce to move on to Round 2, even if pairs haven't finished Round 1. Spend 15 minutes on Round 2, then Round 3, following the same method.
- When inviting individuals with limited English proficiency who will be paired with someone who does not speak the same language, be sure to include a budget line for interpretation. Build in additional time for each question set if using consecutive interpretation instead of simultaneous.
- Prepare enough sets of Fast Friends questions for each pair to have one set. Print and cut the conversation questions into individual slips of paper and divide into three envelopes, maintaining the order that the questions are printed in.



# SAMPLE SURVEY

This survey was developed by Welcoming Michigan with support from the nonprofit Civil Politics. It measures participants’ attitudes, behaviors, and overall satisfaction with a contact building event. You might consider using a six-month follow-up survey, as well. In addition to testing change over time, a follow-up survey also serves as a nudge for participants to reach out to their conversation partners as they intended to, and to continue the connection they forged at your event.

1. Is this your first time at a [name of your organization] event/program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- a. If not your first time, approximately how many events have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. If you have attended previous [name of your organization] events, have you told friends, family members, neighbors, or co-workers about your experiences?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I am comfortable talking about local issues with people who are immigrants					
b. I am comfortable talking about local issues with people who share my same racial or ethnic background					
c. I am comfortable talking about local issues with people who share my same religious background					
d. I have things in common with people who are from other countries					
e. I have things in common with people of a different racial or ethnic background					
f. I have things in common with people of a different religious background					
g. I am dedicated to speaking out against hateful comments about immigrants					
h. I am dedicated to speaking out against hateful comments based on a person’s race or ethnicity					
i. I am dedicated to speaking out against hateful comments based on a person’s religion					
j. I believe that most immigrants want what is best for America					
k. I believe that most U.S.-born people want what is best for America					
l. People I met at this event contribute to making our community stronger					
m. People I met at this event have values and aspirations about family and community that are similar to mine					



3. Please tell us how much time you spend with different members of your community on average per month:

	None of my time	A little of my time	Some of my time	Most of my time	All of my time
a. People who are immigrants					
b. People of a different racial or ethnic background					
c. People of a different religious background					

4. What is the most interesting or valuable thing you learned at today's event?

---

5. How likely would you be to recommend that a friend, family member, neighbor, or co-worker participate in an activity like today's event (with 10 being the most likely)?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

**Please tell us a little about yourself.**

6. Approximately how many years have you lived in this region? \_\_\_\_\_ years

7. What is your age? ☐ 20–29 ☐ 30–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50–59 ☐ 60+

8. What is your gender? ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Different identity

9. Please indicate how you self-identify in terms of race and/or ethnicity:

---

10. Do you practice a religion? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, which one? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed.

☐ No high school degree ☐ High school degree/GED ☐ Some college or vocational training

☐ College degree/bachelor's degree ☐ Some graduate school ☐ Master's or doctoral degree

12. Where were you born? ☐ U.S., including U.S. territories ☐ Outside the U.S.

13. If you were born in another country, how many years have you lived in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ years

**Thank you for your participation!**

## OTHER EXAMPLES FOR CONTACT BUILDING EVENTS



There are a number of ways that different organizations and communities are working to build connections between their diverse neighbors. Here are just a handful of promising examples to explore:

Based in the small city of Winona, Minnesota, [Project FINE](#) brings its diverse community together in part through **shared cultural art projects**. For example, participants are able to learn Mexican tile-making or how to make Native American dream catchers. A recent project was a Hmong basket-making series with more than 50 attendees. Participants come from all walks of life, and as they learn a new art form together, relationships and cross-cultural friendships form.

Based on a **family therapy model**, [Better Angels](#) works to help people understand those with different political points of view and uncover shared values. They divide participants into “reds” and “blues,” reflecting their political beliefs, and conduct fishbowl exercises, in which one group converses in the middle while the other group sits around the perimeter observing. The inside group discusses their perspectives and the stereotypes that they think the other side holds about them, giving people an opportunity to hear the other group’s articulation of their philosophy. Then the outside group presents what they learned, including the stereotypes that were discussed. Participants learn practical skills for talking across political divides and articulating emotions and passions in ways that aren’t demonizing. They also report that they aren’t as divided as they had thought.

Know Your Classmates is a back-to-school **K–12 educational program** led by [Beyond Differences](#). Now in its second year and used by more than 1,300 schools across the U.S., it helps students learn about, share, and understand their own and each other’s identities. Recognizing that there’s no better time to get to know your classmates than back to school, the program curriculum includes

eight teacher lesson plans and three student leadership activities. One major activity is the creation of an art mural. It’s held during a day when kids get to know their classmates. Every school receives 500 cardboard hands, and each student receives a hand and finds a person they don’t know with the same color hand. They sit together and answer 26 identity questions (called Know Your Classmates A-Z). From these hands, a mural is created.

**Food** brings people together in Boise, Idaho, during [Refugee Restaurant Week](#), which is led by the Idaho Office for Refugees. During the event, upscale restaurants in Boise agree to host and open their kitchens to a refugee chef, who creates a special menu for the week. Patrons sample new foods and learn about the chefs’ backgrounds, with 10% of the restaurant proceeds donated back to the refugee chefs. Many new people who have very little understanding of refugees in Boise have been reached in this way.

[The One America Movement](#) combines **dialogue with joint service projects** to help bridge divides and help people understand each other better. Most of their work is across faith groups, and has included bringing Evangelicals, Muslims, and Mormons together to promote a narrative of respect. One America’s model begins by having everyone work together on a joint service project—such as helping in a soup kitchen—followed by eating a meal together and then participating in a dialogue. In this way, the dialogue builds off of a shared experience. Many dialogue groups continue and take on longer-term service projects together, helping make these relationships stick.

## CONCLUSION

At a time when our nation faces growing divides, finding ways to help each other recognize and celebrate our commonalities is more important than ever. While some level of debate is healthy for every democracy, polarization and “othering” people who seem different than we are have the potential to deeply undermine our shared future. As this toolkit points out, there are many ways to bring people together across their differences for shared experiences and to foster mutual understanding. Though this work can be time-consuming and intense, the imperative for working to build greater social cohesion couldn’t be greater.



### ENDNOTES

- 1 Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vaollone, R., & Bator, R. (1997). “The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 363–377.
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- 3 Page-Gould, E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). “With a Little Help From My Cross-Group Friend: Reducing Intergroup Anxiety Through Cross-Group Friendship.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 1,080–1,094.
- 4 Stock, G. (1987). *The Book of Questions*. New York: Workman Publishing.

### PHOTO CREDIT

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