



## A First Step Toward Relationship, Trust, and Deeper Bridge-Building

### We're Stronger Together

As fellow bridge-builders, we know:

- Loneliness is real.
- Segregation is deepening.
- Many people want to connect—but don't know how.

We also know that social trust is the foundation for everything else we hope to do—whether it's dialogue across political difference, civic collaboration, racial healing, or interfaith partnership.

That's where **The Potluck Project** comes in.

### Our Situation

As Robert Putnam has written, people are more isolated, and groups are more segregated than at any time since the 1900's. At the same time, our society has grown in cultural diversity, increasing the complexity of creating connections. Putnam's data ends in 2015: before social media became a dehumanization machine and before COVID 19 further isolated and polarized us.

Thus, while people know they are lonely and groups know they are isolated – and they want to change this – they experience anxiety about acting to help create connections.

Our analysis is that many people need a low threshold first experience to eat with people of other groups and to have a conversation based on their own experience.

### What the Potluck Project Does

It offers an accessible *first step*—a relational on-ramp for people and groups who are disconnected, wary, or new to this work.

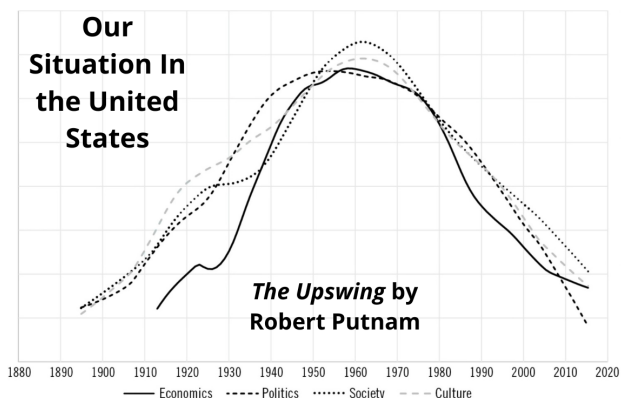
We help local partners host **inclusive, low-pressure gatherings** centered around food and personal storytelling. These are **not issue-based forums or conflict-resolution spaces**. They are about building comfort, connection, and curiosity across lines of difference.

And once that trust is built, people are far more ready to walk into **second-step programs**—deliberative dialogue, depolarization work, civic skill-building, and more.

## How This Supports the Bridge-Building Ecosystem

- **Reaches people who are hesitant** to attend existing programming
- **Connects groups across silos**, including religious, cultural, racial, economic, and geographic boundaries
- **Builds the social capital** needed to support harder conversations and collaborative work
- **Strengthens your local ecosystem**, making second-step programs more impactful

We're not asking people to jump into tough conversations. We're inviting them to dinner.



**Jonathan Haidt:** Vibrant Democracies have  
Social capital | Strong institutions | Shared stories

### A Tool for the Movement

The Potluck Project includes:

- A free, customizable toolkit with guidance for hosting relationship-first gatherings
- A national tour to support local capacity, model the experience, and strengthen partnerships
- A growing community of bridge-builders weaving together the social fabric from the neighborhood up

We see The Potluck Project as a **complementary piece** of the larger movement—not a replacement, but an entry point.

### What We Hope You'll Do

- **Use or share the Potluck Toolkit** as a way to build readiness in your community
- **Invite us into partnership**—let's coordinate first-step and second-step programming together
- **Connect us with local leaders** who are trying to reach isolated populations or siloed groups

- **Join a national learning community** of bridge-builders working to reduce isolation and increase belonging
- **Help us tell the story** of how early connection leads to deeper engagement

## From Potluck to Possibility

You already know: People grow at the pace of relationship.

We simply help people start the journey.


When a group shares a meal and tells stories about life—not politics—they remember their shared humanity. That’s when they become ready for deeper work: healing divides, building understanding, and taking action together.

Let’s walk people through the front door.

Let’s make it easier for them to reach yours.

## About PTU:

Paths to Understanding is a 501c3 working for a world in which all belong and all can thrive. We do this work in partnership with local and regional organizations in Washington State and across the nation. Our partners include secular and religious bridge building organizations and networks.

	
<b>Who can host a potluck?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> <li>• Groups of Friends</li> <li>• Community Groups</li> <li>• Wisdom Communities or Interfaith Group</li> </ul>
<b>What do you need to get started?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 or more people ready to organize</li> <li>• A date and time for your potluck</li> <li>• A location to host your event</li> <li>• Courage to gather with others</li> </ul>
<b>What will you find in this toolkit?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample invitation</li> <li>• Pre-event press release template</li> <li>• Event agenda &amp; considerations for planning an intercultural event</li> <li>• Post-event press release template</li> </ul>
<small>QUESTIONS? Contact us via email   <a href="mailto:Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org">Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org</a></small>	



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