



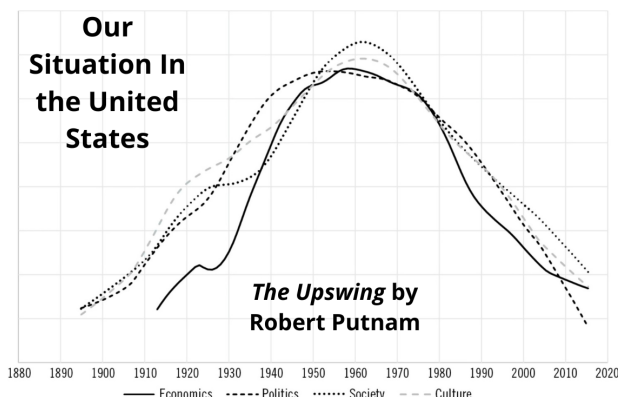
## A Community-Based Tool for Connection, Belonging, and Civic Resilience

### Local Leaders Are on the Front Lines

Cities and counties are facing rising levels of disconnection, polarization, and distrust. Many residents feel isolated—from each other, from institutions, and even from their own neighborhoods. This breakdown in connection affects everything from public health to emergency preparedness to civic participation. It shows up in:

- Tense public meetings and diminished trust in local government
- Loneliness and mental health challenges affecting all age groups
- Weakened relationships between culturally and economically diverse communities
- Lower voter turnout and reduced participation in local programs

These challenges won't be solved by policy alone. They require relationship-based approaches that rebuild the social fabric from the ground up. Many Americans *care* about democracy but don't know where to start. According to the Rippel Foundation, belonging and civic muscle create the foundation of a democratic society. The fact is that so many of us are isolated and so many groups are segregated from each other is why this foundation is crumbling. Therefore it is vital that leaders across sectors offer space for people to make their first step toward connection with others. The Potluck Project provides a low threshold beginning.



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

## A Low-Cost, High-Impact Civic Strategy

The Potluck Project offers a practical tool to help local governments and community leaders reduce isolation, strengthen neighborhood relationships, and promote civic belonging.

The concept is simple:

Bring diverse groups together for a shared meal and lightly guided conversation about life experiences—not politics, not problem-solving—just stories that help people rehumanize one another.

This is not a one-time "event." It's a **community engagement strategy** that builds trust and strengthens the relational infrastructure our civic life depends on.

## Why It Works for Local Governments

- Low-barrier and scalable. No training or special space required—just food and people.
- Culturally adaptable. Works in rural, suburban, and urban settings with a wide range of communities.
- Builds readiness for deeper engagement. Once people are connected, they're more likely to participate in other city programs and civic initiatives.
- Strengthens partnerships. Offers a way for cities to collaborate with community-based organizations and faith groups.

Local governments don't have to do it all—but you can **create space** for this kind of trust-building to flourish by activating trusted leaders in the religious, non-profit, for profit, and cultural center spaces.

## What the Potluck Project Offers

- A **free downloadable toolkit** to guide planning, hosting, and follow-up
- A **national tour** that helps model the approach, uplift local leaders, and build momentum
- A growing **network of communities** using food and story to build a more cohesive civic culture

Whether you use it directly, or help promote it among local organizations, the Potluck Project is a resource you can tap into right away.

## What We're Inviting You To Do

- Sponsor or co-sponsor a Potluck Project event, inviting residents across cultural, neighborhood, or demographic divides
- Encourage use of the toolkit among city staff, community groups, neighborhood associations, and public service providers

- Help us bring the Potluck Project Tour to your town or region
- Share stories of connection and inclusion from your community
- Include the Potluck Project as part of your broader community engagement, DEI, or civic health strategy

## Trust Is a Public Good


When people know their neighbors, understand each other's stories, and feel like they belong, everything else works better:

- Public meetings are more respectful
- Neighborhood projects move faster
- Civic participation increases
- Fear and conflict decrease

The Potluck Project offers a simple, tested way to begin.

## 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>
QUESTIONS? Contact us via email   <a href="mailto:Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org">Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org</a>	



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