

THE Potluck PROJECT

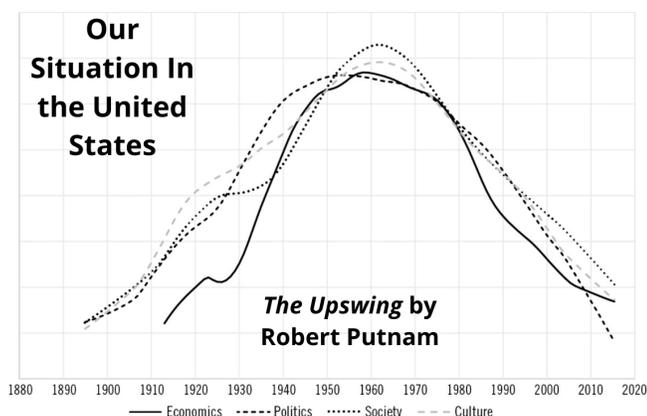
A First Step Toward Civic Engagement and a More Resilient Democracy

Our Democracy Is Struggling

Across the country, democratic norms are under pressure. Distrust, disconnection, and division are growing faster than our systems can respond. We're seeing:

- The rise of authoritarian and illiberal movements that feed on polarization
- Widespread loneliness and disengagement, which leave people vulnerable to fear-based narratives
- A breakdown in civic relationships, making collaboration across difference harder than ever

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 that 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 Simple, Human First Step

The Potluck Project is a strategy to rebuild civic trust from the ground up—through shared meals and personal storytelling.

It's not a campaign, debate, or training. It's a relationship-centered gathering that helps people rediscover one another's humanity—across lines of ideology, identity, and experience.

This work doesn't replace policy change or organizing—it makes those efforts possible by reweaving the social trust they depend on.

Why This Matters for Democracy

- People who feel disconnected don't vote
- People who distrust their neighbors are easier to manipulate
- People who've never met someone from a different community won't fight for their rights
- People without local relationships derive their identity from their political party or ideology that leads to a loss of capacity to engage in policy debates

Social cohesion is not extra—it's essential to democratic resilience.

The Potluck Project creates low-threshold, low-pressure opportunities to build relationships that lead to the strengthening of civic muscle:

- Listening
- Sharing
- Empathizing
- Connecting across difference

These are the foundations of democracy. And they are in crisis.

What the Potluck Project Offers

- A free, downloadable toolkit to help any group plan a meaningful meal-based gathering
- An expanding national tour modeling the practice and elevating local stories
- A network of individuals and organizations weaving back civic relationships—one table at a time

Why It Works

- Accessible. No training required. Everyone eats. Everyone has stories.
- Scalable. One potluck leads to another. Local hubs can emerge.

- Relational. No lectures. Just people meeting face-to-face.
- Foundational. It builds the trust that makes organizing, voting, and dialogue possible.

This is not about agreement—it’s about connection. Civic action grows from there.

What We’re Asking From You

- Use the toolkit in your community, campaign, or movement-building work
- Host a potluck as a nonpartisan gathering point—especially in divided or overlooked places
- Connect us with local groups or democracy initiatives that could benefit
- Bring the Potluck Project Tour to your city to amplify community efforts
- Share your story of how relational trust opens the door to civic engagement

Let’s Start With a Meal

Since the dawn of humanity we have gathered for meals with people of other groups to build trust and connection.

We believe democracy begins not just in the voting booth, but at the table.

Before people show up for town halls, they show up for each other.

Before they believe in shared power, they need shared presence.

The Potluck Project is where that begins.

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.



<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Who can host a potluck?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals • Groups of Friends • Community Groups • Wisdom Communities or Interfaith Group
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">What do you need to get started?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 or more people ready to organize • A date and time for your potluck • A location to host your event • Courage to gather with others
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">What will you find in this toolkit?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample invitation • Pre-event press release template • Event agenda & considerations for planning an intercultural event • Post-event press release template

QUESTIONS? Contact us via email | Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org



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