



## The Potluck Project: A Relationship-Building Program for Community Engagement

### Libraries Build Access—Let's Also Build Belonging

Public libraries are more than information centers. They are trusted, inclusive spaces where people of all backgrounds gather. But today's communities face:

- Loneliness, division, and disconnection
- Language and cultural barriers
- Reduced participation in community events
- Mistrust across civic, cultural, and generational lines

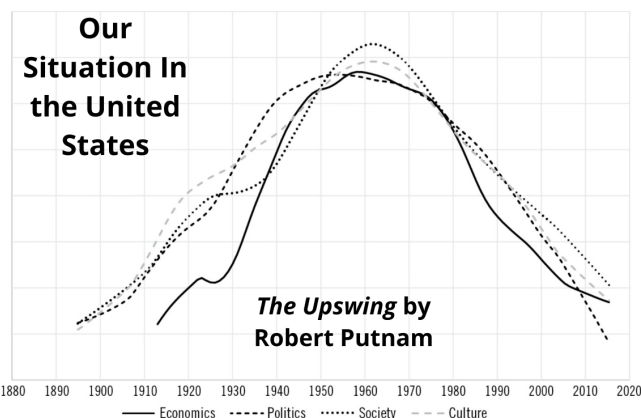
Libraries are well-positioned to help communities reconnect.

### The Challenges We Face Together

Across the United States, communities are facing a wave of division and disconnection that threatens both individual well-being and our shared civic health. Key challenges include:

- The rise of polarization that erodes democratic norms
- Widespread loneliness and isolation, made worse by social media and cultural fragmentation

These issues are deeply interconnected. Social isolation makes us more vulnerable to fear and manipulation. Polarization erodes our ability to collaborate across difference. According to the Rippel Foundation, **belonging and civic muscle are the foundation** of a society. Group-to-group and person-to-person relationships are not a nice to have, they create the possibility for everything else. The question is: how do we respond?



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

### A Program That Starts With Food and Story

The Potluck Project is a ready-to-use toolkit for hosting inclusive, relationship-building events—gatherings that invite community members to:

- Share a meal
- Tell simple, personal stories
- Listen to one another across differences

These events are not about debate, politics, or problem-solving. They're about being human together.

### Why It Works for Libraries

- Library-friendly. Can be hosted in existing library spaces with little cost.
- Encourages diverse participation. Food and story are universal invitations.
- Supports DEI and community engagement goals.
- Pairs well with cultural programming, author talks, and citizenship or ESL events.

This is a natural extension of your role as a convener and connector.

### What We Offer

- A free, downloadable toolkit with planning templates, invitations, facilitation tips, and prompts
- Access to a national network of Potluck hosts and supporters
- The opportunity to co-host a Potluck Project Tour event in your community

## What You Can Do

- Host a potluck event with library patrons or local partners
- Collaborate with cultural organizations, schools, or faith groups to reach more people
- Use the toolkit as part of your programming calendar
- Help your community reconnect, one shared story at a time

## 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.

THE potluck PROJECT	
Who can host a potluck?	<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>
What do you need to get started?	<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>
What will you find in this toolkit?	<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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