



The Potluck Project: A Community-Building Tool for Service Clubs

Your Mission, Our Moment

Service clubs have long played a key role in strengthening the fabric of our communities. But like much of our civic life, clubs are facing new challenges:

- Declining membership and engagement
- Growing social isolation in local communities
- Polarization that makes collaboration harder

The Potluck Project offers a simple, community-centered response.

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 political extremism that fuels polarization and 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?

A Practical Strategy for Building Social Cohesion

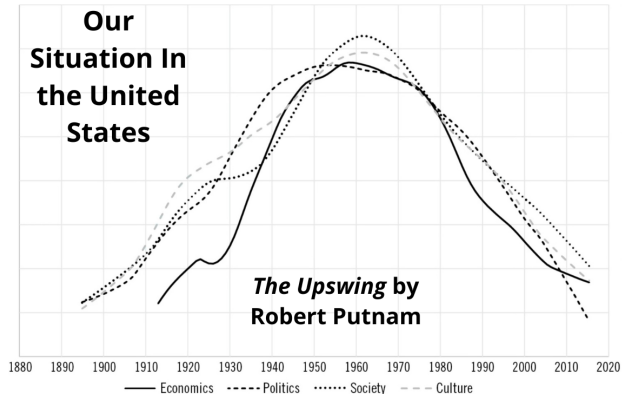
We believe that one of the most effective tools for rebuilding civic trust is as old as humanity itself: **sharing a meal.**

The Potluck Project offers a simple, powerful strategy: Bring diverse groups together around food and story. Through shared meals and life experience conversations, people build relationships—not on opinions or ideologies—but on the human stories that

shape their lives. These organic connections create a foundation for trust, collaboration, and shared action.

Why This Matters Now

In the last 60 years, social cohesion in the U.S. has sharply declined. Researcher Robert Putnam has shown that Americans are more divided and disconnected than we've been in over a century. Long before social media accelerated the problem, we stopped joining clubs, sharing spaces, and forming friendships across difference.



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

Today, Americans are divided along many lines:

- Cultural background
- Economic situation
- Race and ethnicity
- Geography (rural, suburban, urban)
- Age and life experience
- Religious or non-religious identity
- Disability and neurodiversity

The Potluck Project isn't about agreement—it's about relationship. People grow at the pace of relationship, and trust grows through presence, not persuasion. Once these relationships are formed then people can take another step to identify shared values and create partnerships to build stronger communities.

A Hands-On Way to Strengthen Civic Life

The idea is simple: bring people from different backgrounds together to share a meal and personal stories.

These aren't political debates or complex dialogues—just regular folks, sharing real experiences. Through food and storytelling, relationships form. Trust grows. People find their way back to one another.

This is what service clubs are built for.

How It Helps Service Clubs Thrive

- Engage your community in a meaningful and inclusive way
- Attract younger or more diverse members through hands-on bridge-building
- Offer a fresh, low-cost program aligned with your club's mission and values

What We Offer

- The Potluck Project Toolkit – step-by-step guidance for planning, inviting, hosting, and following up
- Support for Tour Stops – bring a national spotlight to your community through a live Potluck event
- Recognition and Storytelling – highlight your club's leadership in building unity

What You Can Do

- Host a Potluck Project event in partnership with local groups, schools, or nonprofits
- Use the toolkit to plan a series of events or member-led projects
- Help expand the movement by sharing your story with regional and national networks
- Co-sponsor a Tour stop to bring people together across your whole town

Service clubs have always been about more than projects—they're about people. This is your opportunity to lead again in bringing people together.

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">• Individuals• Groups of Friends• Community Groups• Wisdom Communities or Interfaith Group
What do you need to get started?	<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
What will you find in this toolkit?	<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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