



HOUSE PARTY TOOLKIT

Note: Download or make a copy of this toolkit to use when planning your own House Party.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[HOUSE PARTY PLANNING GUIDE](#)

[HOUSE PARTY PLANNING CHECKLIST](#)

Resources

- [Sample Invitation Language](#)
- [Attendance Sheet](#)
- [Sample Agenda](#)
- [House Party Agenda](#)
- [Sample Norms and Community Agreements](#)
- [Open Space Process & Tools](#)
- [House Party Small Group Notes](#)



HOUSE PARTY PLANNING GUIDE

Step One: Select a Host, Location, Facilitator, and Date

- **Host:** The host should be someone who has connections and relationships within the community, and has access to the kind of space you need.
- **Location:** While it's called a "house party" and it's great if you can hold this gathering at someone's home, you can also use spaces like a park, private room at a restaurant, or some other communal space. When selecting a location, consider things like:
 - Is it centrally located/convenient?
 - Can it comfortably fit the number of people you're expecting?
 - Is it a safe space for people to share their stories (i.e., they won't be overheard)?
 - Are people able to socially distance, if necessary?
- **Facilitator:** The host and the facilitator don't need to be the same person. You should select a facilitator who:
 - Can cultivate conversation easily among a group of people;
 - Will come prepared;
 - Can help the group move from ideas to actions;
 - Will keep everyone on task and on time.
- **Date:** When selecting a party date, make sure you consider holidays, varying work schedules, and any upcoming events in your district (e.g., board meetings, sporting events, etc.).

Step Two: Set an Attendance Goal and Invitation Strategy

- **Goal:** The small group planning this party should first set a goal for how many people they want to attend the house party. That way, you can track your progress to the goal and adjust your strategy, plans, and outreach as needed when RSVPs start coming in.
 - Some advice on setting a goal from our partners at [LEE \(Leadership for Educational Equity\)](#) is the "Rule of Halves in Organizing." In order to have 8-10 people actually present at your event, you should have double the RSVPs, so 20 RSVPs. In order to have 20 RSVPs, you will likely need to ask about 40 people. Note that this is a general guideline; you know the people you're inviting and can adjust expectations accordingly.
- **Invitation strategy:** Your invitation strategy will have two parts: individuals you'll invite, and a marketing strategy.
 - **Individual invitations**
 - The small group planning the party can use [this tool](#) to create the list together. The first tab is where you will list individuals that you will each invite. Be sure to include who from your group is reaching out to every person on the list. Then, as replies come in, you can also track them on this spreadsheet.
 - Note that *one email is not enough to ensure people reply and you meet your attendance goal*. A few days after your email, you should send a text or make a phone call to follow up. If you don't have someone's phone number, send a short follow-up email.
 - The week of the event, email everyone who RSVPed "yes" with a reminder.

- **Marketing strategy**
 - Next, create your marketing strategy. In addition to individual outreach, how else will you drive attendance? For example:
 - Is it possible to use social media? Since this house party is for values-aligned friends and neighbors, be careful about what social media you use. While you probably shouldn't post it to your public page, if people in your district have a private FaceBook group you've been using to organize, that may be a good place to advertise the event.
 - Do you want to print flyers or informal invitations and hand them out to people at a values-aligned community event?
 - Use the second tab in the invitations tool to keep track of which organizations or groups you'll get information to and who is reaching out. That way, you don't duplicate efforts.
- Note: In your emails and on your flyers, use language that is clear about the purpose of the party, but avoid language that directly identifies any hot button problems or issues. You can look at some [sample invitation language](#) in the resources section at the end of the document.

Step Three: Party Logistics

- **Prior to the party:**
 - Make copies of the sign-in sheet. Make sure the sign-in sheet has room for their contact information so you can follow up. You can use the [Sample Sign-In Sheet](#) in the resources section and modify it based on your needs.
 - Print out the [House Party Small Groups Notes](#) document and make copies.
 - Purchase: name tags, markers, post it notes, pens, drinks, plates, cutlery, and cups.
 - Order or prepare food.
 - You want to be sure you have plenty of food, so use the RSVP list as a general guideline for headcount, but make sure to order or prepare more than the headcount number.
 - Include your babysitters and kids in the headcount, if applicable.
 - It's a good idea to have bags or aluminum foil for people to take home leftovers.
 - Secure babysitters, if you've indicated that this is a child-friendly event. You can use your usual babysitter (if you have one), or ask the older children/ teens in your family or neighborhood to help out for a couple of hours.
- **Set up for the party:**
 - Put out the sign in sheets and pens. Have a couple sign in sheets available so people don't have to wait to sign in.
 - Put out name tags and markers.
 - Put out post-it notes and pens.
 - Set out the food, drinks, cups, plates, etc.
 - If you're providing childcare, have an area for the kids that is far enough away from the conversation area that they can be loud and have fun!
 - Prep the area where you will have the main discussion. Can you move seats in a circle or create areas for people to sit together but still focus on the facilitator?

Step Four: Create a Clear Agenda/ Party Flow

- **Create Agenda:** Create a clear agenda for the party and try to adhere to it as closely as possible. You want to make sure you provide plenty of time for both group discussion and whole group conversation.

Take a look at the [sample agenda](#) in the resources section for guidance, and then modify the [Blank Agenda Template](#) for your own party. The general flow of a house party includes the following sections:

- **Welcome:** Set a welcoming and inviting tone. This is important to ensuring everyone feels like they can share their thoughts and ideas during the conversation portion. Welcome everyone and discuss the purpose of the house party. Be clear that the purpose of the party is not just to talk about issues; rather, it's to develop clear action steps to address what the group decides are the most pressing issues in your district.
- **Introductions:** Ask everyone to introduce themselves and *in a sentence or two*, explain why they came.
- **Community agreements:** Establish clear meeting/ party norms or community agreements. These are basic operating principles for the meeting. The facilitator should come prepared with these agreements, rather than devoting time at the party itself to deciding on them so that it doesn't take up a significant portion of your time. See [examples below](#).
- **Role review:** Explain your role as a facilitator, and explain that we'll be breaking into small groups and each conversation group will need a note taker and a timekeeper.
- **Host story:** Share your story for why you are invested in this work. Include: who you are, why this work matters to you, what you are hoping to see change, and what you are willing to do about it. This should all take no more than 2-3 minutes.
- **Explain Open Space:** There are a lot of methods and strategies for generating discussion among a diverse group. One of these methods is the [Open Space Process](#) detailed in the resources section at the end of this document. This process allows groups to self-organize around what issues are most important to them.
- **Decide on Next Steps:** The small groups must make sure that toward the end of discussion time, they transition to clearly articulating their next steps. It's important to consider:
 - **Timing:** When is the key time that the issue can be addressed or changed (e.g., at the next board meeting? When the state house or assembly is back in session? During budget season? etc.)? Use that time as a deadline for your agreed upon action(s).
 - **Who to advocate to:** It's not enough to know what you're advocating for, you also need to know who actually controls the decisions for that topic. If you're not sure, one next step might be for someone to research the right person to help you address the issue you've identified. For example, if you want to change a policy, is there a school board policy committee Chair? If you want to challenge a resolution the board passed, is there a lawyer you need to talk to?
 - **Each person's role:** Not only is it more effective when more voices advocate on a single topic, it's also more efficient because no one person has to do all the work. Use the tool provided to review and assign [examples of actions](#). Record who is taking each step and by when.
 - Have guests state verbally and/or in writing what their next action step will be using affirmative phrasing: "Yes, I can do this..." "Yes, I can attend this..."
- **Report Out:** When the groups come back together, each note taker should give a high level summary of what they discussed and their next steps.
 - Be sure they settle on a date/time to check in on their next steps.
- **Closing & Thank You:**
 - Decide if you are meeting again as a whole group, or if each small group will have their own follow up meeting, or both! Whatever you decide, set the next meeting date(s) and time before everyone leaves.

- *Emphasize with the group that change doesn't happen after just one action; rather, they are all taking the first steps. But, continued action will be key.* That's why it's important to have follow up meetings, and continue to organize and take action.
- Take a picture of each note taker's action steps so you can help them follow up.
- Thank everyone for coming!

Step Five: Follow-Up

- A day or two after the party, send a thank you to all who attended, reminding them of the action(s) they agreed to take.
- A week after the party, reach out to the notetakers to see how guests are doing with their next steps and if they need help following up.
- Check in again before any deadlines (e.g., the next board meeting is on Monday so on the previous Thursday, check that all speakers are ready).
- Celebrate every step someone takes- speakers at meetings, emails sent, op-eds published! Every step is important, and consistency is key.

Resources:

There are so many resources out there to help you plan a house party. Here are a few that we have found helpful.

- [Get Your Friends Involved: Host a House Party \(ACLU of South Dakota\)](#)
- [Open Space Method Overview](#)
- [Host a Postcard Party \(Working America\)](#)
- [COSF House Party Toolkit](#)
- [Leaders for Educational Equity Virtual House Meeting Toolkit](#)



HOUSE PARTY PLANNING CHECKLIST

Select a Host

Potential Hosts	Decision	Who is asking?

Select a Facilitator

Potential Facilitators	Decision	Who is asking?

Select a Location

Potential Locations	Decision	Who is confirming availability?

Select Party Date and Time

Potential Dates and Times	Decision

- Invitation List Created: [Use this template](#) (Tab 1)
- Marketing Plan Created: [Use this template](#) (Tab 2)
- 2 + weeks out: Invitations sent
- 1 + week out: Follow-up with anyone who has not RSVP-ed
- Food/drinks ordered or prepared

Number of people to feed	Ordered from + Phone #	Who is responsible?

- Childcare Confirmed (if needed)

Number of children to watch	Sitter Contact:	Who is responsible?

- 7 days out: Send follow-up emails/calls; regroup if you do not have enough RSVPs yet
- Purchase materials for the event, if needed: name tags, markers, post it notes, pens, drinks, plates, cutlery, and cups.
- Week of: Finalize the agenda and walk through it with the facilitator; this is the heart of a great event, so be sure you are aligned on the key points the facilitator should make and goals for the event.
- 1-2 days out: Confirmation phone calls/texts/emails to everyone who RSVP-ed "yes"
- 1-2 days out: Print sign-in sheets and small group conversations notes page
- Day of: Prep space with materials, set-up furniture, and set out food
- A day or two after the party: Send a thank you to all who attended, reminding them of the action(s) they agreed to take.
- A week after the party: Reach out to the notetakers to see how guests are doing with their next steps and if they need help following up.
- Check in again before any deadlines



Sample Invitation Language

Email:

Subject line: Invitation to our house party

Hi NAME,

I am reaching out to you as a fellow PARENT/ EDUCATOR/ CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBER because I know you care deeply about education in our community. We're having a house party on DATE at TIME to talk about important issues in our school district, and I want to personally invite you to attend. We hope to get a group together to identify and reflect on what we believe matters most for our students to be successful, and then come up with actions we can each take to build the school district we want to see for our community's kids!

The party will be held at LOCATION. Again, it's on DATE from TIME-TIME. Refreshments and childcare will be provided.

Please let me know if you can make it by RSVP DATE. We hope to see you there!

Best,

YOUR NAME

Text:

We're having a house party on DATE at TIME to talk about important issues affecting students in our school district and what we can do about it. I know this is something you care about a lot! It's at LOCATION, and childcare will be provided. Can you make it?



Sample Agenda (about 90 minutes):

Time	Content
5 min	<p>Warm Welcome</p> <p>Welcome everyone and discuss the purpose of the house party. Be clear that the purpose of the party is not just to talk about issues; rather, it's to develop clear action steps to address what the group decides are the most pressing issues in your district.</p>
10 min	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Ask everyone to introduce themselves and <i>in a sentence or two</i>, explain why they came.</p>
5 min	<p>Community Agreements</p> <p>Establish clear meeting/ party norms or community agreements.</p>
2 min	<p>Review Roles</p> <p>Explain your role as a facilitator, and explain that we'll be breaking into small groups and each conversation group will need a note taker and a timekeeper.</p>
3 min	<p>Host Story</p> <p>Share your story for why you are invested in this work. Who are you, why does this matter to you, what are you hoping to see change and what are you willing to do about it?</p>
12 min	<p>Open Space Process - Question and response gathering</p> <p>The facilitator will ask the guiding question, give guests a few minutes to think, and then guests will post their responses. Guests will then organize around what is most important to them.</p>
40 min	<p>Open Space Process - Group Discussions & Next Steps</p> <p>Guests will break into their small groups. The guest who wrote the response will host the conversation and focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are we now? • Where do we want to be? • How do we get there? • Who do we need to bring in? <p>Each group will come up with clear, actionable and time bound action steps. They should focus on timing, who to advocate to, and each person's role in the group.</p>
10 min	<p>Report Out</p> <p>Groups come back together, and each note taker should give a high level summary of what they discussed and their next steps. Other groups can act as accountability supports making sure steps are clear, actionable, and timebound.</p>
3 min	<p>Closing and Thank You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decide if you are meeting again as a whole group, or if each small group will have their own follow up meeting. Either way, set the next meeting date(s) and time before everyone leaves. - Remind the group that change takes time, and this is the first of many steps! Take a picture of each note taker's action steps so you can help them follow up. - Thank everyone for coming!

*(Adapted from LEE [Virtual House Meeting Toolkit](#) , [COSE House Party Toolkit](#), and [School Board School](#) staff members' experiences)



House Party Agenda

Time	Content
5 min	Warm Welcome
10 min	Introductions
5 min	Community Agreements
2 min	Review Roles
3 min	Host Story
12 min	Open Space Process - Question and response gathering Question:
40 min	Open Space Process - Group Discussions & Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where are we now?• Where do we want to be?• How do we get there?• Who do we need to bring in?
10 min	Report Out
3 min	Closing and Thank You



Sample Norms and Community Agreements

- **Practice Active Participation:** Speak up when prompted by the host or when you feel most able to answer a question that has been posed. Use the framing provided by the host and the responses of others to maintain the flow of conversation. Try to avoid bringing up new topics or diverting from the question at hand.
- **Practice Deep Listening:** If you are not speaking, refrain from having side conversations, and give your full attention to the person who has the floor. Please put away other devices that may distract you.
- **Host Facilitates:** The host is allowed to speak up, redirect, and will ensure everyone participates. They may prompt you to speak or call on you/your group to answer a question.
- **Speak in Story:** Keep "I-statements" in mind and share your personal experience and stories as opposed to making generalizations for others or sharing opinions from a book you read. Remain grounded in your relationships to your local community.
- **Keep to Time:** Ensure everyone has a chance to share by keeping to 2 min (or whatever indicated time limit) and enable your timekeeper to give you visual/audible clues.

**Adapted from the LEE  Virtual House Meeting Toolkit*



Summary: Open Space Process & Tools

Process

1. **Review the purpose and format:** The facilitator starts by grounding the group in the purpose of the open space process, which is to help a group self-organize around issues that matter to them.
2. **Pose a question:** The facilitator then poses the guiding question, and gives everyone quiet time to think and, if they would like, draft a response. Make sure your questions invite your guests to tell their stories. Use "How...", "Why...", and "Tell me..." framings.
 - a. For our education-focused house parties, some potential questions are:
 - What brings you here today? What are you most concerned about in our school district?
 - Tell me about the most pressing issues facing our school district today? What are they and why?
 - What's one thing that, if it changed, it would have a profound impact on students in our district?
 - What is your hope/dream for students and families in our school district? Why? (Think about hopes/dreams in terms of policy change and action.)
 - When you think about the education students in our district are receiving, what keeps you up at night?
3. **Create the "marketplace":** Guests draft their ideas to respond to the question, or pose new questions that arise due to the main question. They write these on post-it notes, share them out with the whole group, and then put them in a central location called "the marketplace." As guests share out, the facilitator groups similar responses, as long as the guests agree with the grouping. Note that not everyone in the group needs to respond; some people may not have their own ideas, and others may not respond because someone else shared the same idea.
4. **Choose ideas:** Everyone reviews the ideas in the marketplace, and chooses the one they want to discuss. They can either raise their hand as the facilitator calls out each idea, or the facilitator can spread out the post-it notes and guests can go stand by an idea. If there are ideas with less than 3 people standing by them, ask those guests to join another group so that there are enough people in each group to have a robust conversation and take action. Acknowledge that all the ideas are important, but the ones with three or more people are where you will start organizing.
5. **Small group conversations:** The groups will engage in a conversation and an action-planning session.
 - a. First, establish roles. The person who posed the idea will facilitate the small group discussion. Be sure each group also has a note taker and a timekeeper. The note taker can use the [document below](#).
 - b. Each group will focus on the below questions and come up with a set of clear, actionable and timebound next steps. You can use the document below for examples of potential actions and deadlines.
 - Where are we now?
 - Where do we want to be?
 - How do we get there?
 - Who do we need to bring in?
6. **Whole group report out:** Groups come back together, and the note taker from each group shares a short overview of their group discussion and next steps. The other groups provide feedback and support as needed.

House Party Small Group Notes



Group member names:

Discussion question: *Record here the question that was posed to the whole group.*

Question/ idea your group is discussing:

Discussion Questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?
- Who do we need to bring in?

Action Step(s): What actions do we want to take? Who is in charge of each action? When will we take them? *Note: This chart is not an exhaustive list of actions, so add your own. Nor are these the actions you must take, so choose the ones that make sense for your topic.*

Action	Owner(s)	Date
Speak at a school board meeting		
Write speech/testimony for someone else to say at a school board meeting		
Write an Op-Ed		
Write an email to _____ (e.g., board members, superintendent)		
Send email to _____		
Get others to send emails to _____		
Attend school board meeting		
Invite others to attend board meeting		
Reach out to the press		
Host house party on this topic		

What are the FIRST three things your group needs to do? For example: research who is in charge of making a decision about our topic; OR set a meeting time to practice what we'll say at the school board meeting.

Action	Owner	Date