Preparing for Your Conversation

A Guide to Help You Host Your Big Table Conversation

When we give our time to listen and learn from one another, we draw each other closer and create the power to lead our community to an even better future.

SETTING THE BIG TABLE

How can we work together to create a strong and connected community?

Thank you for being a critical part of The Big Table on April 17. The Big Table is a community-wide effort and we are grateful for your partnership as a host.

The Big Table is a day of community building designed to bolster understanding in these challenging times. We hope The Big Table generates open, thoughtful conversations that will spark new relationships and new ways of working together by deepening our understanding of each other and what the community needs. Emphasis is not on finding immediate solutions, but rather on creating authentic human connection and civic engagement through conversation. Without hosts, this community-wide effort would not be possible. You are the catalysts that will move these conversations forward.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HOST?

As a host, you believe in each person’s power to make a difference. As an engaged resident of our community, you are committed to convening others so they can collectively explore issues important to our community and share unique perspectives and innovative ideas that will build and sustain our community moving forward.

Anyone interested in convening a conversation may host. Your conversation can happen at any time of day in any place where guests are comfortable. Food and drink can range from light snacks to full-course meals. The only requirement is that hosts provide productive environments for authentic conversations about how to create a strong and connected community. A Host Kit will be provided to you.

In addition to the information available in this toolkit, there will be two host information sessions. While attendance at the informational sessions is optional, you’ll have the opportunity to meet other Big Table hosts and ask questions about guiding your conversation. The tentative dates for the information sessions are Tuesday, February 26 and Saturday, April 13. More details and registration info for these sessions will be shared at a later date.
HOST KIT PICK-UP

Host kits will be available to pick up at the second info session (tentatively scheduled for Saturday, April 13) OR, if more convenient to you, please stop by the Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. office (downtown Pittsburgh) on any of the following dates/times:

- Wednesday, April 10 between 9:00am and 5:00pm
- Thursday, April 11 between 9:00am and 7:00pm
- Friday, April 12 between 9:00am and 5:00pm
- Monday, April 15 between 9:00am and 8:00pm
- Tuesday, April 16 between 9:00am and 5:00pm

HOST RESPONSIBILITIES

If you are reading this, chances are that you are interested in hosting and if you haven’t already, please take a few minutes to register as a host by going to: http://www.lpinc.org/bigtable. If you are reading this out of curiosity – thank you – but do take the next step to serve as a host...it is simple and very rewarding, we promise!

Hosts will:
- Find a suitable location for the conversation on April 17.
- Invite 8-12 people to join the conversation.
- Provide food/drinks, ranging from snacks to full meals, to enjoy with your guests during the conversation. Potluck is a fun way to accomplish this!
- Serve as the conversation guide.
- Respond to a short survey and provide feedback regarding your conversation experience.
- Encourage your guests to respond to a brief survey and provide feedback as well. Leadership Pittsburgh can coordinate distribution and receipt so that you don’t have to!

LOCATION

Conversations can happen anywhere that your group would feel most comfortable. Possible venues include homes, churches, community centers, businesses and restaurants, among others. When planning your conversation, consider the best atmosphere that you can create for honest and open conversation. The more relaxed that your guests are, the better the conversation will be.

REFRESHMENTS

Like the location, refreshment choices are up to you. Please choose any food and drink that your guests will enjoy together. Refreshments may range from light snacks to full meals and everything in between. If you aren’t sure what to provide, consider hosting a potluck so that your guests can share their favorite dishes with each other. Others may simply decide to share the check at a local restaurant. Chips, cookies, pizza, and ice cream—it is all fair game! Have fun with it! Sharing food and drink sets the stage for the conversation to follow so choose something that will help bring your group together to listen and share.
INVITING YOUR GUESTS

The optimal number of people per conversation is 8-12. The Big Table is about giving everyone a chance to share their voice and be heard. Groups larger than 12 people tend to break into smaller groups, dividing one powerful conversation into many disjointed conversations.

If you know more than 12 people who would like to participate in a conversation, please ask a friend (or friends) to partner with you in hosting conversations so that you can each host a table of only 8-12 people. The conversations can still happen at the same location, but make sure you have room for participants to break into groups of 8-12. If there are several tables at one location, please make sure that each table has its own host. If this is the option you choose (and we encourage you to!) you would be what we would call a SUPER HOST!

Also, when inviting guests, we encourage you to have a good mix of different experiences and perspectives. Consider inviting some people who you may not spend much time with socially. Use this as an opportunity to extend your network past your normal routine. In fact, you may consider inviting people you don’t know at all. Ask a few of your friends or colleagues to bring others you haven’t met yet, or invite people from your favorite coffee spot, your child’s school, your church, or your community center. Consider inviting your partner or another family member who may not know your colleagues or the other people you have invited to your table.

Here’s an example of an invitation to send to your guests. Please feel free to use this in an email or letter to your potential guests, or create your own. Guests can be invited in whatever way is easiest for you.

Hello XX,

On April 17, I am joining a community-wide effort called The Big Table. On this one day, thousands of people representing different backgrounds are participating in hundreds of conversations to discuss how we create a strong and connected community.

I am hosting one of these conversations and I would like to invite you to join me and others as we listen to and learn from each other.

Location: Time:

If you would like more information about The Big Table, please visit: [www.lpinc.org/bigtable](http://www.lpinc.org/bigtable).

Please RSVP to me if you would like to attend this fun and important conversation.

I look forward to seeing you on April 17 for our Big Table conversation!

If you’d like to share more information with your guests, ask them to visit The Big Table webpage at: [www.lpinc.org/bigtable](http://www.lpinc.org/bigtable).

QUESTIONS?

Contact us at bigtable@lpinc.org or 412.392.2248.
The Conversation Guide

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GUIDING YOUR CONVERSATION

We hope The Big Table generates open, thoughtful conversations that will spark new relationships and new ways for working together by deepening our understanding of each other and the community. Emphasis is not on finding immediate solutions, but rather on creating authentic human connection and civic engagement through conversation.

How can we work together to create a strong and connected community?

We know there’s no single way to get there. It will take the involvement of individuals, families, businesses, governments and nonprofits. All ideas are welcome and all voices need to be heard.

While it may be tempting to do so, we strongly recommend against choosing the topic, in advance, for your conversation. Conversation starters provided below will help. While you may put together a group that will quickly and naturally settle on a particular area of shared interest, it is best if the topic develops organically as the group shares their voices. The conversation should be open and natural, which may mean multiple topics are discussed.

Here are a few tips on how to get started:

ORGANIZING THE CONVERSATION

- **First,** introduce yourself. Share your name, background, and why you decided to be a host for The Big Table. Perhaps add a quick fun fact about yourself to further break the ice.

- **Second,** invite your guests to introduce themselves and talk about what brings them to the table. Ask them to share a similar fun fact about themselves. (A fun question is “What is your favorite ice cream flavor?”)

- **Third,** urge your guests to stay focused during the conversation. Ask them to put their cell phones and other distractions away until the conversation has ended.

- **Fourth,** do begin by asking the fundamental question—“How can we work together to build a strong, connected community?” This is intentionally left open-ended. Encourage guests to reflect on possibilities rather than dwell on already identified challenges. If there is an initial silence in response, do not be disappointed...perhaps you can warm the guests up by asking a follow-up question—“share what you’d most like to change.” This helps everyone get into the conversation while providing focus.
• **Fifth**, consider the conversation as a journey where the process is as important as the destination. Be willing and prepared to take detours along the way. Help your guests reflect on what they value most and consider the choices and tradeoffs related to their ideas.

• **Sixth**, remind your guests that conversations are as much about listening and learning as they are about talking. Make sure all ideas are invited and all voices are heard. If you attend one of the information sessions, we can help you with some practical tools to use if the need arises at your table.

• **Lastly**, please know that you don’t have to be an extrovert or a trained facilitator to host this conversation. When people gather around food, conversations happen – trust the process – no need to over-engineer it! This simple model has worked at literally thousands of tables across cities. Consider it an “excuse” to take pause from the continued frenzy of life to engage with others in a meaningful way beyond one’s own agenda or worries.

**CONVERSATION PROMPTS**

As mentioned above, we’ve compiled a list of prompts that you may want to use to guide your conversations. You do not have to use these. They are simply ideas that may help you steer your group in a productive direction.

- What are the best things about our community?
- What can we do to spread more kindness in our community?
- What would you like to learn from the others in this conversation?
- What commitment can we make, big or small, to better our community?

**QUICK TIPS FOR YOUR CONVERSATION**

**DO**

- Host the event at a comfortable, inviting place where all of your guests will feel welcome.
- Encourage everyone to participate by talking, listening and learning from each other.
- Promote creative and productive dialogue, rather than focusing on negativity.
- Invite guests to expand on their ideas.
- Take notes and encourage guests to do the same.
- Take a picture of the group before they leave.
- After the conversation, share your ideas, photos, and topics on social media using #BigTablePGH.
- Exchange contact information so your group can keep in touch in the future – assuming all your guests are comfortable doing so.
- Utilize the guest attendance sheet that is at the end of this packet to make note of attendees.
- If you would like to record some part of the conversation, get permission from all the attendees – and be extremely sure that the guests will not feel inhibited by the mere fact that the conversation is being recorded. Remember the purpose of the conversation IS the conversation; neither you nor your guests should be distracted from being fully present.
- Let Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. know if you would be open to some media stopping by during your conversation (in case some media want a list of locations that they may visit without causing a major distraction).
DON’T

- Demand that your group focus on a topic that you chose ahead of time; be open to what your guests think is most important to discuss.
- Solicit in any manner.
- Micromanage the conversation; let it flow freely.
- Be judgmental or dismissive of any person’s comments or ideas.
- Promote complaints, arguments or unproductive debates; these conversations should not dwell on what is wrong but rather what will make us better.
- Be afraid to ask questions.
- Be nervous; conversations should be casual, comfortable and fun.
- Stop sharing when your conversation ends; keep discussing your ideas with colleagues, friends and neighbors or on social media using #BigTablePGH.

AFTER YOUR CONVERSATION

In today’s world, coming together has never been more important. We hope your Big Table conversation connects you, your guests, and our larger community in a new way. Listening to and learning from each other is an important first step toward creating a strong and connected community.

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

As a host, it is critical that you share your feedback about your Big Table conversation. Please take notes during your conversation and share your thoughts afterwards. After The Big Table has ended, you will receive a brief survey from Leadership Pittsburgh to assist you in providing your feedback. Please make every effort to respond to this survey in a timely manner. Additionally, feel free to share any information not requested by the survey via email to bigtable@lpinc.org.

Before your guests leave, remind them to complete a paper survey (if that is what they want) or, if they provided their email on the guest list, let them know that they will receive a link to the survey and strongly encourage them to respond in a timely manner.

KEEP IN TOUCH

We hope The Big Table is only a starting point in sparking conversations, and that you and your guests are inspired to continue to listen to and learn from each other as you create the power to lead our community to an even better future. Please don’t forget to thank your guests for participating in The Big Table. By participating in The Big Table, they are giving our community a great gift. We hope you stay in contact with your guests and continue the conversations by setting up additional get-togethers or talking with others who may be interested in the ideas your group shares. This is a day focused on community-building—but The Big Table is always open for conversation.

ABOUT LEADERSHIP PITTSBURGH

Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. (LPI) is the foremost multi-disciplinary leadership identification, enrichment and networking organization in Southwestern Pennsylvania dedicated to developing a robust pipeline of diverse civic leaders to serve the region. The impact of our programs are felt in all areas of the community and serve as a benchmark across the country. Our graduates and participants are not afraid to tackle difficult issues or take unpopular stands in order to act as catalysts for positive change in our region. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we are committed to helping the broader Pittsburgh region embrace creativity in its thinking and build bridges of understanding across segments.
Social Media Tips

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SHARING IDEAS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

We hope your conversations will remain personal and interactive with both you and your guests staying present and engaged in the discussion. If appropriate, when you aren’t actively participating in the conversation, we encourage you to share your experiences on social media so that others can learn about and interact with your group’s thoughts and ideas as well.

Before and after your conversation, share your excitement about The Big Table and some of your observations about the experience. Include photos or videos that you take or create with your group and encourage your guests to do the same. While social media should be a supplement to, not a focus of, your conversation, it’s a great way to extend connections with your guests and to continue the discussion online, even after the physical conversation has ended. You may even want to share usernames and other social media information as an icebreaker to start your conversation. After all, we hope you walk away from the conversation with new friends!

SOCIAL MEDIA IDEAS:

- Post a fun group photo with your guests gathered around your table. #TableSelfie anyone?
- Capture a powerful quote from the conversation and share it with a picture of the person who said it. Get their permission if you are going to attribute the quote to an individual.
- Share the general topic of your conversation and your group’s top idea for making the community stronger and more connected.
- Post a photo with a new friend and tag them!
- Connect with your guests on social media; mention or tag them using their usernames.
- Share your group’s thoughts on how to spread more kindness with #KindPittsburgh.
- Share what you are committing to do for our community as a result of your conversation.

Be sure to include #BigTablePGH with all of your social media posts!

CONNECT WITH THE BIG TABLE PITTSBURGH ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

- facebook.com/LeadershipPgh
  The Big Table Pittsburgh event
- @LeadershipPgh
- linkedin.com/company/leadership-pittsburgh-inc
- @LeadershipPgh
- #BigTablePGH
Thanks for joining The Big Table Pittsburgh conversation! We’re excited you’re here. Please sign in below. We hope to capture your ideas and feedback from your conversation. You will receive the survey link via email from Leadership Pittsburgh. Please check the “opt out” box if you do not want to receive a survey by email. There are also paper surveys available that you can complete before you leave today and return to your host. Yes, we know that we all hate surveys – but it would be REALLY helpful to the community and organizers if you DO take the five minutes (or less) to complete this one – PLEASE!

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Thank you!

#BigTablePGH