

Host your own

MAKE AMERICA DINNER AGAIN

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5!



1. GATHERING A GROUP

This is the hardest part – gathering a balanced group of people with different opinions who are interested in coming together to get to know one another and talk about our country's challenges.

Depending on our geographical locations and how varied our social network is, many of us often have an easier time recruiting from one side of the aisle than another. Following are some tips on how to gather your MADA group.





1.1 Timing

Give yourself at least one month to recruit guests, bearing in mind you might need to make adjustments to the guest list all the way through the day of; there will likely be a couple last minute additions and cancellations (more on that later).

1.2 Size

We recommend aiming for either 6 or 8 folks depending on your space. An even number will ensure more productive partner activities, though a host can jump in as a partner in a pinch. Fewer than 10 allows everyone to feel space for their voices to be heard.

1.3 Use Your Network

The most successful way to recruit is word of mouth. Leverage your existing networks of friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances by:

- Posting a message on Facebook, and making it visible to the Public. This ensures that people who are outside your “Friends” network can see the post and reply. It also makes it easier for your friends to share with their friends, tag their friends, and easily connect you.
- Sending an email to your work friends, or any communities of which you are a part.
- Asking guests to bring a friend who has the viewpoint you’re seeking to balance the group.

1.4 Reach Out To Established Groups

To cast your net even wider, reach out to established political groups and organizations in your area. For example, in San Francisco we reached out to the Berkeley College Republicans, the San Francisco Republican Group, the Trump Bay Area group, the Bay Area for Bernie Sanders group, and the San Francisco for Jill Stein group. This is essentially cold-calling and does not always have a high response rate.



1.5 First Follow Up

Once you're connected with guests, follow up with them individually with an email or Facebook message. The main purpose here is to thank them for their interest, express you are thrilled to have them, and set a date. We suggest using Doodle to nail down a date that is best for most guests.

1.6 Detailed Follow Up

You should send this email once you have the date, venue, and all or most guests confirmed, giving folks enough time to save the date. The main purpose of this email is to give guests all the information they need to feel prepared for the event. Attach a calendar invite (.ics file) to the email so they can easily save it in their digital calendars (e.g. Google, Outlook, or Apple).

1.7 Day-of Reminder

This is meant to be a little nudge reminding guests and getting them excited for the dinner. It would be wise to reply to your Detailed Follow up email (above), so they have all the information in one thread, at the top of their inbox. This followup is also an opportunity to mention any last minute changes or things to be aware of like weather or traffic conditions. Consider providing your cell phone # in case guests need to reach you.

1.8 Last Minute Cancellations

This will probably happen, and it will suck. Have handy a waitlist of folks who you know are eager to attend and have relatively flexible schedules. If anything, have a close friend or significant other in the wings, ready to jump in.

Few Days Ahead Cancellation: Be positive, but express disappointment and ask for them to connect you with someone who might like to join in their place.

Day of Cancellation: Be positive, but ready to replace this person with someone from your emergency waitlist.

1.9 Last Minute Additions

Hopefully with each cancellation, you have an addition. Forward the new guest the Detailed Follow Up email so they have all the most pertinent info, and at the top of the email, express how thankful you are they are joining so last minute.



2. FINDING A VENUE

Once you've started to gather interest, figure out where you'll host this wonderful group! Following are a few things to consider:

2.1 Location

Should be convenient for the group, so if you live in an area where everyone drives, make sure your location has ample parking. If you live in a place where public transportation is king, make sure your location is near a central stop.



2.2 Privacy/Quiet

Conversation can get pretty intense, so make sure to choose a spot with ample space and noise control so your guests can hear each other. Whether this is a private room at a restaurant, a living room at home, or a meeting room in a workspace.

2.3 Types of Venues:

2.3.1 Restaurants

Pros: The easiest flow: food is prepared and served for you, table is cleared and cleaned after you.

Cons: Also can be the priciest option, particularly if you're booking a private room, you may be subjected to a minimum fee.

How to Make It Work: Hold your event on a less busy evening of the week so the restaurant has more incentive to welcome your group even if you're not paying top-dollar. Speak with the sales coordinator of the restaurant and explain the mission of the event to see if there are any allowances they can make (waiving the minimum), or ways they can help you plan an affordable menu.

2.3.2 Community Centers/Offices

Pros: Private, Quiet, Less expensive (usually a reasonable hourly rate for community centers, and some common areas in apartment complexes are free for residents).

Cons: Bring in your own food and clean up. If a workplace, it can feel a bit stiff and not as cozy as some of the other options.

How to Make It Work: If the common area has a kitchen, this could be a great opportunity to make cooking the dinner a group activity where everyone can get to know each other better. If not, options include takeout, catering by a private chef (anyone have a culinarily talented friend?), or catering by a grocery store.

2.3.3 Private Homes

Pros: Private, Quiet, Most Cost Effective, Intimate. Hosting at home is a great opportunity to do a potluck style gathering, where everyone can contribute. This will be easier on your budget, and will create a greater sense of community!

Cons: Not all of us have homes large enough or conveniently located enough to do this, and depending on how much you enjoy cleaning up and hosting, this option can be the most work.

How to Make It Work: Hosting at home works best when your group is friends, friends of friends, or people who otherwise would feel safe and comfortable going to a stranger's home. If you're doing potluck style, you can ask each person to sign up for either a main dish, side dish, beverage, or dessert.

3. PAYING FOR IT

If you do not have the budget to foot the bill yourself, there are a few ways to cut costs, or get help from others.

3.1 Ask for donations

You can ask for a donation via Venmo or PayPal ahead of the event in your Detailed Follow up email, and/or you can have a donation box ready at the event for folks to slip a few bucks.



3.2 Crowdfund

Start a fundraising campaign on GoFundMe or CrowdRise.

3.3 Potlucks

As mentioned, if you're hosting at home, a potluck is a great, affordable option. The downside is that it might deter particularly busy folks from attending.



4. PLANNING A SCHEDULE

Always have a structure and a schedule, even if you don't need to rigidly stick to it. The two worst case scenarios are:

- a) You get a group who's really reticent and difficult to draw into conversation
- b) You get a group who quickly spirals into arguments/chaos

For both of these scenarios, a plan and a structure can save you. If you have neither of these extremes, it still feels great for peace of mind to be prepared. :)

One thing to decide is how to diffuse conflict if needed. We opted for kazoos, since the sound is silly enough to break up tension, and can be a fun party-favor even if it's not needed. For other tips on moderation, see 4.1 in the appendix.

On the next page is the plan we use for our dinners. Feel free to do the same, or add your own touch!



Format

2 moderators to ask questions and guide activities, 8 guests to participate

Part 1: Ice breaker activities while waiting for all guests to arrive

Index cards for people to write questions they'd like to discuss

A pair of dice accompanied by questions to ask a partner depending on what you roll (free download coming soon).

Part 2: Welcome and setting the tone

Set a few ground rules, for example, if anyone feels uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation or hears something unfair, you can blow your kazoo for a "time out".

Part 3: Getting to know you questions

So that guests can see each other as people first and foremost, rather than political opponents. Example: Who in your life has influenced you the most?

Part 4: Partner Exercise

Pair people who might have different perspectives, and give each of them 3-5 minutes to present their side of a controversial topic. After the 3-5 minutes, the other partner tells their side, and then the whole group comes together to discuss what they've learned. Alternatively, you could have each person present their partner's side to the larger group.


Part 6: Political Discussion Points

Questions posed to the group by moderators. Questions can be created by moderators and/or submitted by participants.

Part 7: Coming together

Our final activity was to find and visualize some commonalities. We had each person write their hopes for the country on sticky notes, then hung them on the wall so we could see how many of our hopes were the same, even if ideas for how to get there varied.

For more details, a complete script of our evening, and a checklist of items to bring based on the above schedule, see the appendix document, available for download from our website soon.





5. KEEP IT GOING!

Here are a few ways to keep the momentum going in your communities:

5.1 Share on Social Media

Post pictures, before and after quotes, or brief write-ups from your event on social media and use hashtags #MakeAmericaDinnerAgain and #MADA. Feel free to include a link to the MADA website.

5.2 Follow up email

Send a follow up email to guests within a week after the event to thank them, ask for feedback, and encourage them to keep in touch and host their own dinner.

5.3 Make it a Regular Thing

Schedule ongoing dinners with the same group or different group on a monthly or quarterly basis. We imagine each dinner will be slightly different depending on the individual guests and the news cycle. That's what makes this so fun! Keep the conversation going, and see if folks might form friendships as a result of sustained meetings.

5.4 Pitch to local media

Reach out to your local newspaper, radio, and publications to see if they would be interested in covering the dinner, by attending as a fly on the wall. They might request to interview guests before and after the dinner. Of course, please make sure that this is OK with your guests beforehand.

5.5 Share with us!

We'd love to hear how your event went, learn from you, and provide feedback if it's helpful.

E-mail us: makeamericadinner@gmail.com