

CIRCLES
+
DINNERS

• toolkit

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We must all hang together,
or assuredly we shall all hang separately.

Benjamin Franklin

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I never considered a difference of opinion in
politics, in religion, in philosophy,
as cause for withdrawing from a friend.

Thomas Jefferson

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In 1787, 55 delegates, gathered at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, accomplished a seemingly impossible task. Through debate and compromise, face-to-face, this disparate group united opposing opinions and priorities into an entirely new model of government. It wasn't a perfect document, as Ben Franklin himself admitted in his final speech, but it was a testament to working together.

To mark the 230th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution, 92Y & The Village Square call for a return to that goal of collaboration.

Join us the week of September 17, 2017, as we revive the American tradition of engaging conversation and dynamic friendship across profound disagreement, and forge a path forward.

HOST A BEN FRANKLIN CIRCLE AND/OR A JEFFERSON DINNER

Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, each in his own way, left us with a unique model to bring people together face-to-face, to hash out differences, to explore big questions and ultimately, to form the personal bonds that moved the country forward. Franklin gathered a small group of community leaders weekly to explore how they could be better people and citizens through the lens of 13 civic virtues. Jefferson regularly hosted private dinners for political opponents to get to know one another outside of the political sphere.

92Y & The Village Square reenvision these intimate gatherings for the 21st Century.

BEN FRANKLIN CIRCLES

gather small groups of 10-12 people to regularly reflect on Franklin's 13 civic virtues and how those qualities can help us be both better individuals and better citizens. Circles encourage people of different backgrounds to reflect on core values like justice and moderation, humility and order.

JEFFERSON DINNERS

gather between 8 and 14 people around a dinner table for a single conversation about a topic of interest or concern. Just as Jefferson invited early legislators described as having come to Washington "in the spirit of avowed misunderstanding, without the smallest wish to agree," this American tradition gathers people with differences to share a meal around their common humanity.

HOW TO HOST A CIRCLE OR A DINNER

Ben Franklin Circles

can exist as a cycle of 13-meetings (one for each of Franklin's 13 civic virtues) or as a one-time event.

1. Choose the format: a one-time meeting or the kick-off to all 13.
2. Identify a host to handle moderating the conversation.
Note: we provide a guide and sample questions on our blog.
3. Select a group of 10-12 people to attend. These can be people you personally invite or you can publicly advertise and cap attendance at 12 people.
4. Download our [toolkit](#) as a guide for your meeting.

Jefferson Dinners

1. Choose a topic—it can truly be anything—a cause you're passionate about, a challenge that concerns you or even a decision that must be made. Consider framing your topic in an icebreaker question you share with the invitation.
2. Gather diverse guests—keep faith with the founding ideals of American democracy and invite people who disagree substantively on your topic.
3. Dive into all the history—both the glory and the hypocrisy—while you check out our guidance and toolkits at jeffersondinner.org.

You can do both! Use a Dinner to kick-off your Circle. Plan to meet once, but use Franklin's 13 virtues to gather again and continue the conversation in the weeks to come.

CREATIVE WAYS TO PLAN YOUR CIRCLES OR DINNERS

The Jefferson Dinners and Ben Franklin Circles are adaptable. We encourage organizations to use a Circle or a Dinner in the way that best suits your priorities. These are great ways to build capacity and advance your mission. Some ideas:

- Use a Ben Franklin Circle as a public-facing event to attract new members or supporters
- Host a Jefferson Dinner for your board of directors
- Engage alumni or re-engage previous event participants in a Ben Franklin Circle
- Invite potential donors to a Jefferson Dinner to highlight how your organization is bringing together diverse perspectives
- Create new partnerships by proposing to co-host a Ben Franklin Circle with an organization you want to collaborate with
- Position your organization by inviting key players in an ongoing disagreement to a Jefferson Dinner

INVITE A DIVERSE GROUP

We encourage you to gather a diverse group of participants. You can offer your event to the public and invite the first 10-12 people who respond.

Or you can hand pick a group. Think of inviting people you know will come with diverse views. Here's a sample invite:

YOU'RE INVITED—A BEN FRANKLIN CIRCLE

This Fall marks the 230th Anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. Please join me to mark the anniversary with a special event to bring people together in our community and explore how we can improve ourselves and our society. Nearly 300 years ago, Ben Franklin started a club called a Junto, where members met regularly to discuss how they could help each other lead better lives and create stronger communities. Join me for a 21st Century Junto, where we sit down, face-to-face, to explore what we can do together to move ourselves and our world forward.

YOU'RE INVITED—A JEFFERSON DINNER

This Fall marks the 230th Anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. Please join me to mark this occasion by reviving a tradition begun by our third president, Thomas Jefferson, of sharing a riveting conversation about competing ideas over a meal. As dinner begins, we'll pose this question to our guests: [a broad framing of your evening's topic]

SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Help us celebrate your Circle and Dinner

- Take a photo of your event, share on social media and tag Ben Franklin Circles + The Village Square.
- Use #BenFranklinCircles or #JeffersonDinner to announce your event.
 - Join our Closed Facebook Groups:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/benfranklincircles/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/jeffersondinners/>

TWITTER
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CIRCLE OR DINNER [HERE](#)