



COMMUNITY GATHERING TOOLKIT

SHAPING *the* FUTURE together



SHAPING

the

future

together

INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS MOMENT MATTERS

In 2026, the United States marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This milestone is more than a moment to look back; it's an invitation to decide what comes next.

At a time when many more people feel disconnected or uncertain about our democracy, something else is also true: people want to belong, to be heard, and to shape the future of their communities. This is our time to come together, listen deeply, and use our connections to build communities where we support one another and thrive.

WHAT WE CAN DO

This toolkit is your guide to host a gathering that brings people together to reflect, connect, and take action in their local communities. It has everything you need to plan, promote, and host an inclusive gathering that builds connection, sparks civic imagination, and helps people **practice democracy together**.

When you host an OurNext250 gathering, you'll guide your guests through three powerful elements:

ABOUT US

Since 1989, Everyday Democracy has provided training, tools, and experiences that build power with everyday people working to solve problems in their communities. Visit us online at everyday-democracy.org for more information.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OurNext250 is created and led by Everyday Democracy, with key inputs and contributions from numerous civic leaders and organizations. Thank you to MadeByUs, Youth250, and Beautiful Trouble for your valuable contributions. Made possible by funding from Freedom Together and The Commonwell Fund.

our stories

Share about what matters most and help us feel like we belong.

our future

Use imagination and creativity to imagine the kind of communities and country that we want to live in.

our power

Turn ideas into collective action by finding ways to show up and advocate together locally.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Planning Your Gathering Page 4

Tips for Hosting Page 5

Communications Toolkit Page 6

Facilitating Your Gathering Page 7

Facilitation Guide Page 8

Materials to Print Page 13



PLANNING YOUR GATHERING

1. CHOOSE YOUR TIME AND PLACE

- Pick a date that works for your community, ideally within Civic Season (Juneteenth–July 4th)
- Consider a time on evenings or weekends to make participation easier and plan for 1.5–2 hours
- Choose a location—a backyard, park, community center, school and beyond—that is accessible and welcoming. Make sure you have tables where groups of 4–5 people can sit comfortably together for conversations
- Remember to cover basics like water, seating, bathrooms, and accessibility needs
- If you plan to play music or use technology, confirm it's possible in your space

2. INVITE YOUR COMMUNITY

- Bring together friends, neighbors, and people from different parts of your community with a range of backgrounds and perspectives
- Consider co-hosting with a partner. If possible, invite local leaders or organizers who can help connect the conversation to real opportunities for civic action
- Aim for 5–30 guests to allow for meaningful small group conversations. Send invitations several weeks in advance using templates from the **Communications Toolkit**

3. PLAN YOUR MEAL (OPTIONAL)

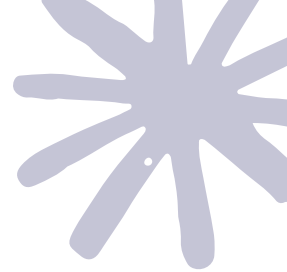
- Food isn't required, but it helps create a welcoming space
- Keep it simple: offer snacks, organize a potluck where everyone brings dishes that are special to them, or provide a meal if you have the resources

4. PREPARE TO HOST

- Review the **Tips for Hosts** and the **Facilitation Guide**
- Consider how you might set up your space and customize the Facilitation Guide for your gathering
- Print key materials and gather supplies like pens, pencils, paper, and markers



TIPS FOR HOSTING



1. Create a space that reflects your goals. Your gathering should feel welcoming, interactive, future-focused space where people can connect, imagine, and contribute. Keep it simple and meaningful for your community. And remember: this experience should be inspiring and energizing for you, too and spark ideas for what people can do next.

2. Host with a team. Partner with friends, neighbors, community leaders, or local organizations to make your gathering more inclusive, creative, and manageable. Consider who can offer space, food, or other support. If you're hosting solo, start small. You don't need to be an expert or have a big budget, just a willingness to bring people together and take a first step toward action.

3. Make it your own. Shape the gathering around your community. Draw on local strengths, traditions, and priorities. You might focus on a specific issue, or incorporate art, music, storytelling, or food that reflects who you are. The more it feels like your community, the more meaningful it will be and the more likely it is to inspire action that matters locally.

4. Expect differences—and welcome them. Conversations about our country's future may bring up strong opinions and that's okay. The goal isn't agreement, its understanding, respect, and curiosity. OurNext250 gatherings are designed to help people connect across differences by sharing personal stories (not debating positions), listening with curiosity, and focusing on what we can build together. If tension arises, gently guide people back to the Community Agreements and overall shared purpose: strengthening community and shaping a future where everyone belongs and has a voice. Remember, many people want to connect across differences, what's often missing is the opportunity. Your gathering creates that opportunity.

5. Share what emerges. Your gathering is part of a larger movement that can help others see what's possible and take action of their own. Consider how you'll capture and share what happens—before, during, or after—through social media or local news. Let people know that your event is part of OurNext250—a growing effort to bring people together across the country to reflect, imagine, and act. Tell the story of why you hosted, it reinforces the core messages of connection, reflection, and action.



COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

EVENT FLYERS

Find social media assets and newsletter banners in a variety of formats available for download on Canva at: canva.link/ournext250

EMAIL INVITATION TEMPLATE

Subject Line Ideas

- You're Invited! Shape the Future of Our Democracy Over Food & Conversation
- You're Invited: Imagine the Future—Together
- What's your hope for our shared future?

Hi [NAME],

What would it feel like to come together with our neighbors to imagine the future we want for our community and brainstorm how we can build it together?

I'm hosting an **OurNext250 Gathering** — part of a nationwide movement bringing people together to **connect, imagine our shared future, and take action in our communities** as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Join us:

📍 [Location]

📅 [Date]

🕒 [Time]

At this gathering, we'll:

- ✨ Share stories and connect across experiences
- ✨ Imagine bold, hopeful futures for our community
- ✨ Identify simple ways we can take action—together

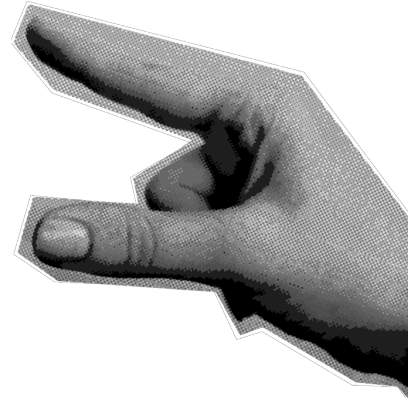
No expertise needed—just bring yourself, your curiosity, and your vision for what's possible.

[RSVP Link]

Looking forward to gathering with you,

[Your Name]

P.S. Want to contribute food, space, or creative ideas? Want to help spread the word? This is a team effort, let's connect and collaborate!



FACILITATING YOUR GATHERING

PREPARE THE SPACE (1-2 HOURS)

Arrive to your location at least 1 hour early. Make sure:

- Bathrooms and water are easy to find
- Food is accessible and clearly labeled

Bring essential printouts (at least 1 set per table):

- ✓ Community Agreements
- ✓ Future Cards (one of each card per table)
- ✓ Conversation Cards – Our Stories, Our Future, Our Power
- ✓ Take Action Card

Set tables with:

- Printouts
- Pens, markers, paper (optional)
- Name tags (optional)



FACILITATION GUIDE



Welcome Your Community & Share Community Agreements – **15mins**

Facilitate Introductions – **10mins**

Guide Table Conversations – **45mins**

Part 1: Our Stories – **15mins**

Part 2: Our Future – **15mins**

Part 3: Our Power – **15mins**

Wrap up & Thank Yous – **10mins**

WELCOME YOUR COMMUNITY & SHARE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS (UP TO 15 MINS, DEPENDING ON ARRIVAL TIMES)

- Greet guests as they arrive and help them get settled
- Create a warm and welcoming environment with music and food
- Once everyone is seated, begin with a brief welcome
- Share why you're hosting and what you hope people experience
- Invite volunteers to read the Community Agreements
- If taking pictures (we hope you will!) make an announcement that invites guests to opt out if they prefer

You might say:

Welcome to OurNext250 Gathering – Shaping the Future Together! I'm so glad each of you are here.

I want to start by sharing why I wanted to host this space. [Add your why here.]

2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Today, we will use this moment to practice what is needed for the future we want in this country. We have the power to come together, share our stories, imagine our shared future, and take actions that move us closer to that future.

On your tables, you'll find Our Community Agreements. These help us create a space where everyone feels respected and heard. Would a few volunteers be open to reading them out loud? [Pause for volunteers]

Thank you. Let's all do our part to hold these agreements together.

One quick note — we may take photos to share the spirit of this gathering. If you'd prefer not to be photographed, just let us know.

FACILITATE INTRODUCTIONS (10 MINS)

- Invite guests to introduce themselves at their tables
- Ask each person to:
 - Share their name
 - Choose a **Future Card** that brings them the most joy and why
- If helpful, suggest a simple way to begin (e.g., most recent birthday goes first)

You might say:

*Let's open with introductions. Take a moment to look at the **Future Cards** on your tables, notice their different images, words, and themes. As you look, see what draws your attention. Choose the future that brings you the most joy to imagine.*

At your table, take 10 minutes to share:

- Your name
- Which Future card brings you the most joy and why?

GUIDE TABLE CONVERSATIONS (45 MINS)

- Invite guests to locate the **Conversation Cards** to begin a 45-minute discussion that will move in three parts: our Stories, Future, and Power
- Each part includes guiding questions to spark conversation, guests can respond to the bulleted questions that resonate with them
- Encourage them to listen deeply, ask follow-up questions, and focus on stories, (not debate) by returning to the **Community Agreements** as needed

You might consider:

- Having groups organically flow through the three part conversation at their own pace, without transitioning them with announcements
- Adding short stretch or snack breaks between sections and taking photos of the small groups or 1-2 people talking together

You might say:

Now that we've had a chance to introduce ourselves, let's move through a 3-part conversation together: our Stories, Future, and Power.

As you enter this space, hold both what has not yet been realized and what is possible to imagine. Listen deeply, ask follow-up questions, and stay grounded in sharing stories rather than debating ideas. If the conversation begins to move away from these values, return to the Community Agreements to gently reset and guide your group.

Together, explore how your experiences and communities shape why these futures matter. You can use the Our Stories, Our Future, Our Power sheet to guide your sharing, listening, and reflection.

PART 1: OUR STORIES (15 MINUTES)

- Encourage guests to share personal experiences based on the prompts in Part 1: Our Stories
- Give a 5-minute warning before transitioning to Part 2: Our Futures

Think about a time when you felt like you belonged or when you felt you didn't belong:

- *How did it impact you, your family, or community?*
- *What feelings came up?*
- *What did that moment reveal about what you want to see more of in the future?*

PART 2: OUR FUTURE (15 MINUTES) – OR EXTEND IF TIME ALLOWS

- Invite guests to imagine what their community and our country could look like
- You may choose to model a response to help spark imagination
- Encourage creativity through writing, drawing, or using symbols to express ideas – consider setting up a Wish Wall from Youth250
- Give a 5-minute warning before transitioning
- Consider having a few people share their visions before transitioning to Part 3: Our Power

Let's imagine a world 250 years from now that is connected, thriving, and joyful for ALL of us.

- *What do you see, hear, say, or feel?*
- *What are people doing together?*
- *What has changed in our systems or communities?*
- *How could this just future make a difference for you or those around you?*

PART 3: OUR POWER (15 MINUTES)

- Introduce the Take Action Card on the tables to move guests from ideas to action
- Invite guests to choose one action they can take and share it with their group

In our future world where everyone is connected, thriving and joyful, what will they say we did to make that possible? What did we act on, protect, build, or refuse to accept?

- *Grab a Take Action sheet*
- *Share one action that you will take this month to create that future*

WRAP UP & THANK YOUR GUESTS

- Close by thanking participants and inviting a few reflections:
What stood out? What action are you going to take?
- Remind everyone that this gathering is part of **OurNext250**, a broader effort to shape the future together through connection, imagination, and action
- Invite guests to take a few final steps together:
 - Come together for a group photo to capture the moment
 - Share any photos, reflections, or actions on the digital **OurNext250 Gathering Gallery**
- Encourage participants to stay connected and follow through on their commitments in the days ahead



You might say:

Thank you for sharing your stories, your visions, and the actions you're ready to take. This is what democracy looks like: people coming together to listen, imagine, and shape the future.

Before we wrap up, let's take a moment for each person to share:

What stood out to you?

What is one action that you are going to take? [Pause for sharing]

This gathering is part of Our Next 250, a broader effort to shape the future together through connection, imagination, and action. You're invited to take a few final steps together:

- *Join for a group photo to capture the moment*
- *Share any photos, reflections, or actions on the digital OurNext250 Gathering Gallery*

The story of the next 250 years isn't written yet. It will be shaped by everyday choices, relationships, and actions, many of which begin in rooms like this one.

Stay connected with the people you met, follow through on your action, and invite someone else to join. Small steps, shared across communities, can grow into lasting change.

Thank you for being part of imagining and building Our Next 250.



CAPTURE & SHARE THE MOMENT

Sharing your gathering helps inspire others and builds momentum across communities. Consider taking photos of guests:

- Holding their favorite Future Cards
- Sharing drawings or written visions
- Highlighting their action commitments

Upload your content to the **OurNext250 Gathering Gallery**.
Be sure to follow any posted guidelines when uploading.



SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK WITH US

As a host, your feedback is important to us! Share your thoughts and experiences about OurNext250 Toolkit here.



MATERIALS TO PRINT

Print the following items on standard 8.5 x 11 paper, ideally in color:

- ✓ Community Agreements (one per table/per group of 5)
- ✓ Future Cards (5 double-sided sheets, one of each per table/per group.
Fold each in half to make popup tent – see image below)
 - Environment, Housing, & Well Being
 - Education & Belonging
 - Immigration & Belonging
 - Food & Well Being
 - Healthcare & Well Being
- ✓ Conversation Cards – Our Stories, Our Future, Our Power (double sided, two per table)
- ✓ Take Action Card (1 per guest)
- ✓ Facilitating Your Gathering (one copy per host)



community

agreements

Use these as reminders during your time together.

- ✓ **MAKE SPACE & TAKE SPACE**
- ✓ **SPEAK FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH "I" STATEMENTS**
- ✓ **LISTEN ACTIVELY TO UNDERSTAND**
- ✓ **STORIES STAY, LESSONS LEAVE**
- ✓ **PRACTICE SELF-CARE & COMMUNITY CARE**



FUTURE CARD 1

Environment, Housing & Well Being



THIS IS THE BACK OF THE CARD. PRINT DOUBLE-SIDED AND FOLD IN HALF
SO THE COLLAGE FACES OUTWARD. FOLD IN HALF LIKE A TENT.



FUTURE CARD 2

Education & Belonging



THIS IS THE BACK OF THE CARD. PRINT DOUBLE-SIDED AND FOLD IN HALF SO THE COLLAGE FACES OUTWARD. FOLD IN HALF LIKE A TENT.



SUPPORTED

SEEN

JOYFUL

HEARD

safe



safe

HEARD

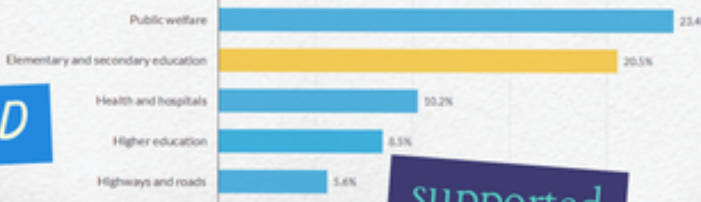
SUPPORTED

JOYFUL

SEEN

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State and Local Direct General Expenditures
Share of total, by functional category, fiscal year 2021



FUTURE CARD 3

Immigration & Belonging



THIS IS THE BACK OF THE CARD. PRINT DOUBLE-SIDED AND FOLD IN HALF SO THE COLLAGE FACES OUTWARD. FOLD IN HALF LIKE A TENT.



FUTURE CARD 4

Food & Well Being



THIS IS THE BACK OF THE CARD. PRINT DOUBLE-SIDED AND FOLD IN HALF
SO THE COLLAGE FACES OUTWARD. FOLD IN HALF LIKE A TENT.

FUTURE CARD 5

Healthcare & Well Being



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SO THE COLLAGE FACES OUTWARD. FOLD IN HALF LIKE A TENT.



FUTURE CARD 5

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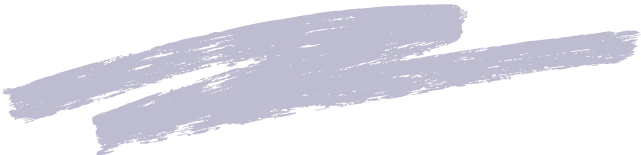
**our
stories**

**our
future**

**our
power**

PART 1: OUR STORIES

Think about a time when you felt like you belonged or when you felt you didn't belong:

- How did it impact you, your family, or community?
 - What feelings came up?
 - What did that moment reveal about what you want to see more of in the future?
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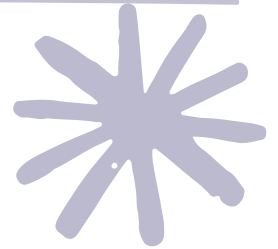
PART 2: OUR FUTURE



Let's imagine a world 250 years from now that is connected, thriving, and joyful for ALL of us.

- What do you see, hear, say, or feel?
- What are people doing together?
- What has changed in our systems or communities?
- How could this just future make a difference for you or those around you?

PART 3: OUR POWER



In our future world where everyone is connected, thriving and joyful, what will they say we did to make that possible? What did we act on, protect, build, or refuse to accept?

- Grab a Take Action Card
- Share one action that you will take this month to create that future
- Explore and add to the OurNext250 Gathering Gallery



TAKE ACTION

TRY ONE OF THESE THIS MONTH!

JOIN UP!

Plug into organizations making change on the issues you care about.



- Turn shared concerns into local action with others near you like Indivisible.org.
- Volunteer with an organization making change in your local community.

MEET UP!

Build connection in your community.



- Host your own OurNext250 gathering with friends and neighbors.
- Share your vision for the future with friends or online to help others imagine what's possible.

READ UP & SHOW UP!

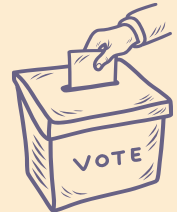
Learn how local decisions are made and have a voice in the decisions that matter to you.



- Find out who represents you and what they are working on at Live.cicerodata.com.
- Attend a local government meeting (e.g. town halls, council, board, commission, or public hearings) to stay informed, speak up on issues that matter, and hold leaders accountable.

GET READY!

Build your power by growing your skills and confidence to participate in civic life.



- Explore tools for advocacy and strategic action at Beautifultrouble.org.
- Plan your voter journey so you know how and when to vote in upcoming elections at Us.vote/how-to-vote.