

Resource

House Meeting Facilitation Guide

Hosting a house meeting is a great step in building your team. House meetings deepen relationships by creating a space for individuals to share their personal stories, skillsets, and motivations for being interested in social justice work. A house meeting could focus on NCJW's mission and priorities or on a specific issue or concern among your group.

Use this facilitation guide to help build relationships among team members and discover their strengths and leadership potential. We encourage you to adapt this guide to fit your facilitation style and the needs of the group.

Exercises in this resource can also be used to shape educational programs, advocacy committee meetings, and more.

What is a house meeting?

A house meeting is a meeting held in someone's home (or a comfortable private space) designed to build relationships among participants to strengthen the group and its actions. It also prioritizes sharing personal stories to get to know each other, while uncovering everyone's skills, strengths, and passions to strengthen your social justice efforts.

Why should I host a house meeting?

While strategy and calendaring meetings are important, it is critical to dedicate time to building and deepening relationships. Strong teams are ones in which members understand what drives one another to do this work. Storytelling helps group members build personal and strategic connections they can lean on as the work progresses. Plus, information from this house meeting will inform issue priorities, gauge leadership potential and interest, and pinpoint advocacy goals.

| At a house meeting, focus on | At a house meeting, avoid |
|---|---|
| Building relationships | Collecting data |
| Sharing stories and aspirations | Declaring ideologies and opinions |
| Understanding each other | Reacting to and arguing with each other |
| Uncovering what can lead to a common action | Complaining |

In preparation

To prepare for a house meeting, leaders should invite people who are either already part of or are interested in being part of the team. Set a goal for the number of attendees (this can be much smaller than you think. 4-8 people works fine). Usually, in order to reach your attendance goal, you have to invite at least twice as many people than you're aiming for, so keep that in mind. Each person should be invited with a personal ask from meeting organizers that includes information about accessibility of the home, such as stairs, wheelchair access, and bathroom access. Consider making arrangements for childcare or a child-friendly space if necessary. To facilitate relationship building, it's best for the group to be sitting facing each other, rather than in rows or at individual tables.

Suggested Materials

- Refreshments
- Sign-in sheet
- Informational printouts: NCJW background, issue briefs, etc.
- Pens
- Paper
- Nametags
- Easel paper ([see example here](#)) with markers or printed out community guidelines
- A copy of this "House Meeting Facilitation Guide"

Facilitator's Agenda

Introductions (10 min.)

- Invite individuals to go around and give their names and [pronouns](#).
- If not everyone in the group is familiar with NCJW, briefly introduce the organization and its history, and if appropriate, the issue at stake. Check out www.ncjw.org for more background information.
- Tell a brief personal story that explains why you are started or joined this team and why you care about social justice.
- Share the purpose of the meeting: to get to know each other and to discuss important issues you can take action on in your community as a team of NCJW advocates.

Conversation Guidelines (5 min.)

Review these guidelines for story sharing:

- When it is your turn, tell a story.
- Be willing to listen as much as you lead.
- Take risks: Try on news ideas and practices.
- Assume positive intent *and* take responsibility for the impact of your words.

- Keep all the comments to the time allotted so that we can end on time and ensure everyone has a chance to speak.

Ask everyone if they agree to these norms, and if they have additional norms to add.

Tip: Consider printing copies of the conversation guidelines or writing them on a large paper or whiteboard so you can refer to them throughout the program.

Story Sharing (30 min.)

Pose an open-ended question to the group to pull out personal stories and issues that are important to them. You can find sample questions below. Read a question aloud. Give each person about **2 minutes** to respond to each question. If you have a larger group, give each person 90 seconds or 1 minute.

- After posing the question, give everyone about a minute to think about what they will share, and let them know how long they have to speak.
- Consider providing note paper for people to write down their response so they can give their complete attention to the speaker as they wait for their turn to share.
- One of the meeting organizers should answer the question first to model a personal story and keeping within the allotted time. *Tip: It may be helpful for this meeting organizer to practice their story ahead of time.*
- Keep the meeting on track. If needed, gently let the storyteller know when their time is up. After each person responds to the first question, continue onto the next question and the next, time permitting.
- If people begin to break the community guidelines, respectfully remind them of the norms everyone agreed to follow.

Feel free to use these sample questions, or create your own:

1. Within the last year, what is one moment where you saw a social justice issue at play and felt called to act? Some issues you might consider are abortion access, immigration or judicial nominees.
2. What is one issue you want to raise awareness for in your community? Why?

or Why do you want to raise awareness about X issue in your community?
3. What is one time you felt powerful? This could be within or outside of a social justice context.
4. What skills, experience, or expertise would you like to bring to the group? What skills would you like to strengthen?

5. What community connections or relationships could you draw upon to expand our efforts? (*Tip: Consider facilitating the network mapping exercise following this question.*)

Discussion and Ask (10 min.)

The goal of this section is for the group to collectively process the stories shared and to end the meeting with an ask of the group. The role of the facilitator is to offer guiding questions, time checks, and community guideline reminders. Here are some example questions:

- Did you notice any common themes in our stories?
- What feelings did the stories elicit for you?
- Did anyone's story specifically resonate with you? What aspect of it resonated?
- What issues stood out the most as potential priorities for our team to work on?
- What leadership skills do we have in the room?

Close the discussion with a summary of common themes and continue to 'the ask.'

The Ask:

At the end of the meeting, ask the group to commit to a next step. The meeting organizer(s) should decide before the house meeting what next step is best for your action team. This could be signing up for an action, agreeing to help plan the next meeting, or joining a phone call. This helps everyone stay accountable and keeps the group engaged beyond a single meeting. It also provides an opportunity for new leaders in the room to take on more roles!

To close, thank the group for coming and for sharing their experiences. Set the date for the next meeting or call, and share your follow up plan with everyone.

Optional: End with giving everyone the opportunity to thank someone or the whole group for sharing, especially if stories were emotional or personal.

Make sure to follow up within 48 hours with a summary of the meeting and commitments, details for the next meeting, and other next steps!

Adapted in partnership with JOIN for Justice.