

FIVE STEP GUIDE TO WELCOME DINNER



change **X**

WELCOME

“Welcome to United Invitations! We hope you’ll join our growing movement, welcome a new arrival in your community to dinner and together we can build a more integrated society, one meal at a time.

Here you’ll find all the information, practical tips and resources you need to make it happen.”

Ebba Akerman, United Invitations



Introduction to the Idea

What is Welcome Dinner?

United Invitations is a welcoming movement that has been growing across Europe and the world. A Welcome Dinner is a simple idea that brings people together, no matter what their background, to share a meal. It’s all about food, language and social interaction.

The meal is a dinner, free of charge in someone’s home or in a public space e.g. a local community center or coffee shop. The meal takes place with no strings attached, and signing up includes no obligations apart from serving food at an agreed time. Hosts and guests participate out of their own free will and with responsibility for themselves. At least one of the participants should be a person who has recently arrived from a different country and is looking to be more integrated into the community.

Why is it important?

People arrive in our communities every day, some have been here for years but it can be very difficult to find a place in our society, often not having the opportunity to meet and talk to others who live here. The best way to learn a new language is by speaking it regularly, but many immigrants do not know a single native speaker. On the other hand, many people also do not know any newly arrived immigrants. By coming together and sharing a meal, cultural and language barriers can start to be broken down.

The Background

The first Welcome Dinner took place in 2014 in Stockholm, Sweden. Ebba Åkerman was the one who initiated it all, having worked as a substitute teacher at a Swedish language school for immigrants for a year and having been invited to amazing meals in her students’ homes. One day she ran into one of her students on the train and asked him whether he enjoyed living in her country. She found the answer deeply disturbing. The man shrugged, saying his life here was not much different from the one he had left behind in Afghanistan. It became clear to her that most of her students, living in neighborhoods packed with immigrants, had virtually no contact with native Swedes. In the months that followed, Ms. Akerman decided to try to change that, calling herself the Minister of Dinners in charge of the Department of Invitations and using Facebook and Instagram to try to bring individual Swedes and immigrants together for a meal. Since then there have been thousands of dinners taking place in Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, UK, Belgium, Ireland and now across Minnesota!

STARTING A WELCOME DINNER

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

TIME



Organizing, hosting and enjoying your Welcoming Dinner will only take a few hours. Once people have done one, they often go on and host many more but it's entirely up to you!

PEOPLE



You can organize the Welcome Dinner alone, with your family or with some friends, there are no rules. Then you just need to find people to invite.

FUNDING



The only cost involved is the food. But you don't need to make anything fancy - you can just up the quantities of your usual family dinner!

Who typically starts a Welcome Dinner?

Someone who:

- wants to help our communities become more integrated
- enjoys meeting new people from different backgrounds and cultures
- believes in making our society more welcoming

5 Step Summary

- 1 Research and Plan your Welcome Dinner
- 2 Connect with others
- 3 Set a date and invite
- 4 Enjoy the dinner
- 5 Spread the Word

Support and Additional Resources

Support from ChangeX: Call us at (507) 301-6614. Email: hello@changex.org

Support from United Invitations: Email: info@unitedinvitations.org

STEP 1: RESEARCH AND PLAN YOUR WELCOME DINNER

Welcome Dinners are all about bringing together locals (anyone who speaks the native language and feels “at home” in the country) and newcomers (anyone who was born in another country and is looking to be more integrated into the community). Although most dinners are hosted by locals, they can be hosted either by a local or a new arrival, and work well both ways.

You have already taken the first and most important step, by registering to host a Welcome Dinner. Congratulations on playing your part to make your community a more welcoming place!

Now it's time to think about what kind of dinner you want to organize, a small dinner in your home, or a larger dinner in a communal space such as a coffee shop, restaurant or community hall. If it's in your home, decide how many people you are happy to host, just one or two, or a larger family or group of friends. Are you happy to host families with children?

Other considerations are about the food - as it may be necessary to make changes to how you usually cook, for example if your guests only eat Halal food or are vegetarian/vegan.

Lastly, it's helpful to consider whether it might be possible to provide transport to your guests, as in some cases they might not have access to their own.

Having thought through these considerations, it will be easier to identify who to invite to the dinner and to communicate with them about what to expect.

CHECKLIST



- Location?
- Number of people?
- Children?
- Food?
- Time and date?
- Transport?

STEP 2: CONNECT WITH OTHERS

If you already have someone in mind that you would like to invite, you can move onto Step 3, but if not, here are some useful tips on connecting with people in your community.

If you're not even sure where to start, a good first step is to contact local immigration organizations. When newcomers arrive, there are government and non-governmental organizations who help them with the transition. A Google search of organizations in your area will help you find out where to start. Reach out to them and see if you can talk to the newcomers or send them information. Be sure to emphasize that it's free to attend for the dinner guest!

Another great way to connect is through existing language classes. A further possibility is to get in touch with places of worship in your area, as they often act as places of community and information for newcomers.

It's totally up to you how many people you invite, there are no rules! Most people invite someone and ask them to bring someone else along or maybe invite a family who can then just join your family. It will depend on whether you decide to do it in your home or host a potluck in a more public space. People of all ages and backgrounds can be invited, they may have just arrived in your community or they may be there for quite some time. Either way, making them feel more welcome and giving them the opportunity to meet others is what matters.

Alternatively, if you are new to the community, you can work on finding someone who is settled in the community to invite.

Here are some organizations that may be helpful in Minnesota:

International Institute of Minnesota:

<https://iimn.org/programs/>

CAIR Minnesota:

<http://www.cairmn.com/>

African Development Center Minnesota:

<http://adcmnnesota.org/>

ISUROON:

<https://www.isuroon.org/>

African Immigrants Community Services:

<https://aicsmn.org/>

Minnesota Council of Churches:

<http://www.mnchurches.org/refugeeservices/mankato>

Faribault Diversity Coalition:

<http://www.faribaultdiversitycoalition.org/>

Karen Organization of Minnesota:

<https://www.mnkaren.org/about/>

Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota:

<http://csc-mn.org/>

United Cambodian Association of Minnesota:

<http://ucamn.org/>

STEP 3: SET A DATE & INVITE

Once you have identified people to attend your Welcome Dinner then all that's left to do is invite your dinner guests and set a date and time that suits everyone. You can do this through ChangeX by setting up a local page - (it doesn't need to be a public page) or else you can do it simply by arranging the time and date through phone or text message with your guests. Don't forget to check in on the dietary requirements of your guests. Also make sure to check if your guests have transport arrangements to get to your home, and if not, maybe consider whether you could help them get there.

Once you have a time and date set, let the ChangeX team know so that we can keep track of all the dinners that are happening.

Don't forget to follow up with your guests to confirm the date and time 24 hours before and if for any reason you need to cancel or reschedule, make sure to do it in plenty of time.



Diana Otongo, Jonas Mphiri, Marina Aleixo and Umar Choudry share a laugh and a meal inside Aleixo and Choudry's Minneapolis home Sunday. *Evan Frost | MPR News*

STEP 4: ENJOY THE DINNER

This is the easy part!

You'll get to meet new people, learn something new and most importantly make your community a more welcoming place! It's normal to feel a little nervous before your guests arrive, but we promise, once you get talking over the meal it will be an enjoyable experience for everyone.

The only other thing you need to remember on the night is to take a couple of photographs!



STEP 5: SPREAD THE WORD

Upload your photo

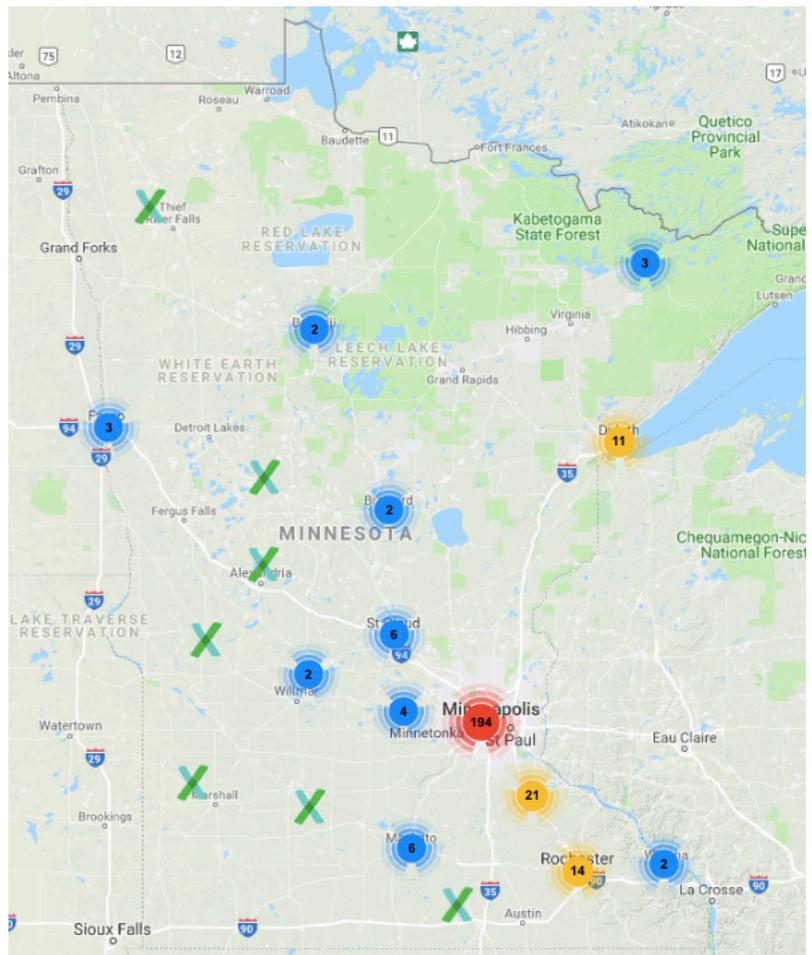
Once you've held your Welcome Dinner, remember to upload a photo with a quick update about how the dinner went to your ChangeX.org page, so that we know it happened and (with your permission!) can use it to inspire others to join the welcoming movement.

Tell your friends

Many people who host Welcome Dinners go on to host more dinners or continue to connect with their dinner guest, sometimes over a further dinner at the original guest's home where roles are reversed!

Of course, there's no pressure to do either but if you have a positive experience, please do share it with friends, maybe encouraging them to do the same and together we can all build a more welcoming society!

SPREAD THE WELCOMING!
Your Welcome Dinner will grow the existing map of Welcome Dinners across Minnesota.



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