

Tips for Planning an IF Discussion

1. Recruiting Participants – how to & who

- a. **Direct personal contact** is essential – ads and posters may create awareness but generate very little commitment
 - i. Follow-up emails, texts and phone messages are OK, but the ‘ask’ must be face-to-face
- b. **6-8 people** is ideal
 - i. Invite 1-2 extras to cover no-shows
- c. **Start with people you know** - friends, neighbors, relatives (social capital)
 - i. Make your first discussion a ‘slam dunk’ by recruiting a friendly audience. They will be understanding and provide the most honest and helpful feedback...because they like you.
- d. **People with interest** in topic (not looking for experts)
- e. **Diversity** – gender, age, occupation, location, length of time in community
- f. **Friends** of friends, spouses, children
- g. **Get commitments**, not ‘I’ll try to make it’
 - i. Get contact info – phone or email
- h. **Remind them** of specific time & location – 1-2 days in advance
 - i. Phone or email
- i. **Provide topical guidebook or other discussion guide in advance** – hardcopy if possible (IF provides at no cost) or link to online version on IF website if using email
 - i. Hand delivering the material(s) a couple of days in advance is a great way to remind participants and get their recommitment to attend

2. Location & Layout

- a. **Limited distractions**, quiet – limit outside noises, other people, pets, music, air conditioning
- b. **Comfortable** – seating, lighting
- c. **Flexible** – movable chairs, tables
- d. **Round or oval setup** – tables are nice but not mandatory, circle of chairs can work
 - i. Sight lines – can everyone be seen without straining
 - ii. Try to avoid traditional rectangular tables
- e. Avoid traditional classrooms if possible
- f. Consider public spaces like libraries, government buildings, community or senior centers, churches, banks
 - i. Best if there is a conference room, private room, secluded area suitable for this
 - ii. Will food be permitted?
- g. Private homes
 - i. Work best for 2nd session or where people already feel comfortable with one another

Discussion Setup Basics (continued)

3. Meals

- a. **Keep it simple** – you're there for the discussion, not the meal
 - i. Takeout is ok, pizza, subs, veggie trays, etc. can work
- b. Plan well in advance – try to **avoid ordering off menus** if possible
- c. **Beginning of session is best** so it doesn't interrupt the discussion
 - i. Lunch for a 12 – 3 pm session (sometimes better for parents with children in school, also preferred by many seniors who don't like to travel at night)
 - ii. Supper for a 6 – 9 pm session (It's after work and they had to eat anyway.)
 - iii. Exception for a single day-long session (10 – 3) where mid session offers a good lunch break
- d. If at a restaurant **talk to wait staff in advance** about limiting interruptions
 - i. Consider restaurant's least busy hours
 - ii. Tip generously if holding a table for an extended period of time
- e. **Consider pot-luck** for at home meetings
 - i. Better with groups that feel comfortable with each other
 - ii. Good second session alternative
 - iii. Can be challenging for busy people
- f. Rule of thumb – **plan on 30 minutes for the meal**
 - i. You may be able to get into the discussion during the meal. Works in some cases and shortens the length of your sessions

4. Time – length/frequency of sessions, best days, time of day

- a. **Two sessions a week apart** is ideal
- b. **Session length of 2-3 hours**, which includes time for meal
- c. Evenings, 6-9 is most often used just remember that people just back from work might get tired so watch for signals and adapt as needed.
- d. **Single one day sessions can work**, 4-5 hours including meal with meal in middle as a break
- e. Start on time (If possible)
- f. **End on time – ALWAYS**, no exceptions (people can hang around and continue talking and socialize but only if they choose to do so)
- g. Select a time that works for you – then build around that
- h. If working with a specific group, surveying them for best time is ok, just remember that no one time works for everyone