

OPEN SOURCE

Instructions for Intervention in Public Space

How to Organize a Stranger Dinner

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The Stranger Dinners is a series of chance events. Six strangers come together to create a collaborative meal (potluck), producing the potential for serendipitous meetings and unexpected happenings. This event engages individuals in a unique situation of spending one night at an intimate gathering with people they may have never met, and may never see again.

This project explores the idea of individual self-expression and temporal intimacy, and allows guests to explore the freedom of interacting with new people outside of expectation, commitment, prior knowledge, or self-segregation. Guests are also encouraged to bring any other items they would like to use as entertainment, conversation starters, favors, or show and tells.

Step 1: *Think about why you want to have a Stranger Dinner.*

Some of the reasons you think of may be a reason people decide to attend. Write down your intention for the dinner, and what you hope to experience. Include this in your invitation, and you will attract people who want the same thing, and who are open to letting that experience happen.

Step 2: *Invite Strangers.*

The safest way to organize a dinner is to make invitations and ask a diverse array of friends to invite someone they know. If you go this route, your friends will have vouched for your guests, but make sure you leave plenty of time for invitation delivery RSVP. If you want to start a dinner series, you can ask the guests to invite the next round of strangers, turning the dinner into a kind of chain letter.

You can also use the Internet. Use a community email list you trust, your own personal contacts, or even a niche local blog or arts calendar. Pick the guests out of a hat, or just confirm the first 6-10 people who email. Follow your gut. Invite them a week before the event, so they don't have time to forget about it and make other plans. Invite 1-2 more guests than your ideal number in case someone flakes. Six people ensure a nice intimate affair, while ten favors the outspoken and socially adept.

Step 3: *Send a Reminder.*

A couple days before the dinner, send your guests a reminder email. Restate the time, day, intentions, and location of the dinner, as well as any special instructions. I ask my guests for a question or topic they would like to explore with strangers for an added confirmation and to use as an ice breaker if the conversation gets slow. Often you won't need them, but they're good to have.

Step 4: *The Day of the Dinner.*

Get your space ready for guests. Make it easy for people to come in, relax, put down their stuff, and make any food preparations. Think of the mood you want to set, then set it. I don't like to tell people what to bring for the potluck to keep it a surprise. There is no need to spend all day preparing something gourmet. Depending on my mood, my budget, and my schedule, I make sure my potluck item is stress free and delicious. Stranger Dinners, unlike other dinner parties, are great places to try out new recipes. If it turns out bad, there will be plenty of other things to eat, and you never have to see these people again.

Step 6: *Let it happen.*

Now all that is left is to sit back, relax, and let in the strangers. Be a courteous host. Make sure everyone feels safe, comfortable, and is never without something to drink. Help people do their final preparations for their dish if they need it, and don't be afraid to use some ice breakers if things aren't flowing naturally. People are there to hang out, and after a while you'll be talking like old friends. When its time to leave, thank everyone for coming. Make sure they get any dishes or leftovers they brought to take home, and if they would like to exchange contact information, send a group email to everyone revealing their email addresses.