



Facilitating Shared Tables

with Care and Consideration

A Facilitation Guide

**SHARED TABLE WITH
KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR,**

What Is Know Your Neighbor?

Know Your Neighbor exists to help San Antonians engage the story of the city and discern their role within it.

We help people who shape the city's institutions, culture, and future encounter San Antonio more fully and carry that understanding into how they live, lead, and relate.

As part of the H. E. Butt Foundation, this work lives into our mission of cultivating wholeness in people and institutions for the transformation of communities.

Key Shifts

Our work is oriented around three critical shifts:

- **From Limited Awareness to Deeper Understanding**
Grasping how city history, design, and systems have shaped our neighborhoods.
- **From Distance to Relationship**
Learning to build bridges across neighborhoods and lived experiences.
- **From Concern to Responsibility**
Discerning what neighboring requires within one's own sphere of influence.

What Is a Shared Table?

A Shared Table is a facilitated conversation that invites people to explore a topic affecting San Antonio by listening to the stories and perspectives of their neighbors with different lived experiences.

Shared Tables can be hosted among people who already know one another, such as teams, boards, congregations, or friend groups, or among people meeting for the first time.

At a Shared Table, we:

- Listen carefully to one another
- Speak from personal experience
- Slow down rather than rush to solutions
- Make room for complexity and uncertainty

What a Shared Table Is Not:

- A debate or persuasive conversation
- A training or expert-led workshop
- A planning meeting or action session
- A space where everyone is expected to agree

The purpose of a Shared Table is learning, reflection, and discernment.

How to Host a Shared Table

You do not need to be a skilled facilitator or have extensive knowledge of the issues. You only need to take the first step—invite.

Invite a few friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors to join you for a conversation. You'll watch a video about a particular topic and then engage in conversation.

Choose a topic from the Know Your Neighbor website and follow the discussion guide provided. The goal is not expertise but curiosity and honesty.

You Will Need:



HOST
(YOU)



4-8 GUESTS
PER TABLE



TWO
HOURS



DISCUSSION
GUIDE



FOOD



A PLACE
TO MEET

The Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator's role is not to teach, persuade, or provide answers.

Your role is to hold space. Facilitators create the conditions for honest reflection, respectful listening, and meaningful connection across difference. You help the table stay rooted in curiosity rather than debate and relationship rather than resolution.

What Facilitators Do:

- **Set the tone**
Model warmth, humility, and openness from the start. Your presence signals that this is a space where people are seen and respected.
- **Hold the structure**
Guide the group through the questions, honoring time while allowing space for depth.
- **Encourage balanced participation**
Invite quieter voices and gently limit those who may dominate, always with kindness.
- **Model curiosity**
Ask questions that deepen reflection rather than push toward agreement.
- **Name what's happening in the room**
It's okay to acknowledge silence, emotion, discomfort, or tension. Naming it often helps people stay present.
- **Synthesize meaning**
Help the group notice patterns, themes, and shared humanity.

What Facilitators Do Not Do

- Debate participants
- Share long personal stories that shift focus away from the group
- Rush people toward consensus or solutions
- Try to "fix" discomfort—discomfort is often part of learning and listening

Balancing Participation

One of the facilitator's main responsibilities is to help create equitable space—so that no one voice carries the conversation and no one is left out of it.

When Someone Is Participating A Lot

Some people process out loud or feel urgency around the topic. Their engagement is often generous but can unintentionally crowd out others.

What to do

- Affirm first then redirect
- Shift from individual sharing to group invitation
- Use time and structure as allies

Helpful language

"Thank you for sharing that. I want to pause us here and make space for a few other voices."

"I'm noticing a few voices carrying the conversation, and I'd love to widen the circle."

When Someone Is Participating Very Little

Quiet participation does not mean disengagement. Some people are reflecting internally or still discerning whether they feel safe to share.

What to do

- Invite without pressure
- Normalize passing
- Offer multiple ways to participate

Helpful language

"(Call by name) we haven't heard from you yet. Would you like to add anything to the conversation?"

"No pressure at all—you're always welcome to pass or just listen."

The Facilitator as Synthesizer

In addition to holding space, facilitators help the group notice meaning as it emerges. You are not summarizing to conclude or resolve. You are synthesizing to help participants see connections, tensions, and shared humanity.

What synthesizing looks like

- Naming themes across stories
- Reflecting tensions without resolving them
- Connecting personal experiences back to the topic of conversation

Helpful language

"I'm hearing both grief and resilience across what's been shared."

"There seems to be a mix of hope and frustration at the table today."

When Disagreement or Harmful Language Emerges

Disagreement is not a failure of the table. It often signals honest engagement. The facilitator's role is to keep the conversation rooted in dignity, curiosity, and lived experience.

When Participants Disagree

- Slow the conversation
- Redirect from general positions to personal experience
- Recenter the purpose of the table

Helpful language

"Let's return to our own personal experience with the topic rather than general opinions."

"We don't need to resolve this tonight. We're here to understand the topic more deeply."

When Language Is Harmful or Dehumanizing

Facilitators are responsible for protecting the dignity of everyone at the table.

- Interrupt calmly
- Name impact rather than intent
- Redirect toward respectful language

Helpful language

"I want to pause us for a moment. That language may land differently for others here."

"Let's speak from our own experience rather than making general statements about groups."

Guiding the Table Toward Next Steps

As the conversation closes, facilitators help the group transition from reflection to discernment.

The goal is not to assign actions or reach consensus but to invite participants to consider what they might carry forward: personally, relationally, or within their own sphere of influence.

We ask participants to:

- *Sit with problems rather than rush to solutions*
- *Reconsider how both wealth and poverty were made possible*
- *Discern how their leadership, resources, and decisions affect others*
- *Act faithfully within their own sphere—however modest or costly*

The cost may include time, attention, money, reputation, convenience, or control. It will look different for each person—but it is real.

A Closing Word to Facilitators

Facilitating a Shared Table is not about doing everything perfectly or managing every moment. It is about presence, care, and trust: trust in the people at the table, trust in the process, and trust that meaningful change often begins with listening.

You will not always know the right thing to say. You may feel moments of discomfort, silence, or tension. This does not mean the table isn't working. Often, it means people are engaging honestly.

What happens next is not yours to control. The work of a Shared Table continues long after people leave the room in how they see, listen, and act.

Thank you for offering your time and care to this work. It matters.

THANK YOU!