

Start Your Own Progressive Dinner Party

The Progressive Dinner Party is an easy and fun way to raise money and awareness for charitable organizations in your community. We emphasize ease and fun because we want people to look forward to our next event and to continue their support in the future. We think that many people are just waiting for an opportunity to be generous and just don't know where to start.

Here is a step by step plan for starting you own Progressive Dinner Party. Remember, keep it simple, work with friends whose company you enjoy and have fun! That's the secret to our success.

Lighten Up

- Before you get started, remind yourself and your partners that the goal is not only to raise money and awareness, but to have FUN. The more fun you have, the more people will want to come to the next event.

What's Your Passion?

- While we choose to benefit children and family-related charities, you might have a different passion: Civil rights? Animal rights? Voting rights? Women's rights?
- The most important thing to remember is to choose your passion, and educate yourself about what's in your own backyard.

Partner Up

- Ask a few friends, a sibling, your spouse, significant other, or anyone close to you who shares with your passion, to join you.
- Be sure these are people whom you really like, because you'll be spending a fair amount of time together!
- We have five "Operatives" in our group, four women and one fella. We suggest between two and five people, but choose as many or as few people as you wish.

Communicate with Your Guests

- We communicate entirely by email (to save time and money) and our lists are developed by pooling the names of our friends and their friends.
- Perhaps you're more comfortable with a more old-fashioned method (telephone? mailing postcards?).
- We do recommend exploring www.graphicmail.com. They offer a FREE, and very easy-to-learn, email newsletter service for non-profits (you don't have to be a registered non-profit, your emails just have to clearly communicate a non-profit goal). You can also manage your email lists through this web site.
- We set up an email address with Yahoo, and a couple of us regularly check it. That's how we receive our RSVPs, to that email account, which makes for great tracking.

Choose Your Charitable Organization

- This might have happened before step one, but decide who you want to benefit. As we said before, it's all about your passion, and making a difference in your community.
- Look in the newspaper for a listing of charities, do a web search within your community...or perhaps you already have one in mind. Maybe a friend has a close contact in a local charitable organization?
- Once you've chosen your beneficiary, just call and explain your goal – they will likely be thrilled with what they hear!
- Ideally you would be able to tour the group's location – it helps give you a better understanding of their mission. This is your chance to do some due diligence about the organization – what they do, who they serve, what is their annual budget, how they would use the non-discretionary funds you raise for them, etc.
- Encourage the benefiting organization to invite their employees, board, etc. (if you have enough space)
- We ask at least one representative of the benefiting organization to attend the dinner, bring brochures and speak for five minutes about the organization, and how the money raised by our dinner will be used. The presenter only needs to give a BRIEF talk. Believe it or not, five minutes is enough, especially if the PDP host gives a good introduction and the guests were provided with the group's mission beforehand.

Set a Date and Time

- We have our dinner parties on the third Sunday of every other month at 4:30pm.
- Perhaps for you Saturday mornings are easier? Tuesday evenings?
- Whatever is best for you and your group, make it happen! We do recommend making it regular – once a month, once every other month, just something easy to remember.

Choose a Location

- Whose home do you feel most comfortable having guests visit (and has enough space to accommodate your group?)?
- Once you host a couple of dinners, you'll find that friends begin to offer their homes as venues, but first you have to choose that initial host spot!

Set Your Price

- We ask for a \$35 contribution from each guest, keeping the price affordable for most people in our community.
- Perhaps you could ask for less, or more! It can be completely tailored to the size and scope of both your community and the organizations you're benefiting.
- We often find that guests are inspired to give more (which is fine with us!).
- WE DO NOT HANDLE MONEY. Each check is made out directly to the featured charity, and given to them the night of the event. Not handling money means NO BOOKEEPING!
- We count the total at the end of the evening before passing the checks to the organization's representative (although, checks do trickle in after the event, so make sure you get an updated total).
- Every dime raised goes directly to the featured charity.

Whom to Invite?

- To begin, just choose a core group, and watch it grow from there.
- Our initial invite list was our closest friends, then their friends started to join, and so on.
- Initially we just invited friends via straightforward emails, nothing fancy.
- Just invite the people you know who you think are interested in your organization – and who like to have fun!

What to Serve?

- We keep our menus simple – pasta, salad and bread is a typical menu.
- We serve white wine and sparkling water to cut down on potential dark beverage stains.
- The Five Progressives pay for the meal as their contribution to the cause, and bring the food to the host's house.
- Sometimes the host offers to provide food and or wine – and that is great, but not expected. What works for you in your community may be very different. Perhaps you would like to do a brunch or lunch, cocktail party, afternoon tea, barbecue or potluck. You decide.

Check back for information on:

International cyber dinners

Community partners

How to build a web site