

Make Shift Coffee House

How it Works for Hosts

April 18, 2019



Purpose

The purpose of the Make Shift Coffee House is to understand each other's political views; and hang out.

It's a calm and relaxed place for people to exchange and consider each other's different views with respect. It's not about persuading or converting each other, but simply listening and understanding where others are coming from.

In this internet age, it's easy to choose our sources of information and reinforce what we already believe. It's easy to build opinions in isolation, each of us interacting with our own computer screen. It's easy to avoid talking face-to-face. The Make Shift Coffee House is a face-to-face place, in real time, with good old-fashioned civic dialogue.

It's also a place where there is good live music, and good food and drinks. The music and coffee house atmosphere lighten the mood and help us see each other as friends and neighbors rather than as adversaries.

Hallmarks

Each Make Shift Coffee House has the following characteristics as its foundation:

- Free admission and a welcoming environment for all ages and all types of people.
- Diverse political perspectives and beliefs among participants, which often require deliberate recruitment.
- Respectful, neutral, humble, facilitation.
- Live music, free food, coffee, and other beverages.

Topics

Each Make Shift Coffee House has a specific topic and a corresponding single over-arching question. Conversations range widely and we never know "what we're going to get," yet there is always a central question advertised in advance and used to kick off the discussion.

These carefully worded questions are designed to attract people of all views, reveal how people see things differently, and not polarize people against each other.

Here is a list of topics and over-arching questions from which to choose:

- A. Role of government What should be the rightful role of government?
- B. Patriotism What does it mean to be patriotic?
- C. Values What are American values and what does America stand for?
- D. Guns Why is gun freedom, or gun control, so important?
- E. Most critical What is the most critical political issue today, and why?
- F. Our future How should America's future be different from its past?

Space

A Make Shift Coffee House can be held anywhere that's welcoming to all types of people. There is no charge. Anyone is welcome regardless of ability to pay.

The following paragraphs describe an ideal set up. Improvisation and adaptability are common.

Tables and chairs are arranged loosely in coffee house fashion. If needed, chairs can be "theater style" without tables and if that's the case it works well if the chairs are far enough apart so people can easily walk between the rows.

There is plenty of space for mingling and chit chat, preferably near the food and drink.

There are two wall spaces for taping up questions. One such space (to be used later in the program for the Debrief Session) is a good distance away from the band. The other wall space (for answers to the question) is visible from the entrance. Next to each wall space is a table for papers, markers, and tape. The table is large enough (perhaps multiple tables) for multiple people to be writing questions or comments at the same time.

At or near the entry there is a table where people are greeted and invited to sign up on our email list.

The band or single musician is playing in a corner or off to the side, providing background music. Ideally the music is in a place that is visible yet not also such that the music is not too loud for those who want to talk. Ideally, the room is big enough that people have choices about how close or far from the music they would like to be.

Space should be booked for 1 hour before and 1.5 hours after the scheduled start and finish. For example, for a 6pm to 8pm event, the space should be reserved from 5pm to 9:30pm.

Format

In general, Make Shift Coffee Houses provide structure for different types of conversations in different types of settings.

Upon arrival each person is greeted at the door and invited in with a welcoming smile and a friendly gesture towards the coffee and food. Live music is playing and people are chatting in pairs and small groups. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, yet charged with a bit of excitement and even nervousness for what is to come.

At the start, Craig welcomes everyone and encourages people to write an answer to the question on the wall. He explains and even demonstrates how this works at the actual wall with the central question prominently displayed.

He also encourages people to get refreshments and strike up conversations with strangers.

While emphasizing it's completely optional, Craig might also invite people to identify their affiliation with a political party, or no party at all. People can affix stickers to themselves. Craig explains that blue stickers, red stickers, and white stickers are available on the tables; all circles about the diameter of a small coffee cup. Markers are available for people who want to write whatever they want on a white sticker.

Lastly, Craig encourages everyone to sit with people they don't know.

After about 10 minutes of music and mingling, Craig calls the room's attention and asks everyone to find a seat. The heart of the event takes place during the next 90 minutes where the whole group engages in a single, facilitated discussion.

Craig begins by explaining the purpose of a Make Shift Coffee House and the discussion guidelines. Craig then asks for a volunteer to kick-off the discussion by sharing their answer to the central question. From that point on, Craig calls on people and manages the microphones (if microphones are needed) and facilitates a lively, fun, and educational discussion.

During this discussion Craig looks for opportunities to facilitate a fishbowl conversation or two; that is, a small group conversation in front of everyone else. He also looks for opportunities to read the questions on the wall and perhaps steer the conversation in the direction of one or more of those questions.

At the conclusion of the full group discussion, Craig thanks everyone and encourages continuing conversations in pairs and small groups. He also encourages the conversations

to continue into the next day and weeks; and that people might want to exchange contact information.

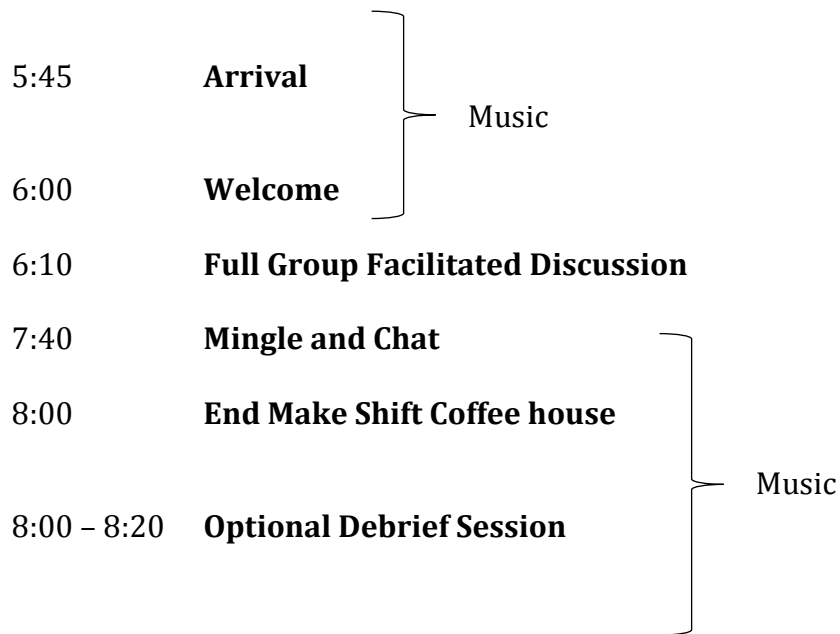
Craig explains that an optional Debrief Session session will begin in 15-20 minutes; an opportunity to reflect on the discussion we just had and identify things that contributed to respectful conversation. He encourages people to write “key ingredients for respectful conversation” on the Debrief Wall and demonstrates how that works (this is a different wall from the Question Wall that was previously highlighted).

Directly after adjournment people hang around to chat, have food and drinks, listen to music, and write comments on the Debrief Wall. Many people linger but some leave as they desire.

About 15-20 minutes after adjournment, Craig leads the Debrief Session for those who would like to stay. There is a gathering around the Debrief Wall and most people stand although some sit. Craig reads things that have been written on the wall and leads a discussion about “key ingredients for respectful conversation.” The Debrief Session lasts 20 minutes or so.

Timing

This timing is for a Make Shift Coffee House that’s advertised to run from 6pm to 8pm with an add-on debrief session just after.



Host Responsibilities

Venue

- Arrange, set up, and clean up.
- This includes helping Craig put up on-site posters and signs, and also distribute handouts to the tables.
- If it's a large venue, PA system availability and technical expertise may be required.
- Pay fees if needed.

Advance Local Publicity

- Print and distribute posters. We will design the poster and provide the digital artwork for printing.
- Publicize on social media, giving special attention to encourage "people who are different."
- Personal outreach – announce at other meetings and events – make personal phone calls.

Food

- Arrange and serve food and drinks (including coffee, of course).
- If food is donated, it works well to have signs that thank the sponsors.
- Pay for food if needed.

Music

- Arrange live music.
- The music should be instrumental background music.
- Good to promote the musicians in advance.
- Pay for music if needed.

Onsite Greeters and Wall helpers

- One or two people available at the welcome to table to greet people as they arrive.
- One or two people to staff each wall on which people post their own comments. It's helpful if whoever staffs the Question Wall has the ability to identify themes and particularly interesting answers, and is not shy about speaking in public.

Post Event Social Media Posting

- It's very helpful for local people to post positive social media comments, after the event; not to carry on the conversation, but to post about the event itself. For example:
 - Photos of the two walls with comments from the event
 - Encourage people to post and tag their own photos taken at the event
 - Comments about what people learned and what they liked about it

A Note about Outreach

In addition to local publicity mentioned above, proactively reaching out to “people with different views” is critical. In fact, the largest determinant of success of a Make Shift Coffee House happens before it starts: getting people with different views IN the room.

If you are a Democrat, deliberately and personally reach out to Republicans in advance of the event: phone calls, personalized emails, etc. And visa versa if you are a Republican. Actually making sure that diverse views are represented among your host committee is a good tactic. It is crucial that each Make Shift Coffee House draws people from across party lines and outside of comfort bubbles. Getting out of comfort zones and reaching out to “others” begins the moment you start planning a Make Shift Coffee House.

Craig will:

- Provide a digital version of the poster suitable for printing and posting on social media
- Create a Facebook Event Page
- Promote via our statewide email list and via other statewide channels

All Make Shift Coffee House promotions need to contain the following elements:

- Emphasis on understanding each other’s political views; it’s not a debate.
- All welcome. Live music. Free food and coffee.
- For more information visit MakeShiftCoffeeHouse.com
- Make Shift Coffee House logo

Facilitation

Craig provides facilitation at no cost to the host. This includes working with the host to define the topic, promotional language, and questions.

For More Information

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MakeShiftCoffeeHouse.com