

# THE LONGEST TABLE®



hosting  
toolkit

# Purpose

The Longest Table is a community meal designed to bring neighbors together, create new relationships, and strengthen trust across our region. Innovia Foundation's "Building Trust, Building Community" grant program supports this work through microgrants for community-led Longest Table events across Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

This toolkit is meant to help local organizers plan, promote, and host a welcoming event that feels simple, inclusive, and easy to adapt to their own community.



## What This Event Is

A Longest Table event is a welcoming community meal where people gather around a shared table or a series of connected tables to meet neighbors, share food, and build trust. Longest Tables are an opportunity to bring whole communities together around a meal and conversation that fosters understanding, reduces isolation, and strengthens trust.

This year, the event invites participants to reflect on America at 250 through conversation prompts that encourage meaningful discussion about where we are as a community and where we want to go next. Participants will also have the opportunity to contribute to Innovia's regionwide U.S. flag mosaic project by sharing a photo and reflection in response to the prompt, "What is your America at 250?"

# Planning Steps

1. Choose a location that feels welcoming and visible, such as a main street, plaza, park, campus, or community center.
2. Set your date during the grant window, between June 1 and September 30.
3. Set the time of your event. Successful events typically take place over a period of two hours.
4. Build a volunteer team early, including table captains, setup and cleanup crews, greeters, photographers, and outreach helpers. The Longest Table model uses volunteers to help hosts create a warm and organized experience.
5. Decide how registration will work and whether you will use RSVP forms, tickets, or simple signups. Clear registration helps organizers estimate food, seating, and table-captain needs.
6. Confirm logistics like permits, accessibility, weather backup plans, and youth activities.

# Roles

## TABLE CAPTAINS

Recruit small groups, help welcome guests, and keep conversation flowing.

## GREETERS

Welcome guests, answer questions, and help solo attendees find a seat.

## SETUP AND CLEANUP CREW

Arrange tables, chairs, signage, and post-event cleanup.

## OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS VOLUNTEERS

Promote the event and help bring in people who might not otherwise come.

## PHOTO AND STORY VOLUNTEERS

Capture images and reflections for the mosaic project and follow-up storytelling.

# Budget

A successful event can be simple, but you should plan for core costs. Common budget items include tables, chairs, linens, permits, printing, signage, name tags, shared supplies, food support, and small activities for children or youth. Innovia's grant program provides microgrants of up to **\$2,500** for eligible event costs.

## A practical starter budget might include:

- Venue or permit fees.
- Rental of tables and chairs.
- Tablecloths and simple decor.
- Flyers, posters, and social media graphics.
- Accessibility supports such as translation, interpretation, or large-print materials.
- Food support for guests who cannot bring their own contribution.
- Cleanup supplies and waste disposal.

# Promotion



Promote the event as a welcoming, free community meal rather than a formal program. Use short, friendly messages that explain both the social and reflective purpose of the gathering, including the opportunity to talk about America at 250 and contribute to the mosaic project.

## Good promotion channels include:

- Social media posts and community calendars.
- Flyers at libraries, schools, faith communities, businesses, and parks.
- Direct outreach to neighborhood leaders, civic groups, and local nonprofits.
- Personal invitations from table captains and partners.
- Local media and event listings.

A strong invitation should explain who should attend, what to bring, where to park, what happens if it rains, and whether kids and pets are welcome. Innovia funded Longest Tables should be open to all, kids are welcome, dogs are welcome on leash, and the event is free.

## Sample Messaging

### Short Invite

Join us for a Longest Table community meal to meet neighbors, share food, reflect on America at 250, and strengthen trust in our community. This free event is open to everyone.

### Social Post

Bring a dish to share, meet new people, and help turn a public space into a place of connection. Register now to reserve your seat at our Longest Table.

### Flyer Line

All ages welcome. Come alone or with friends. We'll help you find a seat and join the conversation.

# Day-Of Checklist

- Arrive early and confirm table placement, signage, supplies, and walkways.
- Make sure table captains know their seating groups and any conversation prompt materials.
- Have a visible welcome point for check-in and questions.
- Use name tags if possible, since they help spark conversation.
- Keep the tone relaxed and inclusive.
- Capture photos and short quotes from participants for the mosaic project.
- End with clear cleanup instructions and gratitude for volunteers.



## Accessibility And Inclusion

Plan for people of different ages, mobility needs, and comfort levels. The Longest Table model is designed to be open and welcoming, so think about seating access, restroom access, shade or weather cover, noise level, and interpretation if needed.

It also helps to welcome people who come alone, since many attendees may not arrive with a group. Table captains can play an important role in helping solo guests feel included right away.

# Post-Event Follow-Up

After the event, thank volunteers, partners, and attendees. Share selected photos, reflections, and short stories, since the mosaic project and the broader Longest Table effort both depend on participants' contributions and follow-up storytelling.

Use the feedback to learn what worked, what could be improved, and whether people want more gatherings. A short post-event survey can ask about food, seating, conversation quality, comfort, and ideas for future events.



# Simple Organizer Timeline

- 8–10 weeks out:** confirm location, partners, and grant budget.
- 6-8 weeks out:** recruit table captains and launch RSVPs.
- 4-6 weeks out:** begin promotion and partner outreach.
- 1-2 weeks out:** finalize logistics, supplies, and volunteer assignments.
- event day:** host, connect, document, and celebrate.
- within 1 week after:** send thanks and survey results.

## Notes for Hosts

This toolkit is intentionally simple so it can be adapted to your own community culture, space, and traditions. Innovia is grateful to The Longest Table founded in New York for the partnership, inspiration and technical support in bringing The Longest Table to Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

Contact the Innovia Foundation team with questions about hosting locally.