**What is a Dinner Salon (or Jeffersonian Dinner)?**

 The tradition of a Jeffersonian Dinner began at the home of Thomas Jefferson in the late 1800’s. A man of many talents and with a deep curiosity of the world around him, Jefferson was known to invite thought leaders and influencers of his time from a range of backgrounds and fields– whether it be the arts, sciences, current affairs, philosophy or literature — to share in conversation and debate on a particular topic.

By engaging in a single conversation, with only one person speaking at a time, Jefferson and his guests were able to unlock the power of their collective wisdom. The purpose was simple: to listen, learn, and inspire one another through meaningful dialogue around a particular topic.

Two hundred years later, Jefferson’s tradition continues to connect small groups of people in a more authentic way. These dinners are particularly valuable tools for engaging people, cultivating a sense of community and mutual learning that is authentic and meaningful.

Whatever your motivation is for hosting a Jeffersonian dinner from positioning you brand as a thought leader, spreading the word about a cause, getting feedback on new efforts, or brainstorm around ideas and partnerships, this 200-year old technique can provide the inspiring environment you’re looking for.

**How do I host a Dinner Salon (or a Jeffersonian Dinner)?**

**People** -it’s all about who you share it with

* Invite 8-14 people who you believe can make a meaningful contribution to the dialogue.
* Guests should represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, but share a common passion or interest around a particular topic.
* Try to avoid inviting individuals who are likely to own the conversation, as it can take away from the community building aspect of the experience. Make sure everyone feels empowered to contribute.
* Try to avoid inviting too many people that know one another closely, as one of the greatest benefits of this experience is connecting to new contacts, networks, resources and opportunities.
* Consider choosing a facilitator (or two) – this can be the host or other guest(s) you feel can help guide the conversation throughout the evening.

**Logistics**- setting the table, setting the stage

* In your invitation, share the topic or theme to be discussed over dinner, and ask guests to prepare a 1-2 minute response to an icebreaker question. The icebreaker question may or may not be related to the topic at hand, but make sure that guests are encouraged to include a personal anecdote or memory, as the purpose of this question is to create an immediate sense of intimacy.
* Once you have a confirmed guest list, you may consider circulating brief bios to all guests so they have an idea of the voices at the table.
* Choose a venue that is conducive to an intimate evening of conversation. Background noise can be a major challenge in ensuring that everyone can hear one another. Ideally, these dinners work best in a home or a private event space at a restaurant.
* All guests should be seated around a single table to allow everyone to participate in a single conversation.
* Craft a list of 5-10 questions that the facilitator can ask throughout the dinner when needed to stimulate the dialogue around your topic or theme.

**Dialogue-** the art of conversation

* Make sure to introduce the evening by welcoming your guests and introducing the structure of a Jeffersonian dinner. The facilitator should share the most important rule: there is to be a single, communal conversation happening around the table, with one person speaking at a time. No side conversations.
* The facilitator opens up the conversation by posing the icebreaker. Guests take turns sharing a 1-2 minute introduction of who they are and their response to the question. Ask other guests to reserve any follow-up questions until after dinner.
* Once everyone has been introduced, the facilitator will pose a broader challenge question that touches upon the evening’s theme and kicks off the dialogue.
* Let the conversation evolve naturally from there. The facilitator can help keep the discussion on track or re-engage certain guests by posing questions when needed. Remember to only speak one at a time!
* As the dinner comes to an end, the facilitator will ask each guest to share a “take away” from the evening. This can be an item they would like to follow up on after the dinner, a new discovery or insight they were exposed to, or something they were particularly inspired or challenged by. This gives everyone an opportunity to reflect on the conversation.
* It can be nice to encourage your guests to mingle with one another and allow for those side conversations towards the end of the night, whether it is during coffee/dessert, or after the meal has finished.