

STORYTELLING

with your Organizing Team

RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most important markers of a successful Better Together campaign is a sense of community among the leadership team. Obviously, planning events and service projects is critical to expanding interfaith cooperation. However, it is opportunities for building deep relationships while engaging across lines of religious and philosophical difference that make interfaith groups so inspiring and invigorating.

At Augustana College (IL), students felt they were spending so much time planning events that they weren't building the meaningful relationships critical to the success of interfaith work. The core leadership team decided to change how they ran their weekly meetings and created a special kind of storytelling meeting where a few members would share their personal stories with the group. Storytelling meetings became a quick favorite, and they continue to hold them today. **Better Together student leaders Vatina McLaurin and Annie Schone share their experience in this video**



This resource, based on the experience of leaders at Augustana College, explains how to incorporate personal storytelling into meetings with your Better Together student group. It will lay out the goals of a “storytelling meeting” and offer tips for running your own meeting.

PURPOSE AND GOALS

A Storytelling Meeting is simply a way to structure your time with space for stories and relationship-building during a regularly-scheduled meeting. You can still cover any major announcements in the first few minutes, but the bulk of the meeting should focus on the personal storytelling from a few volunteers with some time left for discussion.

As you plan your storytelling meeting, make sure you and the other group leaders understand the purpose and goals of the activity. There are many reasons to implement storytelling meetings including:

- to spice up your meetings by introducing a new, interactive activity;
- to create space to voice religious or non-religious values, experiences, and identities;
- to strengthen the sense of community among membership; and/or
- to practice your stories in a safe space before sharing them with larger campus audience.

GUIDELINES

Once the purpose and goals of the meeting are clear, you should decide what types of stories people will share. You could either focus on a theme or ask more general questions about their interfaith story. Here are some ideas:

- *What from your faith or philosophical tradition speaks to the issue of _____?*
- *What from your faith, philosophy, experiences, or values leads you to care about interfaith cooperation?*
- *Why did you join the Better Together campaign at _____ College/ University? Why do you keep coming back?*
- *Are there aspects to your identity you usually keep hidden? If yes, what are they and why?*
- *Were you the victim of or have you witnessed religious intolerance? What were the circumstances? How did this experience affect you?*
- *What inspires you the most about the potential of interfaith cooperation to change the way people interact with one another?*

You and other confident students should **lead by example** and be the first people to share your stories with the group.

It can be intimidating for some people to share intimate details about themselves in front of a group, so do your best to show it's not as scary as it might sound. One way to assuage these fears is to ensure storytellers feel adequately prepared before the meeting. Meeting with them to practice their stories a couple times would be a good idea for newer, more hesitant folks.

THAT'S PRETTY MUCH IT! To help you plan your meeting, there's a suggested agenda on the next page. Read it, share your ideas with your campaign team, and start telling your stories!

SAMPLE AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

➡ Do what you do for any typical meeting. Have everyone say their name and an interesting piece of information such as their favorite song of the season.

Announcements

➡ Since most of the meeting is set aside for storytelling, use this time to update the group about any upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, important religious holidays, etc.

Set the Safe Space

➡ Explain that the group may hear personal information during the storytelling. In order for the activity to be successful and for deep connections to be made, everyone must agree on some basic ground rules so the storytellers can feel comfortable being vulnerable with the group. Here are some we like to include:

- **Respect one another** and our differences.
- **Use “I” Statements**—that is, speak from your experiences only and don’t feel pressure to be the voice for your entire identity group.
- What’s **said here stays here**, what’s learned here leaves here (stress the confidentiality of anything said during the meeting).
- Be an **active and engaged** listener.

➡ You might already have some community rules for your group. If this is the case, take this time to remind people of the agreement they made to uphold those rules.

Storytellers (2-3 storytellers per meeting)

➡ Give storytellers 5-7 minutes to share their prepared story. Make sure they have some time in advance of the meeting to reflect on the prompt and craft the story they will share.

➡ Leave space for 3-5 minutes of questions for the storyteller once they finish. Take this time to ask clarifying questions if any part of the story was unclear.

➡ Often these stories include elements not usually shared in public, and people want to know more. This is a great opportunity to strengthen relationships, but be careful! The leader of the meeting should facilitate the Q&A to make sure questions are thoughtful and appropriate so that the storyteller remains comfortable.

Thank You and Reminders

➡ Thank storytellers for sharing, and thank listeners for asking thoughtful questions. Take the last few minutes to share final reminders and say your good-byes.

Easy as pie, right? **If you have questions or would like some input from IFYC staff** on what you have planned, let us know! Email bettertogether@ifyc.org to speak with one of our experts in Chicago, and visit www.ifyc.org/better-together for more resources on how to run a successful Better Together campaign.

