

Welcome Blanket Gathering: A How-To Guide

A welcome blanket is a great project to do on your own or with others. If you would like to join up with other participants, a Welcome Blanket Gathering is a powerful, accessible way to come together, create, and connect.

Plan in Advance:

Find a space. Choose a place where people can sit comfortably and be together for a while.

Pick a date. It may be a one-time get event, or a recurring one.

Decide on supplies. Will blanket makers bring their own supplies? Will you be providing them? Or, will supplies be available for purchase at the event (easy if the location is a local yarn store!)? Make sure your participants know how to access materials.

Designate a discussion leader: If you are planning to have a formal discussion, it is useful to choose an informal facilitator to help guide the conversation. She may or may not be the host of the event. She does not need formal group leading experience; we recommend someone who is passionate about the project, comfortable asking questions, is a thoughtful listener, and is inviting and warm so people feel safe to share.

Invite people. Once you have a location and a date, let others know by word of mouth, social media, email, and flyers. List it on our website, too: www.welcomeblanket.org/gatherings. (There may be some knit-curious folks who just want to be a part of the action but may not want to knit at the event. Make sure they know they are welcomed to join.)

Spread the word on social media. Follow @welcomeblanket on twitter, Facebook, and Instagram and use #welcomeblanket

Day-of Prep:

Information. Print out a flyer/welcome note template/pattern for each blanket-maker, all of which can be found [here](#) . If you have experienced crafters, great! If not, take a look at our handy [tutorial](#). You may want to print out a few copies.

Have snacks and drinks. It's best if snacks are easy to handle. Make it a potluck and ask for volunteers to bring in treats.

Discussion Pointers:

A knitting/sewing circle is conducive to sharing and listening to stories. Everyone in the room is there for a reason. Coming together to make a welcome blanket can be an opportunity to delve into constructive discussion and explore issues surrounding immigration with others who hold a similar interest, but perhaps not similar views. Below are some pointers to help get the conversation started.

(Note: If you are making a welcome blanket on your own— on the go or Netflix and chilling— these questions can be a springboard to think about yourself. If you have a journal, you can write down your thoughts, too.)

Creating an Open Atmosphere:

Set your intention: Before the discussion begins, take a moment for everyone in the group to set the intention to have a productive conversation.

Set ground rules: Regardless of what these questions bring up, it is advisable to begin the discussion with three ground rules:

1. Members must respect all the various experiences in the room.
2. Each member speaks on behalf of him/herself, not for a group.
3. Members are not required to share.

Set time frame: Decide on a mutually agreed upon time frame. Maybe the discussion lasts 45 minutes, an hour, an hour-and-a-half. Perhaps there is a set break time for people to stretch or get a bite to eat and then return to the discussion. (Note: Depending on how the discussion goes, you may want to end it earlier.)

Suggested Discussion Questions:

We know the political is personal. So how do we talk about our experiences in a constructive, safe way?

Below are suggested open-ended questions that may help contain the discussion. They are personal, policy-oriented, and community-based. Again, you know your knitting circle best. It's up to you. Gauge the comfort level in the room. Not each question is appropriate for every group. Don't feel like you have to ask and answer all of these questions at once. See where the conversation goes.

Personal Questions

My Story:

- What is your family's immigration/migration/relocation story?
- How did you learn about your family's immigration story?
- What sparked your interest in this project?

The Idea of Being the "Other:"

We have all been "the other" in some capacity, at some moment. It may have been taking a new bus route, living in a different country, or learning something new.

- Describe a time you were in a new place/situation. How did that feel for you? What practical/logistical things had been (or would have been) helpful for you then?
- How do you feel in a new situation? Scared? Excited? What factors play a role in how you feel?
- Think of a time when things suddenly changed completely for you. How did you handle it? What did it bring up for you? What helped? Looking back on the experience now, what would you say to yourself then?
- What makes you feel like you belong somewhere? Talk about a time when you felt like you belonged.
- What brings you comfort?

Community:

- What is community? What are some examples of communities you are a part of?

- How can we make spaces of welcome in our community?
- What steps can you take towards creating a community you long for?

Political:

- We have heard the phrase “politics are personal.” Thinking about this concept, what can we do about immigration policy?
- How has Welcome Blanket impacted your understanding of immigration?
- What would a good immigration policy look like?
- What is one action step we can take to move towards such a policy?
- When we talk about striving towards a “more perfect union,” what does that look like to you?

Wrap-Up:

Closing Questions:

- What was it like to take part in this welcome blanket gathering? What was positive? What is something you would change?
- What advice would you give someone who is considering participating in a Welcome Blanket gathering?
- What is one new thing you learned— either about yourself or someone else— in this discussion?
- The discussion— and the movement— have only just begun. What is one thing you will take away from this discussion that you may want to explore further?

Participants might want to continue talking once the discussion formally ends. That's great! Maybe ask the group if they want to meet up again, and, if so, make note of the questions that beg more reflection and discussion. Maybe ask the members to come up with their own questions they might want to bring to the next get-together. As long as the questions are respectful and on-topic, you're good to go.