

# United Invitations

## Guide to starting in a new city



### **Be part of a more inclusive society**

Connecting locals and newcomers over homecooked dinners. All across the world.

*Last updated September 2017*

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## **Purpose of this document**

This document aims to accomplish the following:

- Share United Invitation's mission, progress, and story
- Serve as a resource for how to start a United Invitations program in a new city
- Illustrate how the program started in Sweden
- Highlight resources available through United Invitations

## **Mission of the organization**

We want to enable newcomers to a country to feel more integrated in the local community through homecooked meals. We also want locals to take an active part in creating a more inclusive society and learning more about other cultures. By matching locals and newcomers, we can create a more connected world.

## **About us**

As people continue to migrate across the globe, there's never been a greater need for community and connection. And nothing is more important to someone's integration in a new country than a social network.

Founded in 2014 and headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, United Invitations is a nonprofit that connects locals and newcomers within a community, by having them share a delicious, homecooked meal. Our dinners are always served in the home, free of charge to guests, and with no other obligation than to eat together on a set date.

Today, the program extends into 8 countries and 50+ cities. We've had more than 5,000 dinners hosted and fed over 25,000 participants – we're excited to see how we continue to grow!

## Our story



*Ebba Åkerman, Founder*

As a substitute teacher in Sweden, I spent most of my time helping immigrants learn Swedish. Through that, I saw how difficult it is to learn a new language when you have no one to speak it with and how important language is to feeling at home in a new country. I also realized how segregated my hometown, Stockholm, really was.

Early on my students invited me to share delicious meals in their homes. It was a great way to learn more about each other and our cultures, and we quickly felt closer to each other.

I was convinced that if others could meet as peers over a homecooked meal, we could make the world a happier, more inclusive place.

And thus began United Invitations!

## Disclosures

United Invitations is non-governmental, non-profit organization with no ties to any political or religious institutions. It consists of anyone who chooses to volunteer and take part in the organization. All individuals maintain responsibility for themselves and their interactions.

## **How we built the program in Stockholm: A model for new cities**

*Note: This is just one example for how to start a program in a new city. Feel free to make any changes that work best for you and the mission.*

Overview of the different roles we enlist in Sweden:

- Newcomer: refers to anyone who has relocated to Sweden and is looking for more connection to their community. This includes immigrants and refugees who have been in-country for any period of time.
- Local: refers to anyone that feels settled in Sweden and is comfortable with the language and culture. Because language is so important to building a community, we expect our locals to be fluent in Sweden. However, locals do not have to be native to Sweden.
- Ambassador: refers to our volunteers who help coordinate the matchings and communications between newcomers and locals. There are often one or multiple ambassadors for every city and they spend a portion of their time on outreach to find locals and newcomers that are willing to join our program for the first time.

The process of starting the program begins by recruiting locals and newcomers. This is often done by a designated Ambassador when a city has enough activity, although it can happen organically as well.

We have had success reaching participants through:

- Facebook and Instagram posts
- Community leaders and their support
- Local media
- Local associations or organizations
- Bloggers
- Fliers distributed during other related events
- Word-of-mouth through friends
- Swedish Language Program (for newcomers learning Swedish)

Once we have made contact with interested participants, we collect the necessary information in order to enable a match between locals and newcomers for a dinner. Specifically, for each we collect:

- Name
- Gender – in case participants request someone of a similar gender
- Address or neighborhood – in order to pair with people close by
- Phone number – so participants can communicate once matched
- Email – for a post-dinner survey and ongoing communications
- Dates/Times of convenience – understanding when people are available
- Dietary restrictions – so the host can be prepared when cooking
- Allergies – to foods or pets, for convenience when matching

We also identify whether a participant would be willing to be a host or the guest for the meal. Either a newcomer or a local can be the host. The responsibility of the host is to prepare the meal and invite the guest into their home. Each dinner must have at least one host and one guest. In our experience, it is often easier to start with a host and find guests to attend the dinner.

With these details, the Ambassadors have enough information to match dinners.

Matches are done at least 3 days in advance of a desired dinner time to allow for enough time to prepare the meal and coordinate for travels.

When a pair is identified, the Ambassador calls each participant to ensure the specific day still works for both. They also check if either participant will be bringing additional guests (for example: a partner, friend, family member) to the meal.

If both confirm and are ok to still meet, then the host is given the phone number of the guest. With the phone number, the host can call or send a

text message to the guests, formally inviting the participant. They will also share the specific address for and directions to where the meal will occur. Any changes to timing or location are handled between the participants.

The participants then meet and enjoy a delicious meal together!

In the event a meal needs to be rescheduled entirely or cancelled, participants should let the Ambassador know so they can help coordinate another meeting.

The day following a dinner, a survey is emailed to all participants asking about the experience and the impact it's had on them.

Two months following a dinner, a second survey is sent asking whether the participants are still in contact and if they've met in-person again.

Based on our current survey results in Sweden, we have seen that 96% of newcomers feel more integrated into the community and 97% of locals feel that they're contributing to a more inclusive society after one interaction. Also, more than half of participants continue to interact after the first meal.

## **Resources you can use from United Invitations**

For cities that receive enough interest from participants, United Invitations can offer some resources to help scale the efforts, including:

- Awareness through the United Invitations website – get added to our map of cities covered!
- Promotion through our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, and Flickr)
- Access to a community of ambassadors for questions and support
- Access to the headquarters team for questions and support

- For our most active participants, travel and accommodations are covered for you to come join our annual retreat with ambassadors to share information and learn about the organization's progress

Let us know what else you need and we'll do our best to support you!

You are about to be part of an important movement. Thank you in advance for all your efforts!



## Contact us

Visit our websites:

[www.Unitedinvitations.org](http://www.Unitedinvitations.org)

<http://invitationsdepartementet.se/>

Email us at:

[info@unitedinvitations.org](mailto:info@unitedinvitations.org)

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