

**AMERICA INDIVISIBLE**

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An American's Digital Guide To

# BEING A CIVIC NEIGHBOR



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# WHY BE A CIVIC NEIGHBOR?

We are America. All of us. People from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, races, and cultures. America was founded on an idea: the self-evident truth that all are created equal, with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That is why the motto “E Pluribus Unum” is part of the Great Seal of the United States – because out of many we are one nation, indivisible.

As each other’s neighbors, we constantly construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct our identities and communities, ever striving to create a more perfect union that lives up to our founding ideals. And while we have overcome a great many challenges as a nation, the struggle against bigotry and discrimination continues.

This [digital, clickable](#) toolkit provides ideas and examples of how each of us can build an America that respects the equality and dignity of all individuals. Although these examples focus on Muslim, Sikh, Arab, Black and South Asian Americans given the recent rise in hate crimes targeting these communities, this guide is really for anyone seeking to promote the American values of equality, inclusion, and unity. Use it, share it, and tell us about how you live out these ideals. America Indivisible is a coalition effort, and we are neighbors together in this cause.



There isn’t just one way to be a civic neighbor. You might make an effort to wave to the couple who live across the street as they head to work every morning, greet the new residents at the monthly neighborhood safety meeting, or host viewing parties for March Madness and other sports events. Some neighbors may link arms and work together on shared concerns and others might nudge each other to be their best, through advocacy and activism.

However you connect with your neighbors—waving hello, shaking hands, linking arms, or through a friendly nudge—productive, resilient, and cohesive communities require residents to be more than strangers. To build a truly inclusive and indivisible America, we all have a responsibility to each other, as civic neighbors. Here are four ways to do it.

## The Wave



## The Handshake



## The Link



## The Nudge





# FOUR WAYS TO BE A CIVIC NEIGHBOR

## The Wave: Introduction & Education



One of the simplest ways to be a civic neighbor is through introduction and education. Greet your neighbors and know their names. Here are some ways to master the wave.

**STEP 1: GET FAMILIAR WITH THE FOLKS ON YOUR BLOCK. INTRODUCE YOURSELF, SHARE HOLIDAY MESSAGES, AND LEARN YOUR NEIGHBORS' NAMES.**

This California mom baked and distributed chocolate chip cookies to get to know her neighbors.



**STEP 2: EDUCATE YOUR NEIGHBORS ABOUT YOUR VALUES.**

*“We learned our neighbors names and chatted about their lives. We even came upon a family wedding celebration. An elderly neighbor commented on how it’s a delight for her to see my girls play in the neighborhood. She promised to bring them a gift, and sure enough, she stopped by a few days later to deliver some stuffed animals.”*

This Austin Muslim community responded to an act of arson which burned down their Islamic center by speaking at the local Rotary Club and reaching out to educate their neighbors.

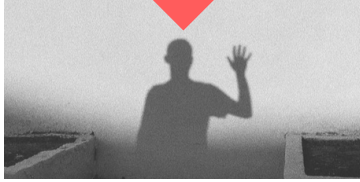


This Champaign, Illinois Muslim community hosted a “Know Your Muslim Neighbor” event at a local Illinois Public Library.





### The Wave: Introduction & Education



### STEP 3: HOST AN OPEN HOUSE AT YOUR COMMUNITY CENTER OR HOUSE OF WORSHIP.

This Muslim community in Oklahoma hosted an Open Mosque Day.



This Chattanooga, TN Muslim community hosts an annual "Meet Your Muslim Neighbor" event and hosts a weekly radio program by the same name.



### STEP 4: REACH OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORS THROUGH THE LOCAL PAPER.



This community in Dothan, Alabama invited journalists from the local newspaper to observe nightly prayers during Ramadan.



Looking for more ways to get acquainted with your neighbors? Try these resources and toolkits.

- Know Your Neighbor Campaign
- Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue
- Open House Gurdwara toolkit
- Host a Living Room Conversation with your neighbors. Try these topics:



This San Francisco, California woman offered to answer questions about her values and identity over coffee by placing an ad in the local paper.

- \*What are American Values/Ideals?
- \*The American Dream
- \*The America We Want to Be
- \*Increasing Harmony and Prosperity



### The Handshake: Conversation & Acquaintance



So you've mastered the wave and know your neighbors' names. They know a bit about your values and you've exchanged holiday greetings. The handshake is all about kicking it up a notch by engaging in conversations and making acquaintances through sustained, meaningful interactions.

#### IDEA 1: JOIN A LOCAL CLUB OR ASSOCIATION.



This group of Boston-based Muslim women started a book club with their interfaith neighbors.



This group of Illinois Muslim women and their Evangelical neighbors meet for monthly dialogue at a local restaurant.



These girls, and their parents, in California are actively involved in their Girls Scout Troops

#### IDEA 2: HOST A SPORTS WATCH PARTY OR A NEIGHBORLY MEAL



This Michigan chef invited her neighbors over for dinner and started a national movement called "Dinner with your Muslim Neighbor."



This Minnesota community hosted a Super Bowl watch party at a local house of worship.



This Alaskan imam joined forces with a local Pastor to bring together Muslim and Christian neighbors for shared meals and community bonding.



These Seattle friends started the national "Eat with Muslims" campaign!



### The Link: Action & Common Cause



There's a good chance that after the friendly waves and handshakes you've discovered you've got some things in common with your neighbors. Maybe you come from different religious or cultural backgrounds but you both care about similar causes. Consider linking arms with your neighbor by working together on local projects.

#### IDEA 1: DO COMMUNITY SERVICE WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS

#### IDEA 2: JOIN A COMMITTEE OR CIVIC PROJECT.



This Connecticut Muslim-Jewish women's group meets monthly for community service, field trips, and dialogue.



This Texan became the first Muslim to serve on the Euless City Council.



This Saint Louis Muslim community holds an annual day of community service on Christmas with their Jewish neighbors.



This Detroit Muslim group partners with neighbors to renovate and rehabilitate vacant properties and neighborhood blocks in need of repair.



Looking for more ideas on common action projects? Try these toolkits.

-Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Advocacy toolkit

- Interfaith Youth Core event toolkits



### The Nudge: Advocacy & Accountability



Neighbors and neighborhoods are not all the same and they're never perfect. Are there ways your town could be more inclusive? Or ways that your block could be safer? Or perhaps your local schools could be more welcoming? Sometimes, being a civic neighbor means nudging our fellow Americans to be more aware about our values and our concerns. This involves advocating for particular issues and holding each other accountable when things could be better.

### FIND AN ISSUE YOU CARE ABOUT AND START ORGANIZING WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS.



This diverse group of Muslims joined in solidarity with the indigenous communities in North Dakota to call attention to the harmful impact of the Dakota Access Pipeline.



This Chicago Muslim community joined forces with their neighbors to call for criminal justice reform and an end to mass incarceration.




This Atlanta Muslim community met with their Baptist neighbors to also advocate for an end to mass incarceration.

“In organizing, you have to get to know your neighbor [and] the people who are directly impacted in your community.”

Imam Mansoor Sabree, IMAN Atlanta Director, speaking on an Economic and Community Development panel for the International Museum of Muslim Cultures in Jackson, MS



# THE SCIENCE BEHIND CIVIC NEIGHBORLINESS

**Multiple independent polls over the past several years have all found that nearly half of Americans don't know a Muslim.**

62% of Americans seldom (26%) or never (36%) have conversations with Muslims. 83% say they know a little (57%) or nothing (26%) about Islam. (PRRI, 2015)	55% of Americans say they do not know a Muslim. (YouGov and Economist, 2015)
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7 in 10 Americans said they have seldom or even never had a conversation with anyone who is Muslim in the past year. (2011 PRRI)	62% of respondents say they don't personally know a Muslim American. (Time, 2010)
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"Nearly half of U.S. adults (47%) say they do not personally know a Muslim, while a similar share (52%) do know at least one person who is Muslim." (Pew, 2016)

**Personal knowledge and relationships make a huge difference in how people perceive others.** If more Americans personally know a Muslim, those people will be less likely to believe anti-Muslim propaganda. This proposition is backed up by data and by the experience of other communities in America.

Americans who interact with Muslims hold more positive views of Muslims. (PRRI 2015)	"The more likely a person is to know a Muslim, the more likely she is to express positive feelings toward Muslims as a group." (FiveThirtyEight)
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Those who know LGBT individuals have substantially lower levels of discomfort and prejudice. (GLAAD, 2015)	"Those who know a Muslim personally are much more likely to regard them as good neighbors and as hard-working." (YouGov and Economist, 2015)
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**Mere exposure is not sufficient, but data clearly indicates that personal knowledge makes a real difference.** Political Scientist Ashutosh Varshney refers to this as "everyday forms of engagement." These interactions can be found in most towns and cities across the country, where neighbors greet each other warmly or make pleasant small talk in the grocery checkout line. Varshney and other scholars like Social Scientist Robert Putnam argue that a deeper form of engagement comes from associational ties ([Varshney](#)) and norms of reciprocity ([Putnam](#)).

In other words, when we join the parent-teacher association, attend club meetings, or organize an annual community service project with our neighbors, these interactions strengthen our relationships with each other and allow us to create peaceful and productive communities that live up to the American ideal.

At America Indivisible, we believe that all of these approaches, (a) promoting knowledge of Muslims and other diverse communities in a neighborhood, (b) building every day relationships between these folks, and (c) cultivating associational ties across these groups is the formula that will make us truly an America, indivisible.



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# HOW HAVE YOU BEEN A CIVIC NEIGHBOR?

SEND YOUR EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS  
TO [ADMIN@AMERICAINDIVISIBLE.ORG](mailto:ADMIN@AMERICAINDIVISIBLE.ORG)



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