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The Dinner Party is a community of mostly 20- and 30-somethings who have each experienced the loss of a parent, sibling, partner, child, or close friend, and connect around potluck dinner parties to talk about it. Since January 2014, we’ve grown from a few dozen people to thousands, currently active at nearly 250 tables in 100+ cities and towns worldwide. We’ve been featured on NPR’s Morning Edition, CNN, NYT, O Magazine, BuzzFeed, and dozens of other publications, and as a case study in various books: The Upside of Stress by Stanford psychologist and TED speaker Kelly McGonigal, The New Better Off by author and columnist Courtney Martin, The Power of Meaning by Emily Esfahani Smith of the Wall Street Journal, and Michael Hebb’s Death Over Dinner.
WE ARE
DINNER PARTIERS
WE KNOW WHAT IT IS TO LOSE A LOVED ONE AND WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT

We hold the following truths to be self-evident:
Life after loss is forever different than life before, grief isn't linear, and moving forward is not the same as moving on.

There is no roadmap, no gameplan. You're your OWN BEST EXPERT.
This journey is yours alone, but you are not alone in journeying.

YOU'VE GOT THIS.

The commitments we make to each other are simple:

We will abstain from Bullshit
No whitewashing loss. No standing on platitudes. No phony.

We will speak our own Truth
and listen deeply, openly, thoughtfully as others share theirs.

We believe in thriving... not just surviving. We will not avoid the pain, but we will also seek out the joy. We will see each other through our worst days, and use them to create our best days. We'll take damn good care of ourselves and of each other. We will:

EAT WELL
BE WELL
LIVE WELL
LOVE WELL

Look around the table and pull up a chair. Cheers!

thedinnerparty.org
Covenant

Earlier this year, we put together our organizational covenant, reflecting on what’s worked and what hasn’t in the eight years since we first sat down to dinner. It guides what we aspire to be like with one another, as a staff and as a community, and the way we approach difficult conversations.

WE ARE DINNER PARTIERS.

Our interest is not solely in what we do, but how we do it. We ask that every member of The Dinner Party community — from staff to hosts to Dinner Partiers — seek to model these core values and principles:

1. We care for our people.
   - We see each other through our worst days and celebrate each other’s best.
   - When we have the capacity and the resources we need to be of service, we serve.

2. We know that caring for our people demands we care for ourselves.
   - We trust that we are each our own best expert and we strive to name what we need.
   - We know that we are the work, and we treat our own wellness with the same standards with which we serve others.
   - We do not fear expressions of pain and frustration, but neither do we make ourselves a punching bag for pain.
   - We name our boundaries, knowing that martyrdom serves no one.

3. We are never alone.
   - We commit to collaborative leadership, and to creating an environment in which every member of our community can capitalize on their own passions and expertise.
   - We commit to asking for help, knowing that it is easier to give help than it is to ask for it.
   - We succeed together, we fail together, and what we build, we build together.

4. We refuse to make shit up.
   - We use data to learn and to make decisions with and for our community.
   - We admit what we don’t know. We ask questions, rather than presume we have answers.

5. We take play seriously.
   - We believe in joy as engine fuel, and we aspire to maintain full tanks — both in spite of and because of the experiences that brought us to this community.
   - We are disciples of Mary Poppins, and revel in surprise and delight.
   - We know laughter and tears are not mutually exclusive.
   - We use humor as a tool to disarm, to engage, to name the unnameable, to survive and to thrive.

6. We know that our hardest conversations are some of our most important conversations.
   - We choose to name the elephant, preferring to keep the tiny elephants tiny, lest they grow big.
   - We value honesty over pretense, and consider disagreement a hallmark of real relationships.
   - We strive for constructive conflict over destructive conflict and trust in our shared capacity to grow.
   - We take our conflicts and disagreements directly to the source.
   - We know that to be human is to screw up sometimes, so we name it when we do.

7. We believe that to be welcome in The Dinner Party is a basic right — one that we cannot attempt to claim for ourselves, and deny for others.
   - We exercise zero tolerance for racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of discrimination at the table.
   - We recognize that grief is not shared equally, and we seek to undo the systems of oppression that perpetuate trauma and loss.
Letter from the Executive Director

From one backyard to many

On December 1st, 2013, I sent an email to 16 friends and family with the words: “We envision a day in which anyone who experiences loss can join a Dinner Party circle, or access the tools and network to easily start their own. And we believe that, together, we can make that day a reality.”

That month, I quit my job, moved my mom’s life insurance money into my checking account, and held my breath as Carla and I and a group of friends pressed go on our first crowdfunding campaign.

In the five years since, a lot of things have changed. We dropped the word “circle” pretty quickly. We discovered that the hard part wasn’t, “will people come?”, but “how do we manage demand when they do?” Only in the last 12 months did we learn how to manage growth without losing quality, and how to sustain relationships at scale (hint: with more people holding those relationships). And some things have gotten easier: It’s a lot easier to connect strangers to one another when you have a community of thousands, and hundreds of tables in more than a hundred places. But what a Dinner Party is, and the vision for what this community could become, remains.

It took us a few years to realize that our work was less about grief than it is about combating the isolation and disconnection that so often follows a loss. It’s about making us less afraid of those parts of ourselves that rarely see the light of day. It’s about the fact that the last things we choose to talk about are precisely the things we should be talking about, and that choosing to cut through the superficial and go deep is actually an amazing way to create meaningful relationships.

Our origin story is one that has been told many times before: a handful of people sat down on a back deck in the Fall of 2010 for a meal, and the chance to talk about something they otherwise tried to avoid. But that’s not really our story.

Ours is a story of people like Alix Rosenfeld in Philadelphia, PA:

“When my mom died, I felt achingly alone. It was an isolation that I had never experienced before. But as soon as I started attending dinners about a month and a half later, that loneliness abated. It was kind of a Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz moment — I was stepping out of a completely colorless world and back into something that was richer and more vibrant than before. I felt like I could start reclaiming my life again.

The Dinner Party is life-changing. Full stop.”

Alix is not alone in her story. Today, there are more than 3,000 Dinner Partiers active at more than 250 tables around the world. Altogether, more than 6,000 people have sat down at Dinner Party tables since we began. In a recent survey, nearly three out of four respondents shared that The Dinner Party has been a transformative experience for them. In an age where we know how important but elusive real community can be, we are gutted and humbled by that response — and we are all-hands-on-deck to see where it can go.

To every person who’s lent us an hour or 100 hours of their time, to every person who’s donated and picked up the phone and offered up their wisdom and their brilliance, to every person, living and dead, who inspires us to live better and to love more: Thank you. This story is yours, too.

Here’s to the next five,
The Problem

We’re living in what’s been called The Age of Loneliness: We are more connected than ever before, and simultaneously more isolated. We rely on social media in place of face-to-face contact. Where it was once commonplace for families to live within the same town, migratory shifts and increased mobility have meant that families are often scattered across hundreds or thousands of miles.

- In 1985, one in 10 Americans said they had no intimate with whom to discuss important matters; in 2004, the figure was one in four.\(^1\)
- The American suicide rate has increased markedly in the last 15 years: Among individuals ages 10–34, it is the second leading cause of death.\(^2\)
- In a Cigna study this Spring, millennials and members of Gen Z ages 18–22 reported higher rates of loneliness than those of any other age demographic, including people 72 and older.\(^3\)

Interestingly, that same Cigna study found no correlation between loneliness and social media use: Young people with the highest rates of social media use reported similar feelings of loneliness to those who barely use it.

What made a difference? People who reported more in-person social connections reported being less lonely, whatever their age. This finding supports decades of research that have consistently shown that social relationships powerfully impact overall health and wellbeing.\(^4\)

There is no such thing as self-help in isolation. In touting the importance of wellbeing as a matter of personal and public health, we have failed to recognize its most essential ingredient: Our ability to thrive as individuals depends first on our building thriving communities.

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Since January 2014, we have served more than 6,000 people worldwide. Today, there are more than 3,000 guests and hosts currently active at nearly 250 tables in 100+ cities and towns in seven countries.

In August, with help from a Ph.D. evaluative sociologist, we conducted our first-ever survey of The Dinner Party community. We sent it to 2,456 current and former Dinner Partiers, and received 448 responses, with representation from 151 tables, 129 cities, 32 states, and five countries.

- 96% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they would recommend The Dinner Party to a friend who has experienced loss;
- 88% of respondents agree or strongly agree that The Dinner Party has helped them feel less alone/lonely around their loss;
- 84% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they’ve found a sense of community through The Dinner Party;
- 70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that The Dinner Party has been a transformative experience for them.
How It Works

Ours is a three-pronged process:

**STEP 1**
Screen, train, & onboard hosts

**STEP 2**
Connect would-be Dinner Partiers to tables

**STEP 3**
Provide ongoing coaching & support

We begin by screening, training, and onboarding new hosts: people who are peers, not experts, and can role model authenticity and vulnerability, while also listening and holding space for others. Our Community Management team then matches each host to 10-12 Dinner Partiers, considering factors ranging from type of loss, to neighborhood, age, shared interests, and affinity groups. From there, we conduct regular host check-ins and offer personalized coaching and trouble-shooting support to each table.

As we’ve learned all too well over the last few years, it is neither effective nor enough to say, “Hey, here’s 12 grieving people! Good luck!!” Building authentic community around some of life’s toughest challenges requires having staff members who are present to answer questions about the inevitable human issues that arise — from grief wars (i.e. my experience is “worse” or “harder” than yours), to wondering how to move past introductions into more meaty and meaningful conversations.

Yet, we also know that our volunteer hosts — and the members of their tables — have no reason to trust us with these inevitable challenges if we don’t take the time to build relationships. A cornerstone of our practice has become creating an environment where our hosts feel witnessed, seen, and heard, where they are humanized and understood for their deepest struggles in every interaction they have with our staff, with the hope that they are then able to make their Dinner Partiers feel witnessed, seen, and heard in return. This process includes regular check-in calls and emails once a host is on board, bolstering current host resources, and an active closed Facebook group for hosts.

This philosophy of practice has led to stronger tables and more meaningful impact. Tables gather quarterly at a minimum, though most of our tables meet monthly or bimonthly. Hosts commit to serving for at least six months to one year, though many tables have been gathering for two or three years, and some have been around for four years or more. Tables very often evolve with time: More than 30% of our hosts began first as Dinner Partiers, and we will gladly help our community find a new table should they move.

In addition to strengthening our in-person micro-communities, we are (finally!) gearing up to launch a mobile-friendly website to enable would-be Dinner Partiers to more easily connect to tables. In our community survey, over 90% of Dinner Partiers wanted increased autonomy in the table selection process and the ability to more seamlessly switch tables if needed. Our new website, which we’re affectionately calling TDP 2.0, will allow Dinner Partiers to view all of the tables in their area, select a table, and switch or try out different tables as needed, allowing us to invest our time in what we’ve learned matters most: relationship-building, coaching and trouble-shooting, and efforts to bring our community together across tables.
Our Impact: Case Studies

**Josh, Atlanta**
Josh is an avid Atlanta United fan, with a passion for music: he works in corporate finance, but plays bass in a band on the side. In October 2016, his wife, Anna, died at the age of 36 after a 21-month battle with brain cancer. “The grief journey has been incredibly difficult, beginning with diagnosis and continuing even today,” Josh wrote in his host bio. “However, throughout the process I have found comfort from sharing with others. Whether that be with a counselor, close friends, or with other grieving people, there is something to be said for opening up to another human.” We connected him with 10 others in the area, most of whom had also lost partners. “It’s given me a new purpose in life,” he says. And he’s not alone. Adds Misty, a member of his table: “I’ve met widows and widowers who are totally different than me and I love getting to know their lost loved ones and feeling more confident that I only need to do what I feel is good for me and my children.”

**Alee, Nashville**
Alee began as a Dinner Partier, and took over hosting duties when her host moved across the country. Attendance was significantly dwindling at her table and she was concerned about an incident at her most recent dinner that she feared would lead to her Dinner Partiers not returning. We hopped on the phone and coached her on how to revamp her table. We talked about her love of music and the relationship between music and grief. We matched her with a new group of people, with an eye toward others who also talked about music in their applications (this being Nashville after all). The results? The next day, Alee emailed with this to say: “Just writing to let you know that I had my first Dinner Party last night since y’all matched me with some people and oh my goodness. You did a fantastic job. It helped me recapture the magic of that very first time, and I will be forever grateful. I absolutely was able to identify a few folks who would be my go-tos, and the conversation we had was controlled, helpful, and all-around healing.” Following that dinner, she and the folks at her table had played music together, with one singing a song in honor of the person they’d lost.

**Kate, Amanda, Ryan, and Renee, Milwaukee**
Every other month, Kate, Amanda, Ryan, and Renee, together with a growing group of Dinner Partiers, gather in Milwaukee, WI. Four very different stories, bound by a common thread: Kate lost her partner in August 2017, at the age of 33. That same Fall, Amanda and Ryan lost their daughter, Greta Forte, and were searching for a way to openly talk about their daughter and what they were going through with others who’d experienced traumatic loss. Renee lost her dad to suicide a few years back, and her stepfather just one year later. She first learned of The Dinner Party through her sister, a host in Chicago. “[The Dinner Party] help[ed] me feel more connected to a larger lost tribe, which has been really helpful in my journey,” says Amanda. Adds Brianna, a member of their table, “I felt very safe and understood by everyone there in a way that I haven’t felt around people since before losing my mother. It was a very comforting experience and I appreciate that we were able to have ‘normal’ conversations with the understanding that we all knew where each other was coming from without having to explain.”
What Dinner Partiers are Saying

“The Dinner Party has been a wildly transformative experience. I remember how I felt at my first dinner, mostly listening and letting the tears roll down my cheeks, hearing my story come out of other people’s mouths. And then noticing the differences, and being in a space where that was fine too. I was struck by the setting (a 20-something’s apartment, not a hospital – thank god!), the vibe (held so lightly, by one of us, and therefore 1000% more authentic and accessible), and the camaraderie (perfection). I came home and spewed a million feelings to my partner, but the main one was: ‘finally.’”

— Dinner Partier, Berkeley

“I needed to find my people. I moved home to live with my mom after my dad died and I [had] no friends here. It’s been huge for me to meet other people my age going through similar pain. I love my mom but she doesn’t energize me and it’s painful to discuss the grief with her, I needed a community of peers and this is it. Infinite, infinite, thank yous for your work.”

— Dinner Partier, Philadelphia

“TDP has not only given me a community of people in my city who have become like family, but it has taught me an entirely new realm of language and practice in communicating and holding space for others and their stories. I am 100% a better person, a better friend, a better communicator, and a better leader because of The Dinner Party.”

— Host, Charlotte

“The Dinner Party made the biggest difference of any therapy, gym, talking to friends, vacation, or any other coping mechanism I’ve tried. And I’ve tried a lot.”

— Dinner Partier, NYC

“At the time of my first dinner, I was in a rough spot and was careless about my health and well being. I honestly didn’t think I had a future at all. Seeing those that survived the loss of a loved one years ago made me reconsider living life again.”

— Dinner Partier, Chicago

“In a nutshell, TDP brought me back to life after the unexpected loss of my father. Just knowing there was a community at my fingertips who intimately understood what I was going through was enough to help me relax into my grief process. That, combined with the fact that hosting has taught me to use my ability to cope with tough stuff with humor and compassion has helped me discover a side of myself that I am immensely proud of.”

— Host, Nashville
Q: Does everything happen around a dinner table? A: Nope!

Here’s a look back at a few of the partnerships and special initiatives from across The Dinner Party community in the last year:

**Regional Organizing**

We’ve consistently heard a desire from folks within our community to connect across tables, and not always over dinner. As one Bay Area member put it: “Dinner is the bedrock, and it really is an old faithful for me — I’m basically never disappointed when I go. But I’d love to get together to make art, be in the wilderness, write letters, be together in different ways.”

The results have been indisputably positive: 100–150 attendees at every NYC TDP Happy Hour; 80 attendees and glowing reviews from the panel in Philly; and many Dinner Partiers who have reached out to us to say how much it meant to them to walk into a room full of that many young people who no longer have their parent, sibling, partner, child, or friend and know, through the sheer quantity of attendees and the interactions that follow, that they are not alone.

**Outward Bound**

What happens when you replace a table with a camp re, and send a group of Dinner Partiers from across the U.S. into the backcountry for a five-day adventure in the wilderness? This Fall, we’re teaming up with Outward Bound California for the second year in a row to bring a group of Dinner Partiers ages 26 or younger together on a five-day backpacking trip in California. Writes co-host Katey Peck of last year’s trip: “As we made our way back home, nervous about returning to the real world, we all knew that we wanted to keep the party going. We decided we would try long distance and have reconvened as a Virtual Table spanning five time zones. We’ve continued to laugh, cry, and reminisce, bearing witness to the beauty and struggle of this journey together. I remain in awe of this special group of people who have turned their pain into gold and fill my cup with their presence, compassion, and honesty.”
**Love Crunch**

This summer, The Dinner Party was approached by Love Crunch, a family-owned, organic granola company based in Canada. They were setting out to create a video series telling the story of people who #DiveHeartFirst into something that’s near and dear to them. They included The Dinner Party story, and as a part of the production, sponsored a gathering of 8 of our best and brightest hosts in Los Angeles. You can watch the final video [here](#).

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**Father’s Day Takeover**

To mark Father’s Day this year, we tried something new: We curated 150+ stories of Dinner Partiers who have lost a father, father figure, or child from 25 states and five countries: stories that are heartbreaking and heartwarming and everything in between. Stories of people who lived, and those who've gone on living in their memory. The experiment was a huge success, so look out for similar takeovers on Mother’s Day and future holidays that tend to hit our community hard.
What We’re Writing

• **Sitting Down to Dinner with Ecogrief: Breaking bread for the loss of places, species, and planet in the wake of the 2018 U.N. Report.** *Medium*, Oct. 31 2018. This fall, we applied the methodology and spirit of our conversations about death loss to another form of loss and grief that’s becoming increasingly apparent and lived for many of us — the loss of places due to climate related disasters, and loss of the planet from climate change overall. We prototyped the concept with dinners on the year anniversary of the Eagle Creek Fire that burned through the Columbia River Gorge outside of Portland, and another on the eve of the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco. Our hypothesis is that by creating environments to metabolize the complex emotions related to climate change, we’ll have a better chance of moving out of the paralysis, fear, and shame and move into more effective action.

• **On Covenants, Valleys, and Real Relationships: Seven Lessons on Building Community in the Age of Isolation,** *Medium*, 31 May 2018. In May, co-founders Lennon Flowers and Carla Fernandez sat down with David Brooks of the New York Times, for a lunch and panel moderated by Terrence Meck, and hosted by our partners, the Ittleson Foundation Inc and The Palette Fund. We managed to cover a lot of ground in those two hours: what’s driving the crisis of isolation and its consequences, the key to building meaningful relationships and scaling peer-driven communities, the view from the valley and the moments that spur us to climb the “second mountain”, the difference between contracts and covenants, and the need for new funding streams.

Ours is a process innovation: a means of building scalable peer-driven community and using the age-old practice of breaking bread to turn isolating experiences into sources of meaningful conversation and connection.

We often hear from people with a wide array of experiences beyond death loss: Women who have suffered miscarriages. People coming out of bad marriages. People who have lost someone to mental or physical illness, where the person was still there but the relationship is gone. Survivors of sexual assault or childhood abuse. The common thread? Whatever we carry, we carry alone.

Our success to date has been born, in no small part, out of our ability to use the “we” pronoun. Every member of The Dinner Party staff and every volunteer has experienced loss firsthand, and is both fluent in the language of loss and can lead with vulnerability. We’re not a program serving “other”, or a group of amateur psychotherapists; we’re peers creating the same community we want to be a part of.

Across time, culture, and spiritual traditions, people have been sitting in circles telling their stories to each other. We tell our stories to our hair stylists and baristas, and the stranger at that party, in those rare and chance moments when the veil between each other lifts, and we’re able to see each other’s truth without being scandalized by it; to bear witness and be witnessed. When everyone has only their own story to go on, it means we’re all equally “experts”: we’re less prone to advice-giving, or attempts to “fix” something, recognizing that what most of us are looking for is a chance to hear and be heard, and to identify with others who’ve been there.

Viable partners are those who come to the table as peers, not professionals. We welcome partnerships with organizations and peer networks comprised of staff or volunteers who have lived a shared experience — veterans groups, support networks for survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault — and that are intent on building meaningful relationships.

In the next year, we’re starting to convene conversations around other forms of isolation, in partnership with other demand-driven peer networks and partners. For instance, we’re:

- Continuing to pilot conversations around eco-grief and environmental loss;
- Exploring what it would look like to deepen community among the 7,000 women enlisted in Special Operations — and the thousands more whose spouses are in Special Ops, in partnership with a mentorship program for women in the service.
- Working with author Linda Kay Klein and the team behind Break Free Together to overcome shame and the legacy of the evangelical purity movement, by making sex and sexuality a dinner conversation.
In late 2016, as a first step toward that end, The Dinner Party teamed up with our friends at the Faith Matters Network and Hollaback! to launch The People’s Supper. The People's Supper brings people together over shared meals for a chance to go beneath the headlines and to reflect on the real stories that have shaped who we are, in order to equip everyday citizens with the tools they need to build stronger, more cohesive communities through better conversations.

We've worked with pastors looking to deepen relationships within their congregations, and faith leaders who wish to connect across racial, religious, and political lines. We’ve worked with teachers and staff at local schools, looking to bring together students, parents, teachers, alumni, and administrative and custodial staff: folks who walk the same hallways, but know little of each other’s stories. We've worked with librarians and conference organizers who want to spark conversations that go beyond the weather and our business cards. We've worked to create healing spaces among people in caring professions, depleted by constantly having to be “on,” and mistrustful of one another despite working toward a common end. And we've worked with ordinary people, who simply want to get to know their neighbors.

Altogether, we've helped people host 1,200+ suppers in more than 120 cities and towns across the country, ranging from Littleton, CO, Cullowhee, NC, to Portage, MI. Our partners include dozens of local and national organizations, including The Obama Foundation, The Righteous Persons Foundation, USC, Duke Endowment, Exhale, #LoveArmy, Dream Defenders, MAKERS, Erie Insurance, Interfaith Youth Core, the Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality, and more.
Case Study: Creede, CO

In early October, 68 people in Creede, CO — nearly one in five adults in the community — sat down for supper inside an old mine that now serves as the town’s community center. The dinner was part of a month-long campaign we ran leading up to the midterms, with a simple goal: In a moment of acute political division, we want to prove that a group of thoughtful people who differ from one another — politically, culturally, racially, generationally, religiously, and economically — can sit down over a shared meal and engage in a meaningful conversation together. Of the 68 people who participated that night, 55 filled out a survey. Fourteen described themselves as “conservative” or “very conservative”, eight as “moderate”, 23 as “liberal” and seven as “very liberal”. Here’s what they had to say:

- **91%** of respondents agree or strongly agree that they would recommend TPS to a friend;
- **95%** of respondents agree or strongly agree that, “As a result of attending the supper, I felt more connected to others.”
- **89%** agreed or strongly agreed that, “As a result of attending the supper, I feel a rise in empathy toward people who are different than me.”
- **93%** agree or strongly agree that, “At the supper, I felt able to open up, be vulnerable, and share my story.”
- **100%** agree or strongly agree that, “At the supper, I felt that others listened deeply to what I had to say.”
- **83%** definitely want to do it again.

Said one participant afterward, “I realized I had eerily similar stories of pain and hurt and rejection as others at the table who are starkly ideologically different than me. There was shared empathy & love, and it was very, very meaningful.”

“Enough events like this and we may put some civility and love back in our Country,” said Frank, a retired business leader and conservative. “Thank you!!”

They’re already making plans to make it a quarterly potluck.
Financials

We’re proud to say that a budget that began with a small crowdfunding campaign has grown each year, and our capacity to serve in a healing, human-centered way has grown with it.

We continue to take pride in our ability to do a lot with a little. We rely entirely on word of mouth, and have never had to market our work. We don’t have an office, and, until last month, every staff member paid for health insurance out of pocket. But the truth is, we’ve paid the price for that, too: Over the years, we’ve struggled with staff burnout and inadequate systems, with colossal waitlists and overwhelming demand, with constant anxiety about whether we could meet payroll and sustain ourselves and each other through what is often emotionally demanding work.

We’ve struggled, too, with how to convey that Dinner Parties don’t just happen. Doing this work well requires sensitivity and care, and people, not products, even with big improvements to our systems and keeping costs low. Ours is a community that will only ever grow, and meeting that demand means we’ll continue to need more staff.

Since reopening our submission form in late January, more than 2,500 people have reached out to start or join a table: an average of more than 60 each week. Over the last year, we’ve learned that doing this work well means having enough staff to sustain relationships at scale. It means having the systems and infrastructure in place so that no one slips through the cracks. And it means being able to care for our people, and naming our limits, so that we can stay in this for the long-haul.

Our organization is people-powered at every level: In FY18, donations from nearly 700 private individuals and members of our community made up 61% of our budget, with an additional 36% covered by foundation funding. And we take sustainability seriously, growing our earned revenue from 3% of our revenues in FY18, to 14% of our FY19 revenues to date.

Starting in 2019, we’re introducing a $35/year membership fee for TDP, with the goal of improving accountability and reducing flakiness. That doesn’t cover our full costs — on average, starting and sustaining a table costs $550/year, but it’ll help us better keep up with growth. The fee will only apply to new Dinner Partiers, and we’ll have an opt-out, no-questions-asked option for any Dinner Partier for whom this cost is a barrier, as well as an option for current Dinner Partiers and TDP alumni to anonymously “sponsor a seat” as a way to pay it forward.

The Dinner Party is supported by:
Our Supporters

We are profoundly grateful for every dollar and every hour of time, for every piece of advice and every word of encouragement, and for the innumerable forms of currency and expressions of care and commitment that have made The Dinner Party what it is today. And we are very excited to see where these new changes take us in the future.

**Donors & fundraisers, FY18–Present (July 1, 2017–October 31, 2018):**

Mission & Vision

**Mission**
We're out to transform some of our hardest conversations and most isolating experiences into sources of community support, candid conversation, and forward movement using the age old practice of breaking bread.

**Vision**
We foresee a day in which people find amidst their deepest struggle the source of their deepest strength by connecting with others who've been there too, in an environment that's accessible and familiar, and marked by deep connections over time; a day in which grief is free of stigma and silence; and in which those who've lived through loss or hardship, whatever its form, are recognized not as objects of pity, but as better listeners and better leaders, characterized by profound empathy, resilience, agency, and a commitment to living a life of meaning.
Meet the Team

We’re growing up! Over the last year, our small but mighty force has grown to include eight amazing humans, three full-time and five part-time. Meet the crew:

**Becca Bernstein** Community Director (Chicago, IL)

Becca Bernstein is the national Community Director of The Dinner Party, and also directly oversees our tables in the Midwest. Becca first discovered The Dinner Party two weeks after her mom died from Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD) and ALS when Becca was 27 years old. Never having expected that most of her 20s would involve caregiving for a terminally ill parent, she was incredibly grateful to find The Dinner Party community and served as a volunteer host for The Dinner Party for nearly two years before joining staff.

Prior to working for The Dinner Party, Becca worked at Swarthmore College, a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania in their Title IX office, working with college students on issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. She also worked for the Center for Civic Reflection, a national leader in dialogue and reflection, training facilitators to lead discussions in their own communities on social justice and civic issues. Becca received her B.A. in English and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies from Grinnell College in Iowa and her M.Ed. in Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy from the University of Maryland College Park, where she was also trained for 2 years at the university’s Counseling Center. Becca lives in Chicago and is passionate about providing spaces for people to feel fully human and talk authentically about issues that matter most.

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**Carla Fernandez** Co-founder (Los Angeles, CA)

Carla co-founded The Dinner Party with Lennon Flowers in the years following the death of her father, Jose Fernandez, to brain cancer. She found that life after loss — especially for someone in their early twenties — lacked the kind of peer support she was hungry for, so she invited a group of soon-to-be-friends who’d all experienced loss to a potluck on her Los Angeles back porch. When not working on TDP, Carla is the Community Lead at enso — a creative agency focused on social impact projects with brands including Google, Khan Academy, Barbie, and The Nature Conservancy. Carla is on the founding team of agency, having served as its Head of Talent and Culture, and General Manager. Carla is a Reynolds Scholar at NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study, where she concentrated in Social Entrepreneurship, and a Senior Fellow at USC’s Annenberg Innovation Lab.

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**Lennon Flowers** Co-Founder + Executive Director (Los Angeles, CA)

Lennon lost her mom during her senior year of college, following a four-year fight with lung cancer. It had been more than three years since her passing, when she hitched up her wagon and headed West to Los Angeles. Suddenly 3,000 miles away from home and the friends she’d known for years, she found she no longer had anyone with whom she could talk about her mom, and explore the way in which her life, death, and absence continued to affect her. So when Carla, a friend, colleague, and soon-to-be roommate, invited her over for dinner, it was a no-brainer. What she found around that table, and over many, many dinners since, was a means of keeping of her mom's memory and legacy alive, of naming the parts of herself that remain a reflection of her, and of working through the things they didn't get a chance to resolve in her mom's lifetime.

As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of The Dinner Party and a co-founder of The People's Supper, Lennon remains hellbent on creating spaces where humans can be human, out of a belief that nothing is done in isolation, and that self-help only works in community. She oversees organizational strategy development and execution and resource- and capacity-building, and together with Carla, leads our work with TDP Labs. She most recently served as the Community Director of Ashoka’s Start Empathy Initiative, and has written for CNN, Forbes, Open Democracy, EdWeek, YES! Magazine, and Fast Company, among others. She is an Ashoka Fellow and an Aspen Ideas Scholar, and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill. [lennon@thedinnerparty.org](mailto:lennon@thedinnerparty.org)

**Iana Malcolm** Regional Manager, South & International (Miami, FL)

At 27, and after seven years of being her caregiver, Iana lost her mother to Breast Cancer. At 31 years old, she lost her father to brain cancer. Since then Iana has dedicated her life to the support of caregivers and all those managing life after loss. Outside of her work as a Community Manager for TDP, Iana is a birth Doula. She finds a beautiful balance in serving those in both life and death. She is a Yoga and Meditation teacher and leads Wellness retreats worldwide with her company [Bliss Out Retreats](http://www.blissoutretreats.com). She is a native New Yorker but traded it all in for the sunny beaches of Miami, FL five years ago. A foodie, a dog lover and a fan of all things wine, Iana is thrilled to be part of The Dinner Party community!

**Sally Phillips** Regional Manager, Northeast (New York, NY)

Sally's dad died of AIDS when she was 11. After keeping his illness a secret for years, she finds it liberating to speak about him now. Her table has been a great source of support and genuine friendship. She feels incredibly lucky to be a part of The Dinner Party, having transitioned from Host to volunteer to staff member. Most recently she worked for Housing Works, a non-profit dedicated to fighting AIDS and homelessness. Outside of The Dinner Party, she loves to draw and practice yoga. Sally graduated from Barnard College and currently serves on the board of Columbia Pride, an alumni LGBT+ organization.
**Katie Seidler** Regional Manager, West Coast & Mountain (Denver, CO)

Katie found an incredible, authentic community in The Dinner Party after a two-year period that included the suicides of two friends and a beloved uncle. She was thrilled to transition from Dinner Partier, to host, to volunteer, to staff member. Outside of her TDP work, Katie is a research physical therapist – specializing in quality improvement and implementation projects designed to elevate the level of care provided to older adults. She is passionate about improving the quality of resources available across the wellness spectrum to individuals of all ages.

**K Scarry** Community Manager, The People’s Supper (Herndon, VA)

An avid journaler and self proclaimed master of the cupid shuffle, K, (yes, just the letter), sees herself as made for life around the table. The table has been the space where she has learned what it means to be human, and where she has seen profound connections made between the most unlikely people. Driven by a conviction that people should have consistent space where they are welcomed in, K launched an open community meal in her hometown a few years ago that continues today. Her love of people has led her to a number of different work spaces, including addressing sex trafficking with She Has a Name in Columbus, Ohio, living as a fraternity house director in Atlanta, Georgia, and working as a chaplain in a maximum security prison. She first heard about The Dinner Party at a conference in Princeton, New Jersey, and has never looked back! K is currently working towards her Masters in Divinity in Washington, DC.

**Justin Thongsavanh** Operations and Partnerships Manager (San Pedro, CA)

As the Operations and Partnerships Manager for The Dinner Party, Justin manages social media and Salesforce, leads and supports fundraising efforts, and project manages special projects, including our website/database build. Throughout his career, Justin has worked for a variety of nonprofits and municipal governments focusing on the development and implementation of programs for youth. Prior to joining The Dinner Party, Justin worked for Comfort Zone Camp, one of the nation’s largest bereavement camps, developing programs, streamlining processes, and raising funds for children and teens who have experienced the loss of a parent or sibling. After the death of his own father at the age of 12, he felt isolated and alone. As an adult, he has made it his mission to not only find a community for himself, but to also help create a community for folks who have experienced loss and subsequent adversities. Justin holds a B.A. in Liberal Studies, a Certificate in Non-Profit Management, and a Master’s in Public Administration from California State University, Long Beach. Outside of work Justin likes to spend his time hiking, hanging out with friends, and taking pictures with his friends’ pets.
You’ve got this.
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