

SOCIAL CONNECTION RESOURCE GUIDE

COMMUNITY LEADERS

A resource from the Hinge *One More Hour* Initiative

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01. INTRODUCTION

Welcome Note

Welcome to the Resource Guide for the One More Hour Initiative! We begin with gratitude to you and your team for creating spaces for Gen Z to connect in real life (IRL). As you will see in the following material, what you do has an impact beyond convening a group of people around an activity. This guide is for you if you create spaces for Gen Z to connect IRL and are looking for ways to cultivate deeper connections by increasing the amount of members you have, the amount of hours they spend together, and the quality of social connections between members.

Social Isolation and Loneliness 101

The U.S. Surgeon General's *Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*, which addresses the loneliness epidemic, reveals that 30% of Gen Z report feeling chronically lonely, 61% of Gen Z adults report feeling lonely always or almost all the time, and Gen Z are feeling lonely at higher rates compared to other generations.^[1-2]

Let's begin with definitions. What does it mean to be socially isolated versus lonely?

Social isolation refers to the *objective* lack of social contact and relationships, whereas **loneliness** is a *subjective feeling of being disconnected or not having sufficient meaningful social interactions*. Research indicates that loneliness can lead to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, and even premature mortality. The effect of chronic loneliness on our minds and bodies is comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.^[3]

Social connection means having a variety of relationships (from close personal ties, such as family and friends, to weaker ties, such as acquaintances and strangers); relationships you can rely upon for support; and relationships that are trusted, high quality, and satisfying.^[4] Social connection encompasses the *structure, function, and quality of relationships with others*, including the size and diversity of one's social network and roles, the roles these relationships play in our lives, and their positive or negative qualities.^[5] Quality time with others can be leveraged to reduce loneliness and helps us feel closer and more supported.

However, Gen Z gets 1,000 fewer hours of in-person connection time every year compared to previous generations.^[6] While social media, tech platforms, and messaging apps offer ways for Gen Z to stay connected with others, for some people, their use can be associated with more time alone. For some kinds of support and relationship development, social media cannot replace the depth and quality of in-person interactions - that is where your club/organization comes in.

While there are places and spaces for Gen Z to connect IRL, there are several barriers that may stand in the way of Gen Z spending more time with others. Some may be external factors, such as finances or accessibility issues, while others are internal, such as experiences of shame, stigma, or anxiety.^[7]

RESOURCE

In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam documents the trending decline and unraveling of American civic and social groups from the 1960s to now.

The accompanying documentary film *Join or Die* highlights the benefits of joining social clubs to mend the fabric of American communities.

One More Hour

While addressing the loneliness epidemic might feel daunting, there are straightforward solutions – like more in-person connection time. However, telling young people to simply put down their phones is not enough. We have to ensure all Gen Z have the support and space they need to build and nurture meaningful connections and belonging IRL. All young adults have the right to meaningful connection and belonging. Safe, affirming, and accessible IRL spaces are critical to realizing this.

Recognizing the importance of in-person connections, Hinge created the One More Hour (1MH) initiative to mobilize Gen Z to collectively add a million hours of meaningful IRL connection to their lives - one hour at a time. The One More Hour fund is creating opportunities for social groups, clubs, and organizations to provide Gen Z with fun, fresh, and recurring in-person spaces to connect with others. There are incredible organizations - surf clubs, hiking clubs, writing groups, etc. - working to

create affirming spaces for Gen Z to share their free time with one another. Despite being vital community spaces, they often lack the resources to scale or even sustain their work. We know that building spaces for Gen Z to connect starts with the people who build them, and making sure they have the resources they need to best serve their communities.

That's why we've created this comprehensive social connection resource guide with best practices for club leaders to increase and deepen the impact of their programs. This guide is part of Hinge's One More Hour initiative and focuses on how in-person connection through social clubs and organizations is a major way we can address the loneliness epidemic.

In this guide, you'll find....

- Key strategies and behaviors designed to empower club and organization leaders to **create spaces for Gen Z to meaningfully connect IRL**
- Evidence-informed best practices and resources for **designing and facilitating programming that fosters connection and community building**
- Activities to **boost membership engagement and cultivate deeper connections** by increasing both the amount of members and hours spent together



02. TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

This quiz is designed to help you reflect on your current club and organization practices, identify strengths and areas for growth, and explore new strategies to foster meaningful connections among your members. There are no right or wrong answers, these are just reflection questions to help guide your thinking and how you'll use this guide! Based on your responses, we'll guide you to relevant chapters in the resource guide to support your journey. Let's get started!

Which of the following are possible benefits of connecting IRL with your club?

- (a) Improved physical health
- (b) Greater trust and social cohesion
- (c) Higher self-esteem and confidence
- (d) All of the above

How often should your club ideally meet IRL to foster strong social connections?

- (a) Once a year
- (b) Once a month
- (c) Weekly
- (d) Daily

How do you invite new members to your club/organization? *(Circle all that apply)*

- (a) Word of mouth
- (b) Instagram, TikTok, and other social media posts
- (c) Hanging flyers and posters around the city with more info about joining
- (d) Event pages and platforms (Eventbrite, Partiful, Meetup, etc.)

How do you ensure all members feel included and welcomed during gatherings?

(Circle all that apply)

- (a) Prioritizing inclusive and accessible spaces
- (b) Making a group chat for folks to connect pre-event
- (c) Using a buddy system
- (d) Checking in with members after the event

What are your club's strengths in fostering social connections? (i.e., hosting accessible and inclusive events, encouraging good conversations, promoting skill-building and learning, etc.)

What challenges do you face in deepening connections among members? (i.e., infrequent meetings, limited resources and funding, getting feedback from members, etc.)

Based on your responses, here are some chapters you might find helpful:

- If you want to **build more affirming and accessible gathering spaces**, see Chapter 3: Setting the Stage for Connection.
- If you're looking for new **icebreakers and conversation starters**, jump to Chapter 5: Encouraging Connections IRL
- If you're looking for ways to **support members** in between gatherings and meetings, see Chapter 6: Keeping the Connections Going
- For **deepening and expanding your club's impact**, visit Chapter 7: Expanding Your Impact

Now, let's dive into the resource guide to help you create even more meaningful and lasting connections for your members.

03. SETTING THE STAGE

This section will cover...

- Designing inviting spaces and building the container for meaningful connections to flourish
- Setting the stage for your club members to feel a sense of belonging
- Emphasizing your club's purpose and cultivating leadership

Leaning into your group's purpose

Whether the purpose of your gardening club is to share plant parent tips or the purpose of your Gen Z run club is to work out in matching sneakers, the key is to orient your members around your already established intentions to plan activities and events that resonate with your members, allowing for deeper connection. Your club's purpose serves as a unifying vision that helps members understand the group goals and their role within it, fostering a sense of belonging and shared commitment.

PRO TIP

There are lots of fun ways to orient your Gen Z members to the purpose of your club/event/meeting. Dress codes can be fun and not only inspire creativity and engagement, but also guide participants to the purpose of the gathering and container. By setting a specific outfit theme, you can reinforce your club's identity, set the vibes for good conversation, and facilitate belonging. Try asking members to come as their favorite monument at your next architecture social club meeting. For example, a gathering of artists were asked to come to a meeting in all white because "they are all blank canvases."

It can get awkward being in a space together for no reason other than the intention to meet new connections and build new relationships. Purpose is the thing that provides context for our gatherings, the excuse that gives room for connections to deepen – the renaissance themed dinner, hike, wrestling practice, coding lesson, or backgammon game. Sharing out your group's purpose also attracts like-minded Gen Z

who share your vision and values that can help expand your club reach. Grounding your club or organization in that strong, clear purpose provides the foundation for sustained engagement and deepening social connections among Gen Z members.

RESOURCE

Priya Parker's The Art of Gathering offers several helpful tips and strategies for designing gatherings and events that foster genuine interactions and a sense of belonging.

Designing Spaces for Connection

Spaces for Gen Z to gather IRL can support increased belonging, sense of place, and are fundamentally more supportive of social connections and can help prevent loneliness and social isolation when designed well.^[8] While some organizations have a dedicated, specific space to meet, others rotate spaces, meet outside, or use shared spaces. Creating spaces doesn't mean exclusively building new places, but includes leveraging existing physical locations to gather as a community in a way that is welcoming, affirming, and accessible. Two things to consider as you plan your meetings are: **1) is this location/space accessible physically and otherwise to my members?** and **2) how does this space impact our ability to connect with one another?**

PRO TIP

Setting the tone of your group's space through a shared soundtrack is a great way to deeply engage Gen Z club members at your gatherings. Have participants collaborate on a shared playlist for your next event, asking members to share music that holds personal significance and stories behind their song choices. Using a music streaming service, participants add songs that represent them or evoke specific memories or feelings, followed by a listening party where each participant shares why they chose their song. The outcome is not only a deeper understanding of each other but also a collaborative playlist that serves as a tangible reminder of the connections formed during the gathering.

Setting the Rhythm

Regularly gathering IRL is ideal for making new friends and deepening connections among Gen Z members. Research shows that it takes roughly 50 hours of time together to move from acquaintance to casual friends and more than 200 hours together before you can consider someone your close friend.^[9] Whether your group meets IRL weekly or monthly, thoughtfully setting the rhythm of your container helps create a predictable structure that supports deepening connections.

Research shows that the key to maintaining connections is repeated interactions and exposure through regular gathering times.^[10] For example, supper club members know that they're meeting on the third Saturday of every month, and chess club members expect to meet every Wednesday. Consistent, well-planned gatherings provide the foundation for a thriving social club or organization, helping to foster a sense of belonging and community among members.

PRO TIP

One-off experiences your club might host like backpacking trips, art installations, tennis tournaments, or film festivals are intense and short-lived experiences that don't follow a regular cadence but still are great opportunities to deepen connections and foster friendships. Consider making these kinds of gatherings annual to follow up on built connections.

Leadership

As leaders of your club, you probably are the beating heart creating the rhythm for regular club gatherings and events. This role can be A LOT, so it's important to think about ways to take care of yourself so you can show up as your best self. Think about ways you can share responsibilities with other members and volunteers, or ways you can train members on being facilitators like rotating book club discussion leaders or asking members to map out the next run route. This practice will also help the longevity of your club in the long run and with succession planning, as training your members can be useful if you're dealing with burnout or other responsibilities. And don't forget to give yourselves a pat on the back and honor and appreciate the way you're building connections in your community.

You also possess the power to create spaces where Gen Z can feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. In her book *How to be an Inclusive Leader: Your Role in Creating Cultures of Belonging Where Everyone Can Thrive*, Jennifer Brown describes how everyone can take steps to make their organization a more welcoming, inclusive environment. By prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration, you can foster a culture of belonging and allow social connections to thrive. The energy of the leader really sets the tone for the group. As a leader, set an example by adhering to the established norms. Demonstrating the expected behaviors will encourage others to follow suit.

RESOURCE

Check out Born This Way Foundation's [list of self-care tips](#) for resources and leadership support practices.

CLUB STORIES

Harlem Dance Club (HDC) in New York is committed to cultivating and elevating its leaders within the Harlem dance community. Their board and core group of volunteers, aka the "HDC Leaders," reflects the community they serve, with the majority of both bodies being women of color.

HDC builds on the momentum of their weekly dance offerings, guest artists workshops, and annual festivals to encourage returning participants to volunteer or join the HDC leaders group. They specifically look for people who've participated consistently in programming, and who've shown a commitment to the mission and values of the group. Basically people who are open and willing to explore and cultivate that with HDC and the rest of the leaders.

HDC always leaves room in their workshops for these leaders to share with the community their personal relationship with the style of dance they teach. This often includes a history of overcoming obstacles that are relatable to other participants, making them more accessible and the space more inclusive.

Leveraging leadership for connection

Turn members into leaders	<p>If people are excited and engaged, don't be afraid to give them more ownership and responsibility in the club. This could be anything from asking members to suggest dishes at the next supper club to making sure everyone feels welcome and safe at events. Don't forget to also leverage the unique skills of your members - giving folks the right roles builds connections and encourages members to share more time together.</p>
Emphasize different types of leadership roles	<p>Offer a variety of leadership roles beyond traditional meeting facilitation. Encourage members to take on roles that align with their strengths and interests, such as event planning, communication coordination, or community outreach. By diversifying leadership opportunities, everyone can feel comfortable volunteering and showcasing their strengths in ways that may not involve leading a meeting. This approach promotes inclusivity and ensures that leadership roles reflect the diverse talents and contributions of all members within the club.</p>
Rotate leadership roles	<p>Give members the opportunity to lead meetings or activities on a rotating basis, fostering ownership and engagement. This approach ensures that the club doesn't feel hierarchical and provides everyone with a chance to shine. By rotating leadership roles, members gain valuable experience, develop leadership skills, and feel more invested in the club's success. It also promotes a sense of inclusivity and encourages diverse perspectives and ideas to be shared within the group.</p>
Think beyond the labels of "member" and "leader"	<p>Shared ownership increases a sense of belonging for the entire club.</p>

Ideas for tasks and roles members can take on:

- **New Member Welcome Committee:** making sure that all new members have someone in contact with them before or after their first meeting.
- **Merch Director:** responsible for designing and ordering club merchandise like t-shirts, fanny packs, hats, etc.
- **Spirit Leader:** Responsible for sending happy birthday messages in the group chat.
- **Foodie:** Bringing snacks to the next gathering and suggesting the next group meeting spot for dinner.
- **Notetaker:** Taking notes during the gathering to capture anything that requires any kind of follow up, like anytime anyone mentions a good book they're reading or a recipe the group really liked, or where they got their socks from.
- **Content Gatherer / Media Taker:** It is a good problem to be so present that you forget to take pictures! But after the event end, you usually want some media to help promote future events and to share with group members. Having a designated photographer / social media representative can ensure you get photos and video to use.
- **Recruiter:** being on the lookout for new members and helping to spread the word about the good work the club is involved in!
- **Communications:** sending out club updates, events, notes, feedback surveys, newsletters, etc.
- **Alumni Coordinator:** tasked with keeping in touch with previous club members to amplify their work and trajectory and broaden the reach of the club.
- **Tech Guru:** Responsible for overseeing any tech requirements and making sure everything is set up, or dismantled, properly can also play a role in accessibility.

04. BEFORE THE MEETUP

This section will cover...

- Establishing group norms and expectations to create a welcoming and cohesive environment for new and current members
- Supporting members overcoming new social gathering anxiety; creating a supportive atmosphere for new members
- Using digital tools to amplify outreach efforts
- Increasing club's membership



Group Agreements

Before your meet-up or gathering, it's important to lay the groundwork for a supportive and welcoming environment that builds trust and respect. Group norms, agreements, and expectations act like a social contract - guiding how members of your club or organization will interact and behave together. They establish a shared understanding about how members of your club will come together, ensuring everyone feels respected and valued.

Coming up with rules of engagement and group norms before the club meeting/gathering primes members of your club to form meaningful connections with one another. Trust is a critical component of socially connected communities, and underlies the levels of cohesion and collaboration in your club. Creating a set of group guidelines helps prevent misunderstandings, manage conflicts, and foster a sense of safety and trust.

Building trust through group expectations

Co-create group rules with your members	Deciding on group expectations with all of your members ensures that the norms reflect the collective values and needs of the group
Regularly review and update	Revisit and adjust the guidelines you've created together often as your club progresses
Practice over time	The effectiveness of group norms and agreements is less in the initial statement and commitment, but more in the practice over time

Reaching New Members

With 69% of 18-25 year olds saying they often feel left out, Gen Z in large metropolitan areas may struggle finding their own community niches and affirming spaces to connect.^[12] As club leaders, you can make it easier and enticing for Gen Z to join your organization by sharing information about how to join and making space for affirming IRL community and belonging. Attract new members and keep them engaged by creating an affirming and welcoming space that encourages friendship, community, and connection. Try suggesting a competition or invite current members to bring a colleague or friend.

PRO TIP

Using an event platform like Eventbrite or Partiful is a great way to market your club or organization to interested members. Whether it's the next skate sesh or the next gallery opening, events help you get the word out about your club. Build in communication in the event description that emphasizes that people at the club are looking for connection, are welcoming, and eager to chat.

CLUB STORIES

LayeRhythm (LR) offers monthly interactive, improvisational street/club music and dance jam sessions, as well as live performances at venues/festivals across New York City.

LR has found that marketing (quality graphic design, attention-capturing fliers) and consistent around-the-city outreach (with outdoor community event appearances, festival appearances, battle circuit participation, and engaging workshops) that always reflects diversity, youth culture, and the high energy of the club experience helps attract new members and keep them hooked.

Create an elevator pitch for your club/organization to attract new members

Who are you?

Get potential members hooked with a sentence that describes what your organization is and what you do

I.e., We are a BIPOC-focused dance party space where inclusivity, fun, and connection are at the heart of every beat.

Why join your club?

Explain how your club is fostering social connections for Gen Z looking for community. Use examples or stories

I.e., If you're looking for a safe space to form friendships on the dance floor, laugh, and share stories until the sun comes up - you're in the right place.

What is your call to action?

State how interested members can get involved

I.e., Ready to experience epic dance nights and build community? Follow us on Instagram to sign up for our next gathering to see what all the hype is about.

Put it all together and practice

I.e., We are a BIPOC-focused dance party space where inclusivity, fun, and connection are at the heart of every beat. If you're looking for a safe space to form friendships on the dance floor, laugh, and share stories until the sun comes up - you're in the right place. Ready to experience epic dance nights and build community? Follow us on Instagram to sign up for our next gathering to see what all the hype is about.

Addressing New Member Anxiety

Gen Z is currently experiencing more loneliness than any other generation, and they are craving meaningful in-person connections.^[13] However, the lonelier they feel, the less likely they are to reach out or connect IRL due to the high emotional risk involved.^[14] The stigma around loneliness and the difficulty in finding affirming and accessible opportunities for community drive them inward instead of outward.^[15] Fear of rejection, FOMO, and the assumption that others aren't open to new connections further hinder their ability to initiate conversations and form new relationships.^[16]

Addressing new member anxiety is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels welcome. The way you onboard new members is key to creating a culture of belonging and connection in your group. When new members of your club feel at ease, they are more likely to engage, form meaningful connections, and contribute positively to the group. Try creating specific mini-groups in your club just for new members, or start a practice of saying hi to at least 3 new people at your next gathering.



Scenario A

Jordan loves nature and biking but feels intimidated to join a local bike club because they are new to Atlanta and don't know anyone in the group. They are also concerned about the intensity of the biking routes and what a typical ride for the club looks like.

Advice: You can establish a sense of belonging early on with Jordan by sending them a personalized new biker welcome note. Include information about upcoming events and rides, and details about how the meet-ups work. Lower the barrier to entry by emphasizing that new members don't have to be experts or professional riders to join your group and have a good time. Try organizing beginner-friendly rides and clearly communicate the difficulty level of each ride to inquire about any accommodation or accessibility needs to alleviate Jordan's concerns.

Scenario B

Since relocating to NYC after the pandemic, Axel has struggled finding his people. Knowing that he loves photography, a friend sent him a link for an upcoming LGBTQ+ friendly photo walk in his neighborhood. Axel wants to join the group to find IRL connections and community, but fears the awkwardness and anxiety that comes with making new friends.

Advice: Connections grow deeper through small acts of bravery by encouraging vulnerability and building trust.

Foster an environment where vulnerability is seen as a strength rather than a weakness. As the leader of the community photo walks, you can model this by sharing your own experiences with loneliness or social anxiety, normalizing these feelings and encouraging open dialogue.

Make a space and plan for members to debrief and ground themselves after the walk - making new friends is a lot of work.

Scenario C

After college, Maria moved to Los Angeles where she doesn't know anyone. She saw a TikTok about an upcoming cake decorating workshop that a local baking club is hosting. She likes to cook, but would feel embarrassed about attending the event alone. She also feels self-conscious about her baking skills since burning the last apple pie she tried to make.

Advice: It can be helpful to offer Maria the option of partnering with a buddy. This buddy can connect with her early on (even before the workshop), chat with her during the first meeting, and be available to answer any questions. This individual connection can serve as a bridge to additional connections within the club and ease initial anxiety and resistance about attending a space where she doesn't know anyone.

There's also evidence that mentorship and peer-to-peer relationships like these are reciprocally beneficial for belonging and well-being.

05. ENCOURAGING CONNECTIONS IRL

This section will cover...

- Creating meaningful social connections during gatherings through effective activity and facilitation planning
- Using engaging icebreakers, conversation starters, and interactive activities
- Making post-gathering plans to follow up with members to reinforce connections and engagement

Facilitation and Activity Planning

Science tells us that to move beyond the surface, it is not just about the amount of hours we spend together IRL but what you do within those hours.^[17] On top of doing

the activity your club or gathering is based on, creating connection-centered rituals, traditions, and routines can help establish a sense of belonging and continuity within the group.

Members of your horror film club expect to watch *The Exorcist* at your next meeting and attendees at your block party know to expect a lot of line dancing, etc. The rituals and traditions can also be connection-centric in themselves. Routine builds comfort, and comfort allows friendship to blossom.

RESOURCE

Be clear about how technology can and can't be used during club meetings or events. Create a designated "drop zone" for phones to encourage members to disconnect and engage fully in the present moment. Use Unplugged Collaborative's smartphone napsacks to help members put their phones away or Hinge's phone books filled with ideas to unplug members from their phones.

6 facilitation and activity ideas for your next event

Moments of connection	Begin or end meetings with a brief mindfulness or meditation session to help members relax and connect on a deeper level. This can also be a good time to set personal or collective "intentions" for the meeting. (What do you want to get out of it? What do you want to focus on or work to notice? What do you want to accomplish or leave feeling?)
Photo time	Consider implementing "photo time" at the beginning or end of meetings/events for members to capture memories, followed by "present time" where phones are put away and the focus is on connecting with each other without distractions. This helps foster deeper connections and meaningful interactions among members. *If photos are being taken, establish guidelines for how they will be shared and accessed to respect members' privacy and preferences.

Shared projects	Working together on a shared project is a powerful way of establishing bonds of trust between club members. Shared projects like repairing bicycles, beach cleanups, prepping the pasta dish, or making the playlist for the dance party are great containers for deepening connections and friendships. Bonus if it is in service of your broader community.
Informal social time	Designate a specific time and space during club meetings or events for informal socializing where members know they can connect with others who are willing to engage. Establish your "water cooler" – a designated area where people can go to connect with others and know that there are eager participants. Removing ambiguity about when and where these connections can happen helps facilitate spontaneous interactions and fosters a sense of community among members.
Gratitude circle/dump	Go around in a small circle where each person gets 1 minute for others to share what they appreciate about them. It can be a meaningful, albeit vulnerable, experience to process feelings about accepting compliments and kindness together.
Friendly competition	Some friendly competition and challenges are great ways to get members engaged and participating in club activities - like setting reading milestones at the next book club meeting.

Icebreakers and Conversation Starters

Deeper connections are formed through meaningful bonds based on shared interests, experiences, and values. Plan conversation topics that encourage the discovery of commonalities amongst your members and reflect on how you express your own values and interests through the activities you plan and questions you ask.

PRO TIP

Name tags are a symbol that Gen Z members of your club can wear to communicate that they're entering an equally welcoming and collective space. When using name tags, it's best to have just first names and pronouns (if desired) in big, bold, and clear letters so they can easily be read from normal gathering distance. You can even have themed nametags - ask club members to write their favorite book or dream travel destination instead of their name to strike up interesting conversations.

Icebreakers to use at your next gathering

The Object and Offering	Members present significant personal objects (can be a photo of something or a personal object that they bring), followed by offerings such as skill demonstrations or recommendations, promoting authenticity and vulnerability.
Story Swap	Attendees share personal stories in pairs, promoting authentic sharing and active listening to cultivate empathy and understanding. Remember, stories stay but lessons leave.
The Power of Threes	Encourage members to practice the power of three as soon as they enter the space: meet three people, learn three things, share three things.
Speed Friending	Similar to speed dating, participants have brief conversations where they share answers to prompts like "What's your go-to vending machine snack?" or "If you could only listen to one song for the rest of your life, what would it be?" with each other to quickly get acquainted.
Fill Your Bucket List	Club members pick one bucket list item and find someone in the club who can help you make meaningful progress toward crossing it off.

Human Bingo	Create bingo cards with different statements (e.g., "Has traveled to another country," "Loves spicy food"). Members mingle and find others who match the statements, encouraging interaction and discovery.
Find Your Points of Connection	Similarity is often the starting point of a friendship or connection. Create opportunities for people to notice and highlight their points of similarity. One fun exercise is to divide people based on an identified difference and then have them find their similarity or connection point within that difference. This exercise not only emphasizes commonalities but also encourages participants to look beyond surface-level differences and find deeper connections.

RESOURCE

Conversation cards can be a powerful way to break the ice and spark meaningful conversations in your club.

For cards that offer thought-provoking questions to encourage deeper discussions, try the Cultivating Conversations Card Deck

To go beyond small talk and foster deeper connections and meaningful conversations, try the Skip the Small Talk Card Deck

If you want members to explore shared values and stories to build stronger relationships, try Where Should We Begin - A Game of Stories

Post Gathering Debrief

Close each gathering with a clear next step to keep club members engaged and motivated. This could be something to think about, discuss with others, take action on, or look forward to.

To keep the momentum of the connections made at your club going, you've got to keep an open line of communication. Send a quick text to the group chat after your next club meeting telling everyone how much you enjoyed today's run or how much you're looking forward to the next coding meetup. Keeping the conversations going in between gatherings will make the next gathering easier for members to come back and stay engaged with less feelings of unease and awkwardness.

CLUB STORIES

Good Co. Bike Club fosters a community of BIPOC cycling enthusiasts in New York City to provide an enjoyable and inclusive environment for members to share their passion for biking and leisure time with their peers through organized rides, social events, and cycling advocacy.

Following the mantra of being “more than a bike club,” they foster social connections and meaningful relationships among members by organizing weekly group rides catering to various cycling skill levels. Good Co. Bike Club hosts social events like post-ride gatherings (cycling rides typically end at a social location whether it's a restaurant or a park, to encourage engagement), and offering an online chat forum where members discuss cycling topics, share experiences, and plan informal meet-ups with each other for “Off the Bike experiences”. The mix of structured and informal activities provides ample opportunities for Gen Z members to bond over shared interests, engage in friendly discussions, and develop lasting friendships within the cycling community.

06. KEEPING THE CONNECTIONS GOING

This section will cover...

- Ensuring club members feel valued and connected in between gatherings
- Using digital tools like group chats, social media groups, or newsletters to stay connected and engaged
- Sharing emotional support resources with club members

Supporting Members

Providing emotional support for Gen Z club members involves creating a safe and supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their feelings and seeking help when needed. This support can take various forms, from offering a listening ear during difficult times to connecting members with professional resources for more serious concerns.



RESOURCE

Learn to support your and other club members' mental health with the [Be There Certificate](#). Created by Born This Way Foundation and Jack.org, this free online course goes through how to recognize when someone might be struggling, showing you care by hearing them out, understanding your role in supporting that organization member, and connecting them with the support they need and deserve.

How to provide support for your members

Clarity about support systems	Clearly define who members should approach if they are experiencing personal issues or difficulties related to the club or club members, and outline how such issues will be addressed within the club. Providing transparency about support systems helps members feel comfortable reaching out for assistance and ensures that their concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.
Consider missed connections	It's important to address what happens when members are unable to attend sessions to ensure they are ok and/or know what happened at the meeting(s) they could not attend.
Keep members in the loop	It's essential to keep absent members informed about what they missed. Designate someone responsible for reaching out to them and providing updates on discussions, decisions, or any important information shared during the session they missed.

Multiple missed sessions	If a member misses more than one session, it's crucial to check in with them to ensure they feel supported and included. This could involve reaching out to see if there are any barriers preventing their attendance or if there are ways the club can better accommodate their schedule or needs.
Holiday or event conflicts	Consideration should be given to holidays or events that may conflict with regular club meetings. Planning around these conflicts can help ensure an inclusive environment and minimize the likelihood of members missing sessions due to external commitments.

Group Chats

Staying connected in between gatherings and meetings is crucial to maintaining the connections and relationships formed at your club event. Encourage Gen Z members to stay connected through formal channels, such as group chats, social media groups, or newsletters.

PRO TIP

Appoint group chat facilitators - members who can help create an atmosphere where people feel welcome and are excited to participate; lead weekly discussions and conversation starters fostering meaningful dialogue; and to act as moderators to keep an eye out for bullying, spam, or inappropriate behavior.

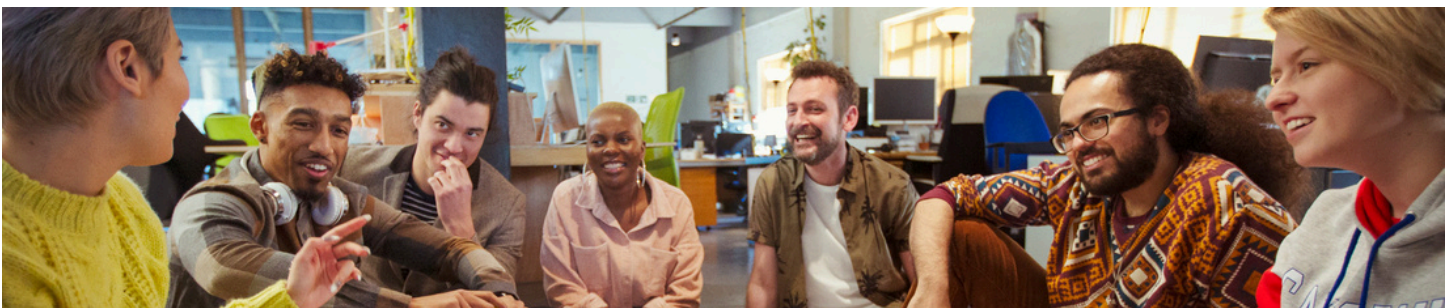
CLUB STORIES

Girls that Gather is a social club dedicated to demystifying making genuine friendships, while creating the space for women in New York City to make connections and authentically gather through fun and interactive events like picnics, candle-making classes, themed mixers, and more.

(cont'd)

Girls that Gather creates the space for relationships to blossom, but the success of those relationships is largely hinged on the follow-through after an event. This has led them to developing smaller “micro-group chats” of women they meet when hosting Girls that Gather events. This encourages them to keep the conversation going beyond the event, interact virtually during busy weeks, and meet up on their own. They have also shared information about other events going on around the city that may be appealing to the greater community. They state that it’s important to provide the Girls that Gather membership with connection opportunities that they may not have found on their own.

Additionally, they have been diligently conducting extensive research about other online or mobile app platforms that can be leveraged to continue building community between monthly events. They find that IRL meet-ups are most impactful; however, they also believe in the efficacy of supplementing with other channels to increase engagement, and encourage conversation and connection when they aren’t meeting in person. This is also a great way for people who may be anxious about meeting in person to “get their toes wet” and learn about other Girls that Gather members before attending.



07. EXPANDING YOUR IMPACT

This section will cover...

- Ensuring your club's future is bright and impactful
- Regularly measuring and evaluating your activities and engagement
- Fostering connections and collaborations with other social clubs, groups, and community-based organizations

Measurement and Evaluation

Get feedback — as much as you can, build your group **with** the members, not for them. Running quick polls, asking questions, delegating, and checking in with folks individually are all great ways to do this. This process includes collecting and analyzing feedback from members to understand what works well, what needs improvement, and how your club is making a difference in terms of social connection and engagement. Consider reviewing and evaluating key performance indicators like member attendance, engagement rates, and changes in activity skills and knowledge as well as gathering member testimonials, feedback, and interviews to really understand how your members feel about your programming.



The onboarding process is crucial for establishing a sense of belonging and community, which keeps people engaged. It is helpful for clubs to solicit feedback about attendees' experiences soon after they join (e.g., "To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following: 1) I felt a sense of ease attending my first meeting, 2) I had someone greet me and someone I could turn to with a questions, or 3) I felt welcome).

This is also a good time to collect feedback on how people learned about the club and what they are looking for. This information can be used to improve the onboarding process and the overall community experience. It also communicates that you value members' voices and opinions, no matter how new they are to the space.

Keep your members informed about the changes and improvements you are making based on their feedback. This not only shows that you value their input but also encourages ongoing engagement and participation. Share success stories and impact data with potential funders, partners, and the broader community to demonstrate the value and impact of your club's activities.

CLUB STORIES

Queer Aunties serves as a vibrant and inclusive hub within the LGBTQ+ community in Los Angeles by centering BIPOC communities with a mission to facilitate connections through various social media platforms and in-person events. Recognizing the need for a supportive community and addressing the visibility gap within queer spaces, Queer Aunties fosters social connections through curated in-person community programming.

Queer Aunties uses feedback from their members to conduct targeted outreach efforts and design events specifically tailored to the interests and engagement styles of their community. For example, their 'Connections After Dark' event offered a variety of activities from a game room for the social butterflies to quiet reflection areas with birth chart readings for introverts. This ensured everyone felt comfortable and could connect meaningfully. They prioritize continuous improvement by conducting monthly surveys to gauge member preferences and adapt their programming based on their evolving needs. This ensures their space remains a welcoming and inclusive environment for all.

Survey questions you can ask members

1	Decide on group expectations with all of your members to ensure that the norms reflect the collective values and needs of the group.
2	Revisit and adjust the guidelines you've created together often as your club progresses.
3	Evaluate group norms and agreements, not on the initial statement and commitment, but more in the practice over time.

4	What has your experience been like in [club name] so far?
5	Which [club name] activities or events have you found most impactful in terms of meeting new people and making connections?
6	How often do you attend [club name] meetings, gatherings, and events?
7	What do you think is missing, if anything, from [club name]’s meetings and events?
8	What would you like to see more of at [club name]’s meetings and events?
9	What factors, if any, prevent you from attending [club name] meetings, gatherings, and events?
10	How satisfied are you with your overall experience since joining [club name]?

Connecting with Other Clubs and Communities

Connecting with other social groups and clubs in your community is a great way to expand connections and increase your club’s visibility in your city. Try reaching out to like-minded local groups and organizations who share your commitment to fostering inclusion and belonging. Local community organizations can also help you connect with neighborhoods

PRO TIP

In addition to the One More Hour grant, seek out other funding opportunities such as local grants, corporate sponsorships, and individual donations. Diversifying your funding sources can help keep your events low-cost and financially accessible, removing barriers for new members to build connections in your group.

and communities currently missing from your membership, allowing you to expand your connection efforts to new groups.

Ironically, leading a club can be lonely work. Being in host mode all the time and not having many people to turn to for advice and companionship can be isolating. Getting peer support from other club leaders can support your own sense of connection and add value to the work you're doing to create meaningful spaces for Gen Z to connect.^[18] There's so much value in being able to share experiences, ideas, and advice with other club leaders! Check out the 1MH fund Club Directory below:

One More Hour Communities		
Atlanta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMPS Wellness, Inc. • ATLFILMPARTY • Black Girl Environmentalist • The Bakery Atlanta • Free to Be Collective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HBCUs Outside • The Hope Booth: Never Alone Community • National Flag Football League of Atlanta (NFFLA)
Los Angeles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminist Synth Lab • Holdette • Intrsxtn Surf • Love, Peace & Spades • Midcity Mercado 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queer Aunties • Skip the Small Talk • Superbloom Collective, Inc. • Suppa Club • WalkGood LA
New York City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asafespacementor Corp • Autistic Adults NYC • AZN AMERICANA: A Collective for Asian Women & Femmes • Blacklist NYC • Climate Cafe • Commonwealth Running and Walking Club • Girls that Gather • Girls Who Gather, inc. aka [gather] • GrowHouse Community Design + Development Group/ Black Utopia Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Company Bike Club • Gumbo • Harlem Dance Club • Kinfolq • LayeRhythm • Link-Link Club • MALIKAH • NYC Backgammon Club • NYC Code & Coffee Meetup • Reading Rhythms • Stilllife Art Community • StoryTell NYC • Work in Progress NYC

08. TAKEAWAYS

As leaders of social groups and clubs, you are doing the important work of organizing gatherings and weaving together a community to help Gen Z get more IRL connection time. To continue cultivate deeper connections and fostering belonging, try these practices, tips, and tools:

Setting the Stage for Connection	The first step to creating a welcoming and engaging environment for Gen Z group members is to build a container for meaningful connections to flourish. From designing inviting spaces and setting the group's purpose to defining leadership and finding the right rhythm, setting the stage for your members to feel a sense of belonging is critical. By thoughtfully building the foundation, you can set the tone and create a thriving community that sparks connection for your club members.
Before the Meetup	Gen Z craves - and values - IRL connection, but the stigma around loneliness can make it difficult for folks to reach out for community. Spend some time thinking about how you can intentionally create belonging and welcoming spaces for new members of your club to join. Leverage digital tools, social media, and event platforms to spread the word about your club to encourage Gen Z to seek out connection.
Encouraging Connections IRL	Creating meaningful social connections during club meetings and gatherings is essential for fostering a sense of community and belonging among members. Effective activity and facilitation planning can help achieve this by incorporating engaging icebreakers, conversation starters, and interactive activities. These elements not only help members get to know one another but also create a comfortable and inclusive environment. Additionally, making post-gathering plans and following up with participants can reinforce connections and encourage ongoing engagement.

Keeping the Connections Going	<p>Encourage members to stay connected through formal channels, such as group chats, social media groups, or newsletters. Ensure that everyone is invited to participate in these channels to maintain inclusivity and accessibility.</p>
Expanding Your Impact	<p>To ensure the longevity of your group, it's essential to focus on deepening and expanding its impact. This involves regularly measuring and evaluating your activities and engagement, and fostering connections and collaborations with other social clubs, groups, and community-based organizations. By strategically assessing your club's performance and building robust partnerships, you can create a thriving, dynamic community that continues to grow and evolve, meeting the needs of its members and making a positive impact on the wider community.</p> <p>Ultimately, your members want to know their voice matters - and as the leader, knowing you are meeting or exceeding your goals will feel amazing!</p>

SHARE YOUR CLUB STORIES WITH US!

Have any experiences, stories, tips, and tricks your club uses that you want to share with others?

Reach out to us!



09. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Methodology

This resource guide was prepared by the team at The Foundation for Social Connection with valuable insights and contributions from a group of friendship experts, cutting edge social connection researchers, and community builders. Over the course of 4 months, we conducted an environmental scan on resources for young adult social connection and held 1:1 conversations and focus groups with thought leaders on Gen Z place-based programming. This allowed us to then conduct a theme analysis of the information we gathered and synthesize these findings into this resource guide. We wrote this resource guide in partnership with One More Hour by Hinge — an initiative to foster IRL connection, one hour at a time.

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This guide was also shaped through conversations and generous insights from the following experts and leaders in their work:

- Claudia Erickson, Unplugged Collaborative
- Deena Ismail, OneLove Foundation
- Francesca Giannattasio, Born This Way Foundation
- Janet King, The Gathering Lab
- Jeffrey Hall, The University of Kansas
- Lennon Flowers, The Dinner Party
- Milena Batanova, Making Caring Common
- Susan McPhearson, The Lost Art of Connecting
- Vanessa Elias, Block Party USA

A special note of gratitude to Deborah Shoola, Social Connection Fellow at the Foundation for Social Connection who led the development of this guide.

About The Foundation for Social Connection

The Foundation for Social Connection (F4SC) was founded in 2020 with the vision of a vibrant society where social connection is at the heart of how we live. As the leading US organization focused on addressing our crisis of disconnection, our mission is to advance social connection nation-wide rooted in evidence for our collective well-being. Together with our Scientific Leadership Council, Action Network, and partners, we translate research into practice, create long-lasting partnerships and convening opportunities for field builders, and prioritize social connection as a national value powered by lived experiences.

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