



Toolkit

TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE. TRANSFORM YOUR WORLD

Steps for launching your own Ben Franklin Circle

Tips for organizing future meetings

Tips for structuring your first circle meeting

Ideas for getting the most out of your circle

THE BEN FRANKLIN CIRCLES

Transform your life. Transform your world.

What are they?

The Ben Franklin Circles are a bold initiative that brings people together in **face-to-face salons** driven by two simple goals:

- To help us improve ourselves
- To help us improve our world

Circles meet regularly, using Ben Franklin's classic 13 virtues to spark discussion about members' goals and aspirations — who they want to be, and what they want to contribute to the world.

Why Ben Franklin?

Founding father, master inventor: Benjamin Franklin was also a pioneer of self-improvement.

In 1727 Franklin formed the Junto, a weekly **mutual-improvement club** made up of individuals with an array of interests and skills.

What are the 13 virtues?

The club was built on **13 core virtues**: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility.

Now, almost 300 years later, the Ben Franklin Circles are revisiting and redefining these virtues—as tools to **enrich our own lives and our communities today**.

How to Use this Toolkit

This toolkit is meant to support, not constrain you. Please treat it like a new outfit: try it on, keep what's useful and make it work for you, and leave the rest. The toolkit provides advice on:

- Starting A Ben Franklin Circle
- Hosting Your First Meeting
- Planning Future Meetings
- Tips for Circle Hosts
- Joining the Ben Franklin Circle Host Community

Section 2: How Do I Start my own Ben Franklin Circle?

So you want to start a Circle. Now what? Follow these five simple steps to get your group up and running in no time. There are no rules — just recommendations.

1. Decide on the group format — Open or Closed?
2. Pick a meeting time.
3. Invite people to join.
4. Pick a meeting place.
5. Host your first meeting!

Decide on the group format — Open or Closed?

First, you'll need to decide the format of your group. Your group can be Open or Closed. Open means that new members can join your group at any time. Closed means that the group is not open to new members and you'll have the same people the entire time. There are pros and cons for each group type.

Open groups

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Good structure for public institutions (schools, libraries, churches, etc.) that want to keep the group open to the community● Lower commitment for group members; they can drop into a meeting at anytime● Ability to reach more people as word of the group gets out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Requires ongoing promotion of the group to the community for each meeting● Less intimate group dynamic

Closed groups

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stronger group dynamic; allows for deeper relationships, more intimate discussions and more trust between group members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Initial legwork to form the group with committed participants

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Up-front commitment from the group; once group is formed, the circle leader does not need to continue to promote each meeting	
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Fun Fact: Did you know Ben Franklin was an early inventor of the pro-con list? As he wrote to a friend in 1772 about his process for making difficult decisions, “My Way is, to divide half a Sheet of Paper by a Line into two Columns, writing over the one Pro, and over the other Con.”

Pick a meeting time and frequency.

Hosting a Ben Franklin Circle is approximately a one-year commitment. As a host, you’ll organize 14 meetings with your group. Some groups have one meeting per month, spread out a little over a year; others meet every other week. You can choose your own meeting timeline.

Tip:

- Be consistent: Have the same meeting place, day and time each month to make it easier for planning and to ensure good attendance at your meetings. Decide in advance when you want your meetings to be (first Tuesday of the month, every other Saturday, etc.) and at what time (we recommend two-hour meetings).

Invite people to join.

Once you determine if the group is Open or Closed, the next step is to figure out who you will invite and how you will reach them.

Private invitations

One option is to handpick your group members. You can start with people you know or would like to know, or do some research to find interesting people in your community. One of the goals of Ben Franklin Circles is to facilitate conversations between diverse groups, so we recommend at least starting with acquaintances rather than close friends and family. (That being said, if you want to start a circle with your immediate family and friends, please do!) Being in a group requires some vulnerability and a willingness to open up; this can be easier in a group where people don’t already know one another. You get to be yourself and share your opinions and challenges with others who don’t have a stake in what you say. It’s like freshman year of college or the first day at camp, when everyone is open to meeting others and you can start fresh.

Tips:

- Start a list of people you know who you think would be good candidates. Good candidates are people who are open to new experiences, open to other ideas and opinions, willing to share and good listeners.
- The ideal group size is 8 to 12 people. If you ask 15 to 20 people, you should be able to land on that number.
- If you can't come up with 15 to 20 people to ask, then start with a shorter list, and as you send invitations, ask them to identify one to two people who might be a good fit.
- Another way to build your invitation list is to reach out to people you don't know but you have *heard* about — like leaders in your community. One Circle host built a dream list of community leaders she wanted to invite. She found their contact information, invited them to coffee and personally asked them to join.
- You can also draw from existing networks you're a part of. One Circle host teamed up with a co-host, and they each asked 10 people to participate. Another host reached out to five people and asked them to identify two to three people to invite and built the list that way. What they all had in common was that they pre-vetted the invitees and made personal asks.
- The asks can be done in person, on the phone or via email/social media. These hosts made the asks personal, and that made the difference. People felt honored to be invited to participate in something special — as they should have!

Open call

Another way to reach out to potential members is an open call. The open call requires more marketing, like social media, posters, flyers and e-blasts, to drum up participation. The Circle host needs to promote each meeting, not just the first one. There is some stickiness with these meetings, and even in open groups, people keep coming back. Remember to publicize the specific meeting time and place, as well as what virtue is being discussed.

Tip:

- Consider a co-host. Working with a co-host can be a big help. A co-host can also help you recruit group members and assist with some of the logistics of each meeting. You can always identify a co-host after your first meeting, or work with one right from the start.
- Use some of our social media graphics, sample invitations, and flyers. Visit our Resources page on the Ben Franklin Circle website.

Pick a meeting place.

If you are an institutional group, you probably have meeting space built in at your workplace; all you would need to do is reserve a room through your existing system. We recommend as comfortable a meeting space as possible. A conference room will do, but if you have a place where you can move the chairs around in a circle, or a more casual environment with couches, that's even better.

If you're an individual, don't fret! Ben Franklin Circles can happen anywhere.

- Around a dining room table
- In your living room
- On your porch
- In a park
- On the beach

Tips:

- Public libraries are often open to giving space to community groups. Reach out to your local branch.
- We recommend a quiet place where you can have a private conversation. You'll need space for the whole group (8 to 12 people).

Host your first meeting!

Being a host does not mean you need to put on a dinner party! In fact, one of our first lessons has been that people never eat the food you put out, so save yourself the effort.

Tips:

- Get your members excited! Pick your first virtue and send it to your members in advance with a fun invitation to come prepared to discuss.
- It's nice to have some beverages (Ben Franklin loved beer, after all); you can invite people to bring a bottle of wine or a few beers to share and some nice nibbles (nuts, pretzels, etc.). But the important thing is that everyone is relaxed and comfortable.

And then you're all ready to go. Welcome your Circle and start the conversation!

Section 3: Hosting Your First Meeting

Congratulations! You made it to your first Ben Franklin Circle meeting. You can use our first meeting guide as much or as little as you need. And don't be nervous. The first meeting can be a little intimidating, but we've provided some tips below to get the conversation started (and trust us, that's the hardest part).

First, welcome your guests, and ask everyone to introduce themselves. Try an open-ended question to make everyone comfortable. For example, "What made you want to come today?" Or try an icebreaker. Here's one we like:

Rose, bud, thorn: This is a very quick and easy way to have people share something personal. Go around the circle. Ask everyone to say their name and (briefly!) share:

1. Something in their life that's going well (blooming, like the rose)
2. Something in progress (the bud)
3. Something they're struggling with (the thorn)

Now you're ready to introduce the topic for the meeting. It doesn't matter in which order you explore Franklin's virtues, but since he started with temperance, that's what we'll do here. Begin by reading Franklin's precept for temperance to the group: "**Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.**" Ask everyone to think about what it means.

Start the discussion with a big-picture question, such as:

- Franklin says he started with temperance because "**it tends to procure that coolness and clearness of head,**" and helps avoid other temptation. Do you agree? Do bad habits build on each other?
- Temperance isn't a word we use as much in the 21st century. What does the concept make you think of?
- Does our society value temperance? Why or why not?

Some sample follow-up questions:

- Some psychologists say that self-control diminishes as the day goes on. We might start the day strong, but weaken towards nighttime. Is that your experience?
- Others say that self-control is like a muscle — that the more you exercise it, the more it grows. Is that true for you?
- Is temperance an important virtue for the community? Why? What are the community consequences if people are weak or strong on temperance?
- Should temperance be imposed (as it was during the temperance movement), or should people be left on their own to cultivate this virtue?

- Franklin’s definition has to do with food or drink. What are other things we might struggle with today? For instance, should we practice digital temperance and use our smart phones less?
- Work can also be an area where people overdo it, and work to “dullness”. Should we apply temperance to our careers? Or does society require that we work all the time to get ahead?

Pro tip! It can be fun to provide some quotes on temperance to get people talking. You can write these on index cards and leave them on the table. If the conversation stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond.

Sample quotes:

“Joy, temperance, and repose, slam the door on the doctor’s nose.”

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

“Everything in moderation, including moderation.”

— Oscar Wilde

“My doctor told me I had to stop throwing intimate dinners for four unless there are three other people.”

— Orson Welles

“I have heard that, with some persons, temperance – that is, moderation – is almost impossible; and if abstinence be an evil (which some have doubted), no one will deny that excess is a greater.”

— Anne Bronte

“Temperance is a tree which as for its root very little contentment, and for its fruit calm and peace.”

— Buddha

Set commitments. Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how to practice temperance in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal for something they’d like to achieve or work on until the next meeting.

Sample commitments for temperance:

- Commit to sitting down for all your meals for a period of time (one week, one month, etc.) Creating a ritual around our meals can help us think more about what we’re eating.
- Think of a social activity that doesn’t involve drinking. Commit to meeting friends for a walk around the park instead of happy hour.
- Carve out device-free time. Commit to one hour a day without looking at your phone. Bonus points: One Ben Franklin Circle member said his struggle was not with food or drink but with Facebook! He committed to deleting the Facebook app from his phone.

Section 4: Guide for Future Meetings

You've had your first meeting, and you're ready for your club to move forward. So let's dive a little deeper into the **three-part format** of a successful Ben Franklin Club meeting.

Here's a general format. Visit the Resources page for more detailed meetings guides for each virtue.

1. The recap: last month's virtue (40 mins)

- Did you achieve your commitments around this virtue?
- Did your understanding of the virtue change over the month?
- How can we apply what we've learned to our communities?

2. Looking ahead: next month's commitments (40 mins)

- How do we interpret next month's virtue?
- In what concrete ways will we commit to pursuing this virtue?
- What challenges may arise, and how can we support each other?

4. Set your Commitments

- Ask everyone to think of one thing they can do between now and then meeting to practice this virtue.

4. The Ben Franklin questions: whom can we help and how? (40 mins)

A set of questions that Franklin and his club asked one another

- What's something you need help with?
- Is anyone here starting a new project? How can we help?
- Is there anyone not here who deserves praise?
 - Anyone who's doing innovative work?
- Is there anyone whose friendship we want?
 - How can we use our networks to help each other?
- Is there anyone we can mentor and encourage?
- Can we give one another any personal/professional advice?
- Can we improve anything about the club itself?

Section 5: Host Tips

Now your Ben Franklin Club is up and running. You're talking about the virtues and applying them to your lives and the world. Here are some general **thoughts to keep in mind**.

1. What makes a good club facilitator

- You're comfortable leading a conversation about life's big issues
- You're a good listener who can ask questions and get others to share
- You're able to manage time and keep meetings on track

- You're ready to see the club through to its natural conclusion

2. Ground rules

- Everything shared in the Circle is confidential
- Don't judge others' commitments—offer constructive feedback
- Attend the meetings—your fellow members are counting on you

3. And don't forget ...

- Document your meetings
 - If everyone approves, share or send us photos, short videos, blog posts, etc.
- Take notes
 - Assign a different note taker at each meeting
 - After meetings, send a short wrap-up email including members' commitments
- We're here for you!
 - Check back on the Ben Franklin Circles website for news and new content
 - Reach out with questions and suggestions

4. Establish a way to stay connected between meetings

- Email, text, Google, Facebook, WhatsApp—pick what works

5. Suggest Accountability Partner

- Ask if members want to pair up with partners to stay in touch and track progress throughout the month

MOST IMPORTANT: What now?

- Turn your inner knowledge into outward action
- How can we use what we've learned about ourselves to better our world?

Section 6: Join Us! Be Part of the Ben Franklin Circle Host Community

We're excited to be able to connect hosts running Circles around the country. You can learn from one another and we can learn from you!

Please tell us how your Circle is going and send us any stories you feel comfortable sharing. Of course, you can keep your Circle meetings private but if you want to spread the word, here are a couple ways to reach out.

- Join our closed Facebook Group for Circle Hosts
- Share photos, stories or tips from your Circle. Post to the group or post to social media with #benfranklincircles
- Follow us on social media and we will follow you back
- Want to share some off the record thoughts? Email us at benfranklincircles@gmail.com.
- Put it on the map! We want to add you to our Circle directory so email us and let us know when you're up and running so we can include you.