Tips for Planning an IF Discussion

1. Recruiting Participants – how to & who
   a. **Direct personal contact** is essential – ads and posters may create awareness but generate very little commitment
      i. Follow-up emails, texts and phone messages are OK, but the ‘ask’ must be face-to-face
   b. **6-8 people** is ideal
      i. Invite 1-2 extras to cover no-shows
   c. **Start with people you know** - friends, neighbors, relatives (social capital)
      i. Make your first discussion a ‘slam dunk’ by recruiting a friendly audience. They will be understanding and provide the most honest and helpful feedback…because they like you.
   d. **People with interest** in topic (not looking for experts)
   e. **Diversity** – gender, age, occupation, location, length of time in community
   f. **Friends** of friends, spouses, children
   g. **Get commitments**, not ‘I'll try to make it’
      i. Get contact info – phone or email
   h. **Remind them** of specific time & location – 1-2 days in advance
      i. Phone or email
   i. **Provide topical guidebook or other discussion guide in advance** – hardcopy if possible (IF provides at no cost) or link to online version on IF website if using email
      i. Hand delivering the material(s) a couple of days in advance is a great way to remind participants and get their recommitment to attend

2. Location & Layout
   a. **Limited distractions**, quiet – limit outside noises, other people, pets, music, air conditioning
   b. **Comfortable** – seating, lighting
   c. **Flexible** – movable chairs, tables
   d. **Round or oval setup** – tables are nice but not mandatory, circle of chairs can work
      i. Sight lines – can everyone be seen without straining
      ii. Try to avoid traditional rectangular tables
   e. **Avoid traditional classrooms if possible**
   f. **Consider public spaces** like libraries, government buildings, community or senior centers, churches, banks
      i. Best if there is a conference room, private room, secluded area suitable for this
      ii. Will food be permitted?
   g. **Private homes**
      i. Work best for 2nd session or where people already feel comfortable with one another
Discussion Setup Basics (continued)

3. **Meals**
   
a. **Keep it simple** – you’re there for the discussion, not the meal
   
   i. Takeout is ok, pizza, subs, veggie trays, etc. can work

b. Plan well in advance – try to **avoid ordering off menus** if possible

c. **Beginning of session is best** so it doesn’t interrupt the discussion
   
   i. Lunch for a 12 – 3 pm session (sometimes better for parents with children in school, also preferred by many seniors who don’t like to travel at night)

   ii. Supper for a 6 – 9 pm session (It’s after work and they had to eat anyway.)

   iii. Exception for a single day-long session (10 – 3) where mid session offers a good lunch break

d. If at a restaurant talk to wait staff in advance about limiting interruptions
   
   i. Consider restaurant’s least busy hours

   ii. Tip generously if holding a table for an extended period of time

e. **Consider pot-luck** for at home meetings
   
   i. Better with groups that feel comfortable with each other

   ii. Good second session alternative

   iii. Can be challenging for busy people

f. Rule of thumb – **plan on 30 minutes for the meal**
   
   i. You may be able to get into the discussion during the meal. Works in some cases and shortens the length of your sessions

4. **Time – length/frequency of sessions, best days, time of day**
   
a. **Two sessions a week apart** is ideal

b. **Session length of 2-3 hours**, which includes time for meal

c. Evenings, 6-9 is most often used just remember that people just back from work might get tired so watch for signals and adapt as needed.

d. **Single one day sessions can work**, 4-5 hours including meal with meal in middle as a break

e. Start on time (If possible)

f. **End on time – ALWAYS**, no exceptions (people can hang around and continue talking and socialize but only if they choose to do so)

g. Select a time that works for you – then build around that

h. If working with a specific group, surveying them for best time is ok, just remember that no one time works for everyone