

Tips for Masjid Open Houses

Increasingly, mosques and various Muslim non-profit organizations are hosting open houses in an effort to educate their neighbors and co-workers of all backgrounds about Muslims and their faith. In light of increasing Islamophobia in this country and growing negative perceptions about Islam and Muslims, it is very important that we provide a positive experience for guests attending the mosque for a Ramadan, or any other, open house. What you present is as important as *how* the event is presented.

To that end, based on our long experience of interfaith engagement and of educating Americans of all backgrounds about Muslims and their faith, ING makes the following recommendations and suggestions for hosting open houses and similar events that are designed to introduce Americans to Islam and Muslims.

Invitations

- Create digital or hard copy flyer or card that is colorful and professional looking. Request an RSVP from all your guests.
- Invite community members who have experience with interfaith engagement and are able to provide basic information about Islam, and make sure that they RSVP their attendance.
- Children of hosts under the age of 12 should be with the babysitter, but youth over 14 can serve as volunteers, waiters, etc., and should be trained in proper procedures.

Venue

- Ensure that your venue is in the best condition possible.
- Ensure that shoes are on shelves.
- If venue is small, limit the number of people who can attend.
- Use tablecloths with matching center pieces and floral arrangement near the front or podium.

Volunteers

- Choose volunteers who have a track record of interfaith engagement and are the best representatives of your community.
- Conduct a brief training before the event to explain the program and make sure everyone knows her or his role and is prepared.
- Refer them to ING's answers to [frequently asked questions](#) to prepare them for answering questions during the event
- Ask volunteers to be at the venue at least an hour before the event.

Greeting and Seating

- Assign a few people as greeters. Their job is to greet guests, guide them to their tables, and check on their needs at different intervals.
- Greeters should dress business professional or, if dressing ethnically, then wear formal dress, and wear name tags or special badges that identify them.
- Seat families together and make sure there is at least one Muslim host at each table.

Food service

- Choose a caterer well known for his/her quality of food, generosity in portions, and timeliness in delivery.
- Avoid very spicy or hot foods.
- Arrange for the caterer to deliver the food at least half an hour before dinner.
- If using disposable utensils, use quality products, and avoid Styrofoam and other non-biodegradable or non-recyclable products.
- Designate a separate container for recycling bottles or cans if used.
- Serve juice or natural drinks if possible.
- Food can either be served to the tables or laid out buffet style, depending on the size of the room and number of people.
- If the room is small and the group is relatively small so that it can be served quickly, have people serve the guests.
- If you have a large room with space for two or more serving stations or lines, buffet style is better. It is often faster to have people serve the buffet as well, especially if the amount of food appears to be inadequate.
- If serving the food, be sure servers dish it neatly. Divided plates often work best for this – one slot each for meat, rice, and vegetable or salad.
- Serve guests first; if there is not enough food, then the guests should have priority.

Program

- The program should be brief and concise. All effort should be made to begin and end on time.
- A leaflet or brochure should be printed and made available either at the registration desk or on every table with brief bio of speakers, sponsors or special guests, and schedule.
- Begin with some type of Qur'anic recitation. Only read a few verses (5 to 10 depending on length) and read the English translation as well. Choose verses that speak of commonalities.
- Only one keynote speaker if time is limited; if you have more time, have a panel or a couple of speakers, but make sure they adhere to time allotted.
- Choose speakers with documented experience in interfaith events who will avoid proselytizing.
- The program should include a basic overview of Islam if time allows, emphasizing commonalities and beliefs or traditions shared with other faiths. Consider using our presentation on [Muslims and their faith](#).
- It should also include an overview of Ramadan. Consider using our presentation on [Ramadan](#).
- Allow time for Q & A at the conclusion of the presentation.
- The goal of answering questions is to create understanding, so keep the answers short.

Prayer

- Give guests the option of observing or even joining the prayer if they choose or of beginning food service during the prayer.
- Choose an imam who can give a beautiful recitation, since this is an art form that can cross different cultures and that speaks to the heart.
- The imam should be aware that time is important in these events and avoid lengthy surahs.
- Even if your mosque has a separate prayer area for women, have everyone pray in the same space, as separation will become an issue of contention that will divert from the overall purpose of the program.

Conclusion

- Choose hand-outs carefully to be sure they are appropriate and do not proselytize; if unsure, it is better not to distribute material.
- You may want to include evaluation forms for the event on the registration table to get feedback from the audience.
- You may also include a sign-up sheet for people who are interested in being contacted for future events.
- Thank guests and speakers for their attendance.
- Present guest speakers from other faiths with a small gift of appreciation.