



PolyColumbus Coffee-amory Event Guide

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Background

Large discussion groups are both a blessing and a curse. You are able to bring a lot of people together to share ideas, but the larger the group, the less time people get to drill down into their personal topics and the more intimidating the group becomes to newcomers.

An event PolyColumbus calls Coffee-amory seeks to help with both of those concerns.¹ We put one or two leaders (generally board members) at a specific coffee shop for two hours at a time, and encourage anyone who wants to chat about polyamory or PolyColumbus to RSVP and swing by.

Choosing a Venue

A coffee shop can be a great place to meet, although a cafe, pub, or other establishment is also an option. That said, using a venue that does serve food (as our venue does) adds value, as folks can eat dinner (or not) if that makes it easier to join the event.

Do ensure that you encourage attendees to patronize the establishment, and do so yourself! You want the owners to like you and be glad that you are there. This is especially true if you lack t-shirts or other wearable insignias, and have to stretch norms a little by “advertising” your group on the table via buttons, business cards, etc. so newcomers can find you.

Transit is an important consideration. Try to be near a major bus line and ensure there is ample parking available nearby.

What to be Prepared For

¹ PolyColumbus does hold a trademark on the name “Coffee-amory”, and so we encourage your group to come up with its own inventive name! We originally used the name “Office Hours” (but don’t anymore), so dibs are available there :-).

We have found that two leaders is a good number, as you can unofficially get some organization work done if no one shows, and can comfortably handle four or five attendees.² However, we have found that RSVPs are important (discussed below).

You will get a lot of folks that are brand new to polyamory and/or your group. Have your own story and your answer to Poly 101 questions at the ready. Those conversations are (we feel) the heart of an event like this: giving folks new to polyamory a wonderful first experience with the organization and useful tools for their own lives.

You might have non-poly folks show up as well. (One of our first visitors was someone new to the city who wasn't poly but was browsing Meetup and thought the event sounded interesting, so he came!) Answer their questions and engage to the extent you are comfortable, but be prepared for some awkwardness.³

Some attendees might ask questions that are essentially requests for legal (or other professional) advice. Unless you have such a professional license, and are comfortable taking on such a relationship, be sure to have the contact info for a poly-friendly lawyer, CPA, therapist, and doctor ready.

The Importance of RSVPs

When we initially started Coffee-amory, we kept it a public, drop-in event (no RSVP required). This led to larger and larger groups attending, until we were averaging eight people or so each event.

The problems with a large group are that:

- It is easy for the conversation to drift off of polyamory and onto current events, pop culture, etc.
- It is more difficult for leadership to steer the conversation.
- Some leaders come out specifically because they are energized by being able to share of their experience to newer people (but are less interested in leading a casual social event). It is important to meet your leaders' needs too, especially if they are driving from across town, buying dinner out, etc. to lead the event.
- It is more difficult for newer people — and especially newer people that are more introverted — to ask their question the larger the group gets. If they are brand new, and one of eight people at a table, it takes real courage to interrupt the current topic and ask extremely personal questions about their life.

² In our several months of holding Coffee-amory events, we have only had one event where no one showed (and two people RSVP'd to that particular event).

³ Based on our Mission & Vision, we serve “those living or exploring ethical non-monogamy.” If the visitor (who didn't seem to be engaging in bona fide exploration of poly) had disrupted our conversations with those who were poly but new at it, we would have referenced this limitation as we showed him the door.

- You might outgrow the venue (especially if the venue is smaller or quieter).

We resolved this issue by splitting the event. We now hold Coffee-amory with RSVPs and a Poly Lounge at a local tavern without RSVPs. Coffee-amory is focused on specific questions about poly or PolyColumbus, while the Poly Lounge is about anything attendees want it to be.

Leading the Event

Here's the text we use on our Meetup page:

Let's get a beverage — caffeinated or otherwise — and talk about polyamory :-). Whether you're curious about polyamory, are just starting out, or want help with a specific difficulty you're having, we're happy to chat! Coffee-amory is also a great way to get introduced to PolyColumbus, meet some new friends, or gain another perspective on a situation in your life.

We will have a PolyColumbus leader or two present (such as board or staff members) and there is no question too basic! We're not able to be your therapist, mediator, or other professional, but we are happy to be your friend :-).

To ensure Coffee-amory remains a place to talk through intimate topics in a small group, RSVPs are required, with a maximum of four attendees. Further, we require those attending to have a specific topic they'd like to talk on. Alternately, you can join us if you're new to polyamory (with lots of questions to ask!), or if you are new to PolyColumbus and want to know more about our community.

We have plenty of other social options — including the new Poly Lounge — for members of our community who are looking for the chance to just hang out with other poly folks.

We meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays at the Crimson Cup in Clintonville at 4541 N. High Street, Columbus, OH 43214. The venue serves a variety of snacks and drinks, and we can always bounce next door to Panera for dinner if folks want to share a meal while talking.

Again, RSVPs are required. We hope to see you there!

P.S. Coffee-amory is a PolyColumbus space, which means our inclusivity and other policies are in effect. We encourage you to take a look at www.policolumbus.org/policies if you haven't had a chance to read them yet!

Here are the expectations PolyColumbus sets for those leading Coffee-amory:

- One board member loves Coffee-amory (it was their brain-child), and so has committed to covering practically every one.
- This board member is responsible for wrangling a second person if at all possible, and ensuring the event is covered if they have a personal conflict that day.
- Leaders should arrive at least five minutes early, because sometimes there is traffic and the last thing we want for new folks is for them to get there with no one waiting.
- Leaders should either wear PolyColumbus t-shirts or have some buttons and business cards to put out on the table.
- Although not optimal, it is okay to cancel Coffee-amory up to once a month (for reasons unrelated to a conflicting PolyColumbus special event) so long as the cancellation is publicized; consistency is important, but life does sometimes occur.



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for Coffee-amory Event Guide

The core of the PolyColumbus Mission is empowering individuals that either self-identify as polyamorous, open, or ethically non-monogamous, or are exploring such possibilities. Part of this empowerment comes from serving organizations with similar goals by documenting best practices and creating other resources for successfully running such an organization.

Good policies and related documents facilitate the orderly and sustainable growth of communities and events that advance the PolyColumbus Mission, whether in the Columbus, Ohio area or elsewhere.

PolyColumbus does not claim a monopoly on wisdom. What we do claim is fifteen years (and counting) as an organization, and leadership with relevant and valuable education, experience, and training. We have confidence in the documents we draft, as well as the humility to revise them when necessary in light of experience.

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