

Creating a Home for CFI Portland

The mission of the Center for Inquiry is to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values.

CFI has established centers throughout the world which provide a means of delivering educational programs and services on a local level and provide a venue for like-minded individuals to meet and share experiences.

In aiming to foster a secular society, we do not seek to abridge the rights of believers. We vigorously object to government support of religion and the use of religious dogma to justify public policy; we do not oppose the free exercise of religion. The secular society we are building is a community of reason and compassion in which the dignity and fundamental rights of all individuals are respected.

Three goals represent the focus of our activities: an end to the influence that religion and pseudoscience have on public policy, an end to the privileged position that religion and pseudoscience continue to enjoy in many societies, and an end to the stigma attached to being a nonbeliever.

Dear Friends of the Center and Meetup Participants:

It is time to start talking about whether or not we want to have a building for CFI Portland, and if so, what resources it would require, how we would go about getting it, and how we would expect to use it.

We are inviting *all of you* to participate in the conversation, and to find *Friends of the Center* who are interested in joining a new committee to research what it would take to have a building, and whether we should tackle that project. For details, see below.

We are approaching our 2nd anniversary as a 501(c)(3) organization in Portland, and by all measures our community has been a fabulous success. We have had great membership growth, lots of programs, and lots of dedicated volunteers who organize those programs in various parts of the Portland metro area. Now, some of our members have expressed a desire for CFI Portland to have a building, and the Advisory Board has promised to research the issue. We have good information about how CFI Transnational would work with us to implement such a project, so it is time to see if this goal is within reach, and if so, to develop a local roadmap.

We are launching two processes to accomplish this: a Research Committee and a general forum conversation.

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Center for Inquiry Indiana

WHY SHOULD I JOIN CFI?

- CFI Portland, Co-Coordinator Kurt Johansen



I'm often asked: Why should I join CFI if the events are free? There are multiple reasons; some will appeal to you more than others. Rather than rattle off several simple answers, I thought it would be helpful to give a broad overview.

CFI has a [multi-level approach](#) to [addressing many of the challenges](#) the world faces, while at the same time providing opportunities to meet the social and affective needs which are often missing in organizations for non-believers. Even if you are the independent introvert type who doesn't desire social interaction or events designed for intellectual stimulation, your participation is still important. In the next few paragraphs I hope to show you what some of the challenges are, the direct action we are currently taking, and why your participation matters.

CFI is a [secular humanist organization](#) grounded in the principles that came out of the Scottish Enlightenment and further refined particularly in the last 30 years by many of the great freethinkers of our day. [Principles](#) like: Freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, democracy, evidence-based knowledge, and using reason to make decisions, define ethical behavior and guide political policies.

Recently, there have been a growing number of religious fundamentalist threats to these values. Across America, there have been relentless attempts to dumb down our science education by adding religious content or pseudoscience. The [Texas School Board](#) approved rewriting history textbooks to suppress the role of Enlightenment ideas in the founding of our country and to inject religious revisionist history into the curriculum. Our secular constitution has been under assault since the [1950s](#). Our motto was changed from "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One) to In "God We Trust", which was then added to our money by law. "Under God" was added to our pledge of allegiance, and a National Day of Prayer was added by law (which last week was deemed [unconstitutional](#))! In the past decade, there's been a disturbing infusion of religion into our military ([evangelizing chaplains](#), [Bible verses on weapons](#); [Armageddon verses on Iraq war documents](#)). Our freedom of expression has been threatened via the resolution passed by the [United Nations](#) and a law passed by [Ireland](#) to make blasphemy illegal. Since 9/11 it's been clear that religious fundamentalists

threaten our society. The major terrorism threat is from Islamic militants, though a [growing number](#) of [Christian militias](#) have also formed in the last two years.

The challenges we face are not just threats from religious fundamentalists. We also have serious scientific challenges that will require rational evidence-based legislation. This requires a public educated in critical thinking and an increased understanding of science. We are facing important decisions about climate change; how to allocate our shrinking resources such as water, oil, arable land, and biodiversity; and rational regulations which balance the [benefits](#) and dangers of nuclear materials, [nano-particles](#), and genetically-engineered plants, animals and humans. The stakes could not be higher, and workable solutions require a solid grounding in science and reason.

In order to push for a science and reason-based approach to these problems, we have to obtain a political voice.

It is absurd that we do not yet
have a seat at the table.

Non-believers make up [at least 12%](#) of the nation. By comparison, Jews make up just 2%, Mormons 2%, and gays and lesbians 8%. There are enough of us to make politicians listen. Because of our passion for choosing different labels (agnostic, atheist, secular humanist, freethinker, etc.), our aversion to joining organized groups, and too frequently the fear of telling others what we believe, we remain the largest minority in the country with almost no political influence. At the same time that we are politically overlooked, we are the [most feared and hated](#) minority in America. This is highlighted when [only one of the 22 nontheist congressman](#) will publicly go on record as nontheist.

The LGBT community has given us a model on how to change public opinion. Numbers matter in our society. Simply joining CFI increases our numbers by +1. Participating in our charity activities or discussing your beliefs openly shows that non-believers are normal, everyday citizens that need not be feared. By simply getting our numbers on the record, we will gain a voice in the public square, attention from political parties, and increase our acceptance as a group in the US.

CFI communities accomplish more than just gathering demographic numbers to increase political voice and acceptance. They help educate our members and the public, and they provide a healthy alternative to church communities. They also mix a wide range of people with different skills and ideas yet share common goals. This mixture acts as a catalyst to spark a diversity of projects and programs that wouldn't have started otherwise. These projects are where the most potent change to society will occur.

The educational programs we provide, such as learning critical thinking skills, will help people in their jobs, life in general, and ultimately the success of our country. These skills are not generally taught in schools. We plan to offer this to adults in the near future. We currently offer it in our children's program along with activities that teach ethics and morality.

The three primary reasons non-religious people cite for going to church are: 1) to raise their kids morally, 2) to find someone to date, 3) to make friendships. These three social needs are not religious in nature so should not be left to churches to fill, and need not be connected to religious indoctrination. We can and should provide a healthier secular alternative.

Non-believers are a diverse bunch. Some are long-time atheists, others recent "de-converts." Some stand politically to the left, some more to the right. Some like to bash religion, others want everyone to get along. Some feel they don't have social needs which aren't already satisfied elsewhere, others would like to have a human community without religious superstition. All of these traits are important. This is where your participation is vital. If a community shifts too far to one direction, people with different tendencies will tend to drop out and its lack of diversity will prevent vigorous debate between competing ideas. Worse, the organization will not be an attractive alternative to religiously dogmatic institutions. So, your participation is not just an activity that helps you, but is critical to the health and direction of the community and attractiveness to others.

SO SPECIFICALLY, HOW DOES CFI ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES?

CFI creates communities across the world. Each community provides programs to satisfy the social and intellectual needs of its members and extended local community. CFI branches offer **intellectual stimulation**

(*Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer* magazines, *Point of Inquiry* podcast, [lectures](#), [discussions](#), [book clubs](#)), **parenting support** (activities for kids, a parenting discussion group), **personal development** (courses for critical thinking skills, humanism, historical study of our cultural competitors, small groups for discussing "The Big Questions" in life, charity work via our [SHARE](#) program), **the arts** (Humanist Film Festival, annual celebrations like Dark to Light), **entertainment/ socializing** (bars/coffee houses, campouts, discussion groups, movie nights, wine tastings), **celebrations of life events** (weddings and funerals with a [Secular Celebrant](#)), and **educational events for the larger community** (conversations with the local religious believers, science lectures on topics like evolution, global climate change, and medical pseudoscience).

Each of these local communities is made more effective by the support they receive from [CFI Transnational](#). Our international parent organization offers legal and administrative assistance, support with bringing in nationally-known speakers, and years of experience so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

The sharing of information doesn't stop there. The various local communities and affiliated campus groups also network with each other via [leadership conferences](#), nationwide phone conferences, and email distribution lists to disperse information and share experiences.

At the national level, we have an [Office of Public Policy](#). It is on the ground in Washington D.C., keeping its ears open for legislation that is either unscientific, or infringes on human rights or the establishment clause. They mobilize email [campaigns](#) or action at the grassroots, federal, or international level. This has already been very effective, and the more members who participate the more effective it will become.

IN SUMMARY:

By meeting social needs at a local level, we create a networked community large enough to tackle America's big challenges today and be a real force against fundamentalism tomorrow.

I hope you can be part of the solution!

[Go to Events](#). [Become a member](#). [Donate money](#).
[Subscribe to our Magazines](#). [Help lead CFI Portland](#).

www.centerforinquiry.net/portland
www.meetup.com/cfi-portland

Life's Big Questions: Questions & Answers

An interview with Sylvia Benner,
CFI Portland Co-Coordinator



Q: What is the program “Life’s Big Questions”?

A: This is a series to explore questions of meaning and purpose, ethics, happiness, and other important issues contemplated by humans in a discussion group format. You don't need to be religious in order to want to examine your life. It's a human impulse, not a religious one. This is our first attempt at providing such a structure in a non-religious setting.

Q: What is the purpose of the program?

A: The intention of the group is not to discuss topics of academic interest, like our monthly Discussion Groups in NW Portland and Beaverton, but more personal ones - those involving meaning and life satisfaction. There is a feeling out there that humanism is a very intellectual movement that doesn't address the affective needs of human beings. That's a charge that I take seriously, because there's nothing inherent in humanism that makes it removed from people's emotional and aesthetic needs. Quite the opposite is true. And when it comes to approaches that have traction, humanism may even be better suited than superstition-based systems to addressing such human issues. After all, we have relied on science and reason to help us navigate these issues. But until recently, we really didn't have a structure to address this side of human inquiry. Potlucks and socials make social connections, but what we hadn't done is provide structures where people can have substantive conversations to help them align their lives with their values as secular humanists. That's what this group is doing, and it's going rather well. Current participants are deciding if they want to meet informally for more mutual support in the future.

Q: Where did the idea come from?

A: One of our members, Bernie Dehler, initially

proposed creating a group to facilitate personal inquiry at his place of work. I asked if we could do this for CFI, because our members had requested regular meetings to talk about issues of meaning and explore what their secular humanist values mean for their own lives. Bernie agreed to organize the program to fulfill this need.

Q: Who came up with the questions?

A: Bernie put together a curriculum after consulting books on goal setting, happiness, and finding meaning in life. The first series in the *Life's Big Questions* program consists of three sessions whose topic is *Finding Happiness and Meaning in My Life*. We are establishing our core values in life and will then align our short- and long-term goals with those values. We hope to duplicate this very format in other areas. The curriculum is set, all we need is someone to host and follow the curriculum as a moderator. But we are also planning to add other topics. For example, we could do a series on ethics, on aesthetics, on creativity, or anything else that people are interested in exploring. I am sure there are members who have good ideas. People who would like to propose a discussion curriculum for the *Life's Big Questions* program, or people who are interested in hosting and/or moderating a discussion group based on an existing curriculum, should get in touch with a meetup organizer or send an e-mail to portland@centerforinquiry.net.

Q: How do I start another group?

A: Anyone can use the existing 3-session curriculum to start a CFI discussion group in the *Life's Big Questions* program. The curriculum can be used as is or modified. People can also develop their own curriculum, and we would want to make those new curricula available for other CFI groups, as well. We're hoping this is a concept that will duplicate and spread. I envision numerous different groups all over the metro area, some with the same, some with different topics. The small, local approach has worked very well for us. It means we can offer more options to more people. All it takes is someone to take the initiative.

CFI Monthly Events

SKEPTICS IN THE PUB

May 1st, 2pm



BJ's Pizzeria
12105 N Center Ave
Portland

Organizer: Kurt Johansen
and Judith Qualman

Meet local skeptics, atheists, secular humanists, scientific naturalists and other friends of reason for conversation and friendship! We meet in Vancouver but welcome people from anywhere.

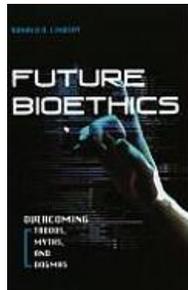
Meetings are informal and social. Conversation is spirited and polite.

FREETHINKERS BOOK CLUB

May 5th, 7pm

Powell's Books
Cedar Hills Crossing
3415 SW Cedar Hills Blvd
Beaverton

Organizer: Tom Gebhardt



Book: chapters four through seven & Ronald's conclusion of: *Future Bioethics: Overcoming Taboos, Myths, And Dogmas*, by Ronald A. Lindsay.

SECULAR PARENTING DISCUSSION

May 7th, 7pm

We're reading the last two essays of chapter two: "Teaching Children to Stand on Principle-Even When the Going Gets Tough, and Secular Schooling" *Parenting Beyond Belief* by Dale McGowan.

SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL

May 9th, 10:30am – 12:00pm

Beaverton Resource Center
12500 SW Allen Blvd
Beaverton

Teacher: Ute Mitchell



TWEEN TALK

May 9th, 10:30am – 12:00pm

Beaverton Resource Center
12500 SW Allen Blvd
Beaverton

Organizer: Joy Licata

DISCUSSION GROUP

May 10th, 7pm

Note: Different Location

Club House of the Murrayhill Woods Condominiums
9450 SW 146th Terrace
Beaverton

Organizer: Kurt Johansen

This month: What are your goals for CFI Portland?

We are a few months shy of our two-year anniversary. We'd like to get your feedback on how we are doing and where you'd like to see us go.

Free for CFI members, \$2 for non-CFI members.

SHEP MOVIE NIGHTS

May 12th & May 26th 6:30pm

Stone Ridge Apartments
13300 SE Hubbard Rd
Clackamas

Organizer: Kurt Johansen

Join us for a time of sharing, the movie, discussion to follow, friendship and snacks. We will have some social time beginning at 6:30, announcements at 6:50 and the movie starts at 7:00.

FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT

May 15th, 6:30pm

Organizer: Joy Licata

Movie Night is geared to our tween group, ages 9-15. Moms and dads are welcome, as well as any siblings that might enjoy the movie.

BEAVERTON ATHEIST MEETUP

May 26th, 7pm

Organizer: Shannon McNair

Moonstruck Chocolate Café
Beaverton Town Square
11705 SW Beaverton Hillsdale
Beaverton



Free for CFI members, \$2 for non-CFI members.

**RSVP for CFI Monthly Events at
www.meetup.com/cfi-portland/calendar**



Yes! I want to become a Friend of the Center!

\$60 (Individual)

\$80 (Family)

\$250 (Supporter)

\$500 (Patron)

\$1500 (Lifetime)

\$20 (Student)

SPECIAL OFFERS: **\$79 Individual PLUS** one-year subscriptions to *Skeptical Inquirer* OR *Free Inquiry*-subscription value \$30
(Please circle your magazine choice above)

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The Research Committee

We are currently forming a committee tasked with two objectives: 1. researching the financial and volunteer requirements for a potential CFI building, and 2. developing a roadmap for how to get there. In doing so, the committee would maintain a dialog with the wider CFI community in and around Portland (more on that below). We anticipate that the committee should be able to present results after three months. It will consist of six people and include both members of the Advisory Board and people who do not hold board positions. Participation in this committee is reserved to Friends of the Center. Committee members should expect to meet and communicate frequently and would have to commit a significant amount of time to the work. The upside is that you would be part of a decision that will have great impact on the future of our community.

If you are interested in participating in the committee, please send an e-mail to Kurt Johansen at kujo78@gmail.com or Sylvia Benner at SMartinaBenner@gmail.com. If you are interested in becoming a Friend of the Center, please go to our [FOC Sign-Up page](#) (go to www.centerforinquiry.net/portland and click on the JOIN US button on the right).

The General Conversation

Hearing from a few individuals who are willing and able to be on the committee is not enough. ***We want to hear***

from all members and from our non-member participants. Final decisions will be made by the Advisory Board, but we need to know what kinds of facilities and/or services our members would like to see, where you think such a Center would best be located and why, if you have ideas of where to look, what we should use the Center for, and how to make it pay for itself. In other words, we would like to hear your insights and ideas so we can include them in our research. And – we would like you to help us dream a little!

In order to do this, we have started a [conversation thread](#) in the CFI Portland Forum where you can discuss your ideas and concerns with other CFIs, the Advisory Board, and the Research Committee (go to www.centerforinquiry.net/portland, go to Forum, scroll to Portland and select the thread titled "Physical Center in Portland".) We invite all of you, whether you are a Friend of the Center or an informal participant in our programs, to check out the thread and post your comments there. Your input will inform the Research Committee's work.

We hope to hear from many of you, and we look forward to the conversation!

Sincerely,

Advisory Board
CFI Portland



If you'd like to contribute to this newsletter, or have any comments or questions, please email Dani @ danijtofte@yahoo.com.

Contact the Center for Inquiry Portland at portland@centerforinquiry.net