



Association for the  
**TREE OF LIFE**

## TEACH-IN ORGANIZING

Teach-ins are educational, interactive forums where people come together to focus and discuss a topic. They are meant to be practical, participatory, empowering, and action-oriented. Lectures, forums, discussion panels, and free debates can all be part of teach-ins. Teach-ins are often held on college campuses, but can also be hosted at libraries, houses of worship, and community centers.

Organizing a teach-in should be seen as part of a larger and longer organizing effort, not as a one-off event. Teach-ins are crucial at this time for educating and awakening Americans to the urgency of the climate crisis. As with other critical historical moments in our history, teach-ins are an important tactic for personally engaging people, and building an effective, responsive movement.

### ORGANIZING PRACTICALITIES:

**Gather your organizers.** A small group of students or volunteers can organize the teach-in. Set a date for the first meeting, and start inviting people.

**Structure the program.** First, determine what you want the teach-in to look like. Length of the teach-in can be an all-day Saturday event, a half-day Saturday event, or an evening event of 2-3 hours. Weekend events may be more preferable, as people can set aside more time and will be fresher than after a workday. Possibilities include speakers, panel discussions, films, and facilitated dialogue with a speaker. The first half could be devoted to discussing the issues, and the second half devoted to response, with a networking intermission in between. You can have several speakers or center your event on 1-2 speakers.

**Outline the content.** ATL can provide suggestions regarding content; contact us for suggestions. A resource page is forthcoming.

**Set a date.** Set the date(s) well in advance—a 60-90 day planning horizon is suggested, to line up speakers and reserve a meeting space. Choose a date or dates that works well for your group, speakers, audience, and semester schedule. Possibilities could include: (1) week-long, (2) Thursday night through Sunday afternoon, (3) a series of Saturdays, (4) an all-day Saturday event that runs late into the evening.

**Reserve a space well in advance.** Public spaces often are booked well in advance, so make this an early priority. Options include universities, colleges, libraries, houses of worship, union halls, and community centers. Choose a site with sufficient seating for the anticipated turnout, that is easy to find, readily accessible, and with proper sound / lighting systems. If the event is an all-day event, make sure there are restaurant options nearby or you will need to provide

food. Many places will donate the space or offer a discount if you tell them it is a free public education event.

**Arrange speakers well in advance.** Choose people who are conversation-starters, not spectacles. Look for speakers who can communicate the climate issue well in everyday language, not scientific jargon. Possibilities include professors at your local university's climatology or physical sciences department, local leaders taking a stand for climate protection, and climate advocates with local organizations. Some speakers will charge fees—many colleges have funds reserved for invited speakers.

**Find co-sponsors.** Co-sponsors will help promote the event through their own networks, and can help with the organizing. Make sure responsibilities and time-lines are clearly defined for each party. Co-sponsoring organizations can set up tables in back to provide attendees with an opportunity for further engagement.

**Handle various details.** Arrange lunch if needed and / or snack table—ask local businesses to donate, or have organizations pick up costs. Arrange an event moderator, a timekeeper, setup and cleanup crews, an AV/light person (they should confirm the system in advance), a photographer, a video person, someone to pass around sign-up sheets, tabling volunteers, and a coordinator to confirm volunteer commitments two days ahead. Create a sign-up sheet, a take-home follow-up action sheet, and a program schedule sheet if needed.

**Publicize.** Create posters, flyers, leaflets, sidewalk chalk, Facebook event page, and radio announcements. Post on website calendars. Personally invite key people (local leaders, government officials, professors), and remind them within a few days prior. Posters around campus should be placed within a week of the event, and may need to be stamped. Have manned tables in the student union in the days prior. Go door-to-door in the dorms. Hand out leaflets personally at key locations on campus. Ask professors of large classes if you can briefly announce the teach-in at the beginning of their class. Ask professors to give extra credit for attendance.

**Cover your costs.** Make the event free, so that all can attend. If funding is not available to cover costs, a cosponsor that is a 501c3 nonprofit org can ask for donations. If you decide to provide lunch, then suggest a donation amount in an announcement.

**Get media coverage.** Write simple, clear, concise press releases, and send them to local radio, TV, and newspapers at least two weeks prior to the event. Arrange interviews with the speakers on local radio programs. Call beat reporters and ask them to attend the event.

**Build future support and follow-through.** The teach-ins are part of a larger movement-building process, not a one-off event. Capture the energy of participants who are eager to respond. Have a table with literature, and a letter-writing table. Pass around a sign-up list, asking for names and email addresses. Send a follow-up email to those who signed up thanking them for their attendance and desire to respond.