

How to host your own mini-COP



Ages: 14+



Time: Over several weeks

Purpose:

To learn about local climate issues and solutions, and raise awareness within the community.

Youth work outcomes:

Outcome 1: Young people are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future

Outcome 2: Young people manage personal, social and formal relationships

Outcome 3: Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills

Outcome 4: Young people participate safely and effectively in groups

Outcome 6: Young people express their voice and demonstrate their social commitment

Outcome 7: Young people broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking

Sustainable development goals:



Context:

In November 2021, Glasgow hosted the United Nations' Annual Climate Change Conference, known as COP26. Global leaders gathered in the Scottish Events Campus to discuss, negotiate and make deals on issues such as energy, finance and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

In the wake of these global discussions in Glasgow, it's the perfect time to have more localised discussions in your own community. One way to bring the negotiations to your doorstep is by hosting your own mini-COP, where local issues such as transport, food and energy can be discussed.

This step-by-step guide takes you through the process of organising an event like this, whether that's in a youth group, a school, or in your wider community.

Step 1: Think about local issues

With your group or some friends, brainstorm some issues connected to the climate crisis that are particularly relevant to your local area. These can be to do with the impacts of climate change in your local area, or with the kind of climate solutions that are needed where you live. For example, if you live in a rural area with a lot of farming, food production could be one of the issues you want to focus on. Or if you live in a town that isn't well connected by public transport, you could choose to focus on transport issues. Talk to other people around you to see what concerns them as well. Decide on how many issues you want to focus on. If you don't have much time, it's better to focus on fewer issues and do it well, rather than skipping over lots of different issues in a short time. Three could be a good number to focus on, as you can cover some varied topics without taking up too much time.

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Step 2: Decide whether you want to hold the event online or in person

There are pros and cons to both options. Holding the event online means that people don't have to travel to reach it, which is good both in terms of carbon footprint and convenience, especially if you are hoping to cover quite a large area. It also takes away the logistics of following covid guidelines. However, at online events it's more difficult to get the kinds of dynamic discussions and networking you would get at an in-person event.

In-person events are great for making connections and getting people engaged. However, there are a lot more logistics to think about, especially with making sure your event follows covid guidelines.

Step 3a: In person logistics

First of all, think about where you want to hold your event. If you are organising it as part of a youth group or a school project, could you use the same venue as your youth group, or your school hall? If you are hoping that people will travel to the event from the surrounding areas, think about whether your venue is in a central location.

Next, consider covid guidelines. How many people are you expecting to come to your event? Are you going to be able to socially distance? Will you ask people to do a lateral flow test beforehand, or wear masks while at the event? To keep an eye on numbers, you might want to set up an Eventbrite page for the event so that people have to register for tickets, even if the event is free.

Now think about when you want your event to be. Evenings are good for people who go to school or work during the day, but not so much if people have children to put to bed. Weekends could be good, or they could clash with other activities. Talk to the people you want to attend the event and ask them what they would prefer, then pick a date and stick to it.

Step 3b: Online logistics

If you're holding your event online, think about what platform you want to use. Zoom is probably the most popular, and most people do have a Zoom account by now. Do you or anyone in your group have a paid account? If not, think about local groups which might have a paid Zoom account that would be willing to lend you theirs for the event.

Once you have set a time and date, you can schedule your Zoom meeting. Make sure you don't share the link online as this means your event could be hacked. The safest ways to share the link are by email or through an Eventbrite page, where people only receive the link if they register for a ticket.

Think about the structure of your event. Will you need to split into breakout rooms? Do you need to share your screen or play any videos? Make sure you've practiced using all these features, and start your call 10 or 15 minutes early on the day to make sure everything is working as it should be.

Step 4: Invite some keynote speakers

At COP and other conferences, there are always some keynote speakers to get people inspired and in the mood for discussion. Often, these are young climate activists such as Greta Thunberg who impress upon the decision-makers the need for urgent and real action, rather than just empty words.

Think about who would make a good keynote speaker for your event. Maybe you or someone from your youth group could open the event with a speech about what scares you about the climate crisis and why you decided to organize this event? Or maybe you'd like to have more than one speaker, or one speaker per issue you're discussing? Local people or experts in their field are good people to ask as they are likely to be respected and listened to by the people at the event.

When you're inviting people to be speakers, make sure you explain what the event is about and your aims for it. You want your speakers to be on the same page as you and for them to inspire action in your attendees.

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Step 5: Invite local stakeholders, the general public, and any interested parties

Now that most of your plans are in place, it's time to invite people to your event! Think about local stakeholders that it would be interesting to hear from, for example farmers, bus drivers, local business owners, and councilors. You might also want to tell your MP and/or MSPs about your event and ask them to come along to hear what their constituents are thinking.

Then invite all your friends and family and the general public to come. The more people you have at your event, the more perspectives and experiences you will be able to hear from, so make sure you invite a range of people and not just those who are already interested in climate change. You could advertise the event on social media, email lists, by putting up posters, and even by writing to your local paper.

Step 6: Decide on your structure

The structure of your event will largely depend on how many people you're expecting to attend, and how long you want to make it. If you're dividing the event into discussions about different topics, it makes sense to allocate the same amount of time to each topic.

If you have multiple topics and are expecting a lot of people to attend, you could split into working groups to discuss each issue and come up with some statements on them to feed back to the main group. On Zoom this is easily done in breakout rooms (but make sure you have enabled this function in your account settings), and in person you can create physical spaces for each group in different parts of the room. Make sure each group nominates someone to feed back to everyone else what the group was talking about. It's good if you have some local experts about each issue in each of the groups, as people are bound to have differing levels of knowledge and ask a lot of questions! If you're working in person, you can get creative with the discussions and provide materials for mind mapping or modelling of solutions.

Step 7: Decide on an output

What do you want to come out of your event? Is the point of it just to have discussions around the issues you've decided to talk about, or do you want to finish with something concrete that everybody agrees on?

It can be nice to have something tangible to show for your hard work, so if you've decided you want to finish with an output, you need to think about what format this might take. It could be a written document, like a local manifesto or declaration. Or it could be in video form, featuring testimonies from individuals and groups who attended your event. If you're wanting people to all agree on a statement, you'll need to factor in some time for this as everyone will have different opinions about what should be included!

Step 8: Host the event!

Once you've sorted all your logistics, advertised your event and invited everyone you want to be there, it's time to host the actual event! Make sure you have enough helpers on hand to cover every task, for example, checking people's tickets in person, or spotlighting speakers on Zoom. Enjoy the experience and remember to thank everyone for coming at the end.

Step 9: Stay in touch

Hopefully in the process of organising and hosting your mini-COP you will have met some interesting and like-minded people in your local area. It's a good idea to stay in touch with them so that you can tell them about future events you organise, and vice versa. The people who attended your event might want to stay in touch with the people they talked to as well. You might want to create a contact list of all your attendees and share it (with their permission) so that everyone can stay in touch. Maybe you could plan to meet up again in six months or a year's time to see whether any of the solutions you discussed have been implemented?