

Sustainable Practices Workshops for Philosophers Guide for Facilitators

by Eugene Chislenko, with input from Kaitlin Pettit and Colin Marshall
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Background and format

Beginning in 2021-22, Philosophers for Sustainability is organizing an ongoing series of local Sustainable Practices in Philosophy Workshops for philosophy departments and philosophical communities. These structured discussions provide an opportunity for participants to identify and discuss next steps toward sustainable practices, both individually and collectively. They often work best when they are led by one or more members of the community, and we are happy to consult with you as you lead an event. We are also available to lead workshops, usually over Zoom.

Workshops are typically 75-90 minutes, either on Zoom or in person; a condensed 20-30 minute version as part of a faculty meeting can also be very useful. We ask that participants pre-read our nine-page [Guidelines for Sustainable Practices in Philosophy](#), now also included in the American Philosophical Association's Good Practices Guide ([Section 9: Sustainability](#)). These guidelines offer recommendations in various areas at different levels of scale, and offer a starting point for discussion.

If you have questions or would like to hold a Sustainable Practices in Philosophy workshop in your community, please contact us at philosophersforsustainability@gmail.com.

Why these workshops?

Workshops on sustainable practices serve several aims. They create opportunities for participants to individually and collectively think through next steps toward sustainable practices in research, teaching, service, and governance. They facilitate the sharing and discussion of useful resources. They build a sense of community. They help center issues of concern to marginalized populations in philosophy, who are mostly also frontline populations with respect to climate change. They offer a chance to discuss and develop positions on recently developed professional guidelines. They further the mission statements of most institutions of higher learning, which often include aims of nurturing the next generation of leaders, building critical thinking skills relevant to contemporary challenges, and/or a commitment to sustainability. And they help interested participants identify each other and, in many cases, form or grow a group that can meet occasionally on a recurring basis.

Before the workshop

The basics of holding the event are simple: get permission, pick a time, send an announcement with the Sustainable Practices Guidelines attached, convene and discuss. This is already useful, without any additional preparation. You could stop reading here and just hold the event. This guide, our sample presentation, and further consultation with us offer further suggestions that may help the event go well, but they should always be tailored to your sense of what will be useful in your department or community.

You may want to ask yourself the following questions before the workshop:

- ❖ Whom do you want to pull in to help make this event happen and help advertise it?
- ❖ Who should announce this workshop, and who should lead it? Do you want a co-leader? Having two leaders can help share work, recruit colleagues, and give the event legitimacy.
- ❖ When will people be most likely to have time and energy to participate?
- ❖ Do you want to do a community-wide event, or part of a faculty meeting, or both in tandem? Doing both allows for inclusive brainstorming followed by specific departmental decisions.
- ❖ Who should be invited? Faculty and grad students only? Undergraduate majors? Students in all or in some particular philosophy classes? Student government? Staff? A campus sustainability officer? Nearby departments? The answer is rarely “all of the above,” though it is often useful to invite a broad range of potentially interested people. Keeping your own workload manageable is also an important concern.
- ❖ Reading through the Guidelines, what are issues of particular concern to you that you want to highlight? Do you have any concrete proposals to make?
- ❖ How will you recruit for the event? Some combination of email lists, individual in-person outreach, a flyer, and recruiting others to help recruit is helpful, as is consultation with department chairs and others.
- ❖ Climate activists sometimes distinguish active supporters, passive supporters, passive resisters, and active resisters. Where do people in your community tend to fall on this spectrum? With many active supporters, a group will be ready to think about advocacy and take some bolder steps. For a more neutral or resistant group, your workshop might aim mainly to get people thinking about the relation of their activities to issues of sustainability, and get people talking to each other about specific department practices. In the latter case, drawing connections to existing mission statements can be especially helpful.
- ❖ Do you want to prepare resources to share with participants? Our [resources page](#) includes links to syllabi and bibliographies, resources on virtual events and faculty travel, a primer on climate strikes for philosophers, some recommended reading, and other resources.

Sustainability is increasingly important to many of our colleagues and students, and people will probably be interested in and grateful for this event. At the same time, philosophers are very busy, and sustainability crises are overwhelming and terrifying, so some people may struggle to prioritize the event enough to come, even if they want to. It is very useful to be kind and enthusiastic toward people as you schedule the event and encourage people to attend. It is also very useful to stay in contact with one or more people who are kind and enthusiastic toward you and toward your holding the event.

Sample workshop agenda

The basic structure of a *full 90-minute workshop* might go as follows:

- (1) Introduction, welcome, and thanks. These can include a [land acknowledgment](#), and having each person say or write one area of interest in sustainability, or one hope for the workshop.
- (2) Workshop goal: identify next steps toward sustainable practices, collectively and individually.
- (3) Background: say briefly why you wanted to do this. Say something personal! Some information on Philosophers for Sustainability and/or the importance of collective action can also be helpful.
- (4) List/review some possible next steps collectively and individually—many options at different scales, drawing from the Guidelines and/or our sample presentation slides. E.g., rethinking course offerings, e-colloquia, cutting plastic or meat at events, taking a position on new construction, etc.
- (5) Breakout groups of 2-4 people (10-15 min): ask participants to make sure each person gets to think out loud about three questions about sustainable practices: (i) what is a next step you want to see in your philosophical community? (ii) what is a good next step for you individually? (iii) what is a challenge or obstacle you'd like to discuss?
- (6) Open discussion (at least 30 min). Make sure many people get to speak, including and especially members of marginalized groups who may not jump in to speak first. As the discussion goes on, help steer participants increasingly toward strategic planning toward next steps in the community.
- (7) Closing: About ten minutes before the end: ask for a show of hands of who would like to meet occasionally in an ongoing way to work toward sustainable practices; if there are several people, do 1-3 people want to coordinate the group? If the workshop is on Zoom, ask people to write into chat one next step they would like to take. Thanks everyone!

A 20-30 minute *faculty meeting workshop* might go as follows, with (1)-(3) taking 3-5 min. total.

- (1) Brief welcome and thanks.
- (2) Workshop goal: identify and discuss next steps toward sustainable practices in research, teaching, service, and governance in the department.
- (3) The importance of sustainable practices. You might briefly cite consensus about climate change, department or university mission statements, and/or this introductory sentence in the Guidelines: “Like academic freedom and academic integrity, sustainability is a part of fair institutional practice and of nurturing the next generations of philosophers and members of society at large.”
- (4) Suggestions and discussion (About 2/3 of the workshop): Following the order of headings in the Guidelines, invite proposals and discussion concerning (i) food, (ii) conferences and travel, (iii) teaching (course offerings and content), and (iv) governance and advocacy within the department and institution. Since time is tight, help keep the group moving through the topics, so it can build toward teaching, advocacy, and the closing. Alternative formats for (4) include self-selected breakout rooms focusing on one of (i)-(iv), or a report on suggestions from a full-length workshop, followed by open discussion. The two workshops can work especially well in tandem.
- (5) Closing (3 min): Ask for a show of hands of people interested in meeting occasionally about sustainable practices in the department (or beyond). Ask whether an informal group or a department committee might be useful, and take names of interested people. Thanks everyone!

After the workshop

- ❖ As you are able, it can be helpful to help an ongoing group form that can keep working toward sustainable practices, with or without you, including getting a first meeting set up. As with departmental climate committees, it is good practice to include students in the group.
- ❖ A thank you email to the department chair is usually appreciated, and can also solicit their thoughts about department next steps and/or feedback for you about the meeting.
- ❖ You may want to consult with someone about this, but in most cases, organizing and leading this workshop should be listed on your CV, in addition to your being proud of having tried it. It is a service to the profession that shows initiative and leadership. Academic credit is crucial for keeping activities like this both fair and sustainable.

A final reminder

Young climate activists often make the same request of everyone: *organize your networks*. One of the best ways to respond to climate change and other environmental crises is by holding an event that organizes your community to think and act in response to it. Events like these can lead someone to start a college-wide task force, design a new course, or cut 500 beef sandwiches from a colloquium series. Some of these impacts can be felt immediately, and others happen later, after the seeds you plant grow and come across new opportunities to implement changes. What you are doing is significant, and inspires other people to take initiative. Thank you for doing it!

