



## HOW TO ORGANIZE AN EAT-IN

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There are eight steps to organizing an Eat-In:

1. Form a planning committee.
2. Choose a location and a concept.
3. Register your Eat-In at <http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>.
4. Get your community involved.
5. Spread the word, and get the media's attention.
6. Run through your logistics checklist.
7. Eat-In! Make sure to take pictures and collect email addresses.
8. Tell us about it, and follow up with your supporters.

An Eat-In is a potluck. It's that simple. It's a group of people gathering in public to share a home-cooked meal. Because it takes place in public, and because it brings a community together to share real food, an Eat-In is also a political statement. It challenges the status quo, it reminds us of the pleasure of eating together and it shows everyone how easy and fun food activism can be.

The first Eat-In organized by Slow Food USA took place in San Francisco on Labor Day 2008 as part of Slow Food Nation. Since then, people have begun organizing their own Eat-Ins in communities across the country, and we've picked up some great tips and guidelines for what makes an Eat-In successful.

Every Eat-In that takes place on Monday, Sept. 7 will be unique, but following these steps will help you plan and execute an outstanding *Time for Lunch* Eat-In.

**Start with a planning potluck. Make it collaborative and inclusive.**

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Our tendency as organizers is to work with the friends we already have and with the communities we already know. It's a great place to start, but our campaign will be more effective – and will have more impact – if we reach out to people we don't already know and invite them to participate in planning.



We suggest you start off with a “planning potluck,” inviting anyone who wants to join your campaign to come together and talk through what you can accomplish as a group. Set a date, find someone who can volunteer their house (or find a community center to host it) and then spread the word to anyone and everyone to attend. Contact your local PTA, local principals and teachers, clergy, leaders in your community and representatives from other groups and non-profits that want to get involved in this campaign.

Have your planning potluck as quickly as possible, as you’ll need plenty of lead-time to organize your Eat-In. On the day of your planning potluck, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Backgrounds vary.** The people who attend will probably vary in their knowledge of Slow Food USA’s work and of the problems with the existing school food system. Keep your planning efforts focused on our campaign and our call to action to get real food in schools.
- **Our focus is national.** This year’s Child Nutrition Act is only one step towards our goal of providing real food in school. After the Eat-In, there will be opportunities to turn our attention to local work improving school food, but for this campaign, we’re focusing on change at the national level. Passing a better Child Nutrition Act will dramatically improve every school’s ability to source, prepare and serve real food.
- **Ask for help,** and assign “homework.” The people who attend your planning potluck are already committed to this issue, and they should all leave with a sense of what their role in the campaign will be and how they can contribute. If someone stands out as a leader, give that person a more prominent role. Let everyone contribute what he/she knows and does best.
- **Think local.** Brainstorm other groups in your community that can get involved. Think about where everyone in your community goes for information, and how you can reach them. When you’re planning your Eat-In, think about the most symbolic place you can have it—at a school, in a school garden, in the city center, etc. Plan to call on local groups and businesses for support.
- **Strengthen your network.** Recognize that the planning process is an opportunity to strengthen your local network. If you lead a Slow Food chapter, remember that people who take on leading roles in this campaign may join your chapter in the future—and may be interested in leading Slow Food in Schools projects after the campaign. Groups you reach out to for support may be partners on future projects. Take advantage of each interaction to explain what your chapter does



and how it might be of interest to your new contacts. And **then send us the names of the people on your planning committee**, so we know who's joined the campaign.

- **Have fun.** That should come easy. You're sharing a meal with neighbors who care about the same thing. Remember that what makes us unique is our commitment to the pleasure of sharing good, clean and fair food. "Making a difference" doesn't have to mean going to meetings and marching in the streets; it can mean cooking, sharing meals and building a community.
- **Take photos!** You definitely need to take photos at the Eat-In, but consider taking photos along the way and sending them to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org). It'll help us tell the story.

### Make your Eat-In fun, meaningful and compelling to the public.

With your planning group, discuss ideas for the kind of Eat-In you can organize. Spend some time thinking about your city or town, its values and what makes it unique, and then think about the audiences you want to attend (or at least to hear about) your Eat-In: parents, teachers, school board members, clergy, cafeteria workers, politicians, the press, etc. What will make them listen? Why should they come to your Eat-In? What will make your Eat-In accessible, meaningful—even irresistible?

Whether you're aiming for a big or small Eat-In, you might consider adopting some of these ideas:

- **Have your Eat-In on the grounds of a public school.** Get parents and teachers and the school's PTA to help you plan it, and invite the students to cook a meal with their families and come together on Sept. 7 to show what real food can be.
- **Organize several Eat-Ins.** If you're unable to organize a large Eat-In, organize several smaller ones in neighborhoods or at schools throughout your town. Each Eat-In can be simple—like low-key block parties.
- **Choose a creative location.** If you're having trouble finding a location—or securing a permit—for your Eat-In, be creative. Have it on a farm or in a community center, make it a block party or decentralize it and have Eat-Ins on supporters' front lawns or in parking spaces downtown while you feed the meter.



- **Teamwork.** Get people cooking together by dividing them up into teams. You may find that local farms or groceries are happy to donate ingredients. Organizing cooking teams is a great way to get kids involved, too.
- **Honor Labor Day.** The National Eat-In is taking place on Labor Day because it's a day that's already set aside for sitting down to eat together. Contact teachers' unions and labor councils to find out if there's a way to collaborate, or think up a creative way to honor workers at your Eat-In.
- **Call your legislators.** During the Eat-In, ask everyone to take out his or her cell phone and call the office of your legislators in Congress. Keep calling until everyone who's there—kids, especially—has left a message telling your representative that real food is a priority in your district.
- **Sign the petition and get contact information.** Ask participants to sign the *Time for Lunch* petition, and hand out copies for them to take home and to their workplace. Get the name, email address and phone number of each person attending.
- **Speak to the crowd.** Invite parents, students, farmers, school board members or politicians to speak to the crowd before you start eating. Even better: have them sit down at the table and start conversations about the importance of real food in schools with the people sitting near them.
- **Tell the story.** At your Eat-In, tell the story of how this group of people came together for a meal in support of real food in schools. The media will pick up on it, and it will show people how easy and fun it is to get involved in the food movement.
- **For more ideas,** check out our campaign web site: <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>. And to see pictures of past Eat-Ins, check out <http://eat-ins.org>.

### Get your community involved.

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Everyone can get behind keeping kids healthy. Get your message out, and encourage everyone in your community to participate in your Eat-In:



- **Reach out to other groups** and organizations, particularly parents' groups and organizations that already work in child nutrition. Since the National Eat-In is taking place on Labor Day, you should consider reaching out to unions and labor councils, too.
- **Advertise** your Eat-In far and wide, not just to your regular mailing list.
- **Get the media** to highlight your Eat-In the week **before** Sept. 7.
- **Post your Eat-In** information to websites like **Facebook** or **MySpace**, and tell your friends to invite their friends.
- **Invite farmers, politicians, school board members** and anyone else who should hear you. Think carefully about the people who should be at your Eat-In and create a plan to get them to show up.

### Run through your checklist

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As you're organizing your Eat-In, you'll have to keep all the event's details in mind. Write out a checklist, and assign tasks to your fellow organizers. Here are some sample tasks:

- ✓ **Choose a location** and secure necessary permits.
- ✓ **Secure tables and chairs.** If your location does not have tables, ask local businesses or community centers to loan them to you for the day. If you have the resources to rent tables, do it. If you want to be more flexible to accommodate more people, make it a picnic and sit on blankets.
- ✓ **Provide directions.** Make sure people know how to find the Eat-In. Give them driving, public transit and parking directions (specific to the Labor Day holiday schedule).
- ✓ **Tell people what to bring.** Make sure people know that the Eat-In is a potluck and that they should bring home-cooked food they believe in.
- ✓ **Bring dishes and utensils.** Tell people to bring their own plate, cup and silverware in order to reduce waste.



- ✓ **Prepare campaign materials.** Get all your materials together: sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, signs or banners, copies of the petition, a microphone, a camera, video camera, etc.
- ✓ **Be ready to advocate.** If you're asking people to contact your legislators during the Eat-In, have phone numbers, mailing addresses, pens and paper and talking points ready.
- ✓ **Assign a press contact.** If reporters are coming, assign someone the task of greeting them, sharing press materials and introducing them to participants.
- ✓ **Assign speaker contact.** If speakers are coming, assign someone the task of introducing them to the crowd and making them feel welcome.
- ✓ **Assign a photographer and/or videographer.** Designate one person or a team of people to be the official photographer(s) and/or videographer(s) for your Eat-In. As soon as it is finished, contact us at [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org), so they can be posted on our site.
- ✓ **Assign a "sign-in" contact.** Be ready to gather attendees' names, email addresses and phone numbers during the Eat-In. Put someone in charge of the sign-in list. Building a list with which you can communicate after the event is critical to the success of the campaign.

### Make it last.

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The mark of a successful *Time for Lunch* Eat-In is its ability to bring a group of people together, collect signatures and contact information and then to turn those people into long-term advocates for real food. If they show up to your Eat-In, that's great; if they keep showing up to future events and start pitching in on projects, that's even better.

*To help turn them into long-term advocates, it's essential that you share their names and email addresses with the National Office, so we can keep them informed of ongoing campaigns and help them become lasting supporters of Slow Food. It's all about the list.*

Here are some ways to keep growing that momentum:



- **Communicate with your contacts.** Whenever someone comes to a planning potluck or meeting, get his or her name, email address and phone number. Send the information to the National Office. The same goes for the Eat-In: everyone should sign in AND sign the platform. Immediately after Sept. 7, write everyone who was involved to say thank you. Tell them what to do next: contact your representative, get five friends to do it too, organize the next Eat-In, come to your Slow Food USA chapter's next meeting, help start a Slow Food USA chapter, become a member of Slow Food USA, etc.
- **Send your list to the National Office.** We will continue to provide information about the campaign and the Child Nutrition Act after Sept. 7, and those who attend your Eat-In will want to keep receiving information and stay involved in the movement. As soon as you compile a mailing list, please send it to the National Office in an Excel document to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).
- **Join us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.** Become a fan of the Slow Food USA Facebook page and follow us on Twitter in order to keep tabs on the campaign and relevant issues for the Child Nutrition Act. Search for us on Facebook or click the link on the Slow Food USA web site, and follow us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/slowfoodusa>.
- **Follow-up.** Get in touch with the organizations you partnered with for this campaign, and let them know that you would like to be a resource for them in the future. The same goes for the politicians you contacted: let them know that they can contact and consult with you in the future. Send the names of your partner and legislative contacts to the National Office, so we can keep them informed of our campaign efforts.
- **Keep the momentum going.** After a little time to rest, the people on your planning committee and the people who came to your Eat-In will be hungry to continue working to get real food into schools. If you don't already have a Slow Food chapter in your area, consider starting one and creating a [Slow Food in Schools](#) project to support your local schools. Join your district's [Wellness Committee](#), and offer to help out with existing projects. If you have questions or want to share ideas, email us at [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).
- **Collaborate.** Consider keeping your "planning potlucks" going beyond the Eat-In to collaborate on future projects and to keep getting new people involved.