

How to Partner With Your Local Astronomy Club

Astronomy is awesome! It seems that every day there is another piece of incredible news or an amazing image from a telescope or space probe from the universe around us! Did you know that there are people who can help bring the wonders of the universe to Earth living right in your own community? If you are looking to bring a dash of space science to a group you work with or serve, such as a local troop of Scouts, a library, museum, a local science fair or other community events, you may be able to ask your local astronomy club for help!



Amateur astronomers are everywhere. Many astronomers love to set up their telescopes for their communities and do acts of astronomy outreach, bringing the stars to their local communities at nearby parks, libraries, schools, and even sidewalks! Astronomy clubs that are members of the Night Sky Network outreach program also have access to additional materials and tools to help bring NASA science to their communities and often bring fun demonstrations of astronomical phenomena like eclipses, meteorites, cratering, and comets with them to their events.

As you may have already guessed, planning an astronomy outreach event doesn't necessarily need to involve just telescopes! Each astronomy club and amateur astronomer has their own style of outreach and you should make sure to communicate each others' expectations fully before an event! No one likes heading into something blind, and by giving your potential astronomers important information right up front you can help smooth out the planning process to help may your astronomy event a success.

Finding a Club

You can easily find a club by searching the NSAS Night Sky Network website at nightskynetwork.org. Just put in your local address in the "clubs and events" section to see who is near you! Get in touch with them by clicking on the club name and then on the contact link for that club.

Contacting a Club

When contacting a club for an event, make sure to have the following info handy and keep a few considerations in mind:

Schedule well in advance. Contact the club well ahead of time. Try to give them at least a month, if not more. Many clubs only have a few dedicated volunteers for outreach events and need to plan well in advance to make sure they have enough members and time to ensure a quality event.

- When is the exact **time** and **date**?
- **How much setup time do the astronomers have?** Some demos and telescopes take a while to set up and get positioned properly. Also, even though the event be scheduled for night time, it much easier for the clubs to set up before sunset, when there is still plenty of light outside!
- Is there a **backup date** in case of poor weather?



What type of event is it? Is it a science, fair, scouts campout, community event, or something else? This helps the club members plan what they will be doing at the event.

Who is this event for, and how many will be there? Let the club know their potential target audience and how many people to expect. Will it be children? Young adults? Senior citizens? An all-ages event? Dozens of people or hundreds? Club volunteers need to know about their potential audience in advance to help them plan what they observe and show, as well as how many members and support they will need to bring.

Where is the event location? Include not just the address, but extra information about the location that they may find useful. Are there special access considerations? Is there access to electricity or internet nearby? Is there a lot of direct light pollution, buildings, trees, or hills blocking the potential view? Sometimes a club member may scout out a location in advance with you just to make sure the location will work for stargazing.

Who should they contact, and what is their preferred contact information? In addition to your own info, is there a backup person, in case you can't make it or get caught up? Is there a person in charge of the event itself or a custodian, or other handy person that can help club members with basic issues with the event space?

Helping a Club at the Event

Make sure you help your guest astronomer out by ensuring they have easy access to your event space and if possible extra help in setting up and tearing down-and time to do it.

Crowd control and **clear guidelines for your visitors** are essential for a smooth event. Remind people not to touch or crowd the telescopes. If you need to light the area choose **dim red light**; red light does not hurt your night vision (as long as its dim!) And last but definitely not least: **No flash photography!**

One bonus that is always liked: **snacks and hot drinks** like tea, coffee, or hot chocolate are the key to an astronomer's heart! A spot to warm up and take a short break if the night is long is also very much appreciated.

Thanking a Club

Thank your guest astronomers after their visit! A thank-you card or email will really help-and of course, a shout out in your social media, if applicable, is lovely too. If you have any photos, or thankful comments from guests, they are always appreciated in particular. Amateurs often put these quotes and pictures their own newsletter and social media as well, to thank their own volunteers and encourage new folks to sign up for more outreach opportunities, too!

