

Sharing the Universe Video Series



“Growing Your Astronomy Club” is a series of three videos that offer ideas and advice gathered from research with amateur astronomy clubs across the United States. The solutions outlined here have been successfully implemented at astronomy clubs to address a variety of issues related to attracting and welcoming visitors, retaining members, and involving members as volunteers.

Watch the videos with your Board and club members. Then review these Tips to start transforming *your* club.

Tips for Part #1: Welcoming Visitors



Sharing the Universe videos are produced by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP) from research conducted by the Institute for Learning Innovation, the ASP, and from astronomy clubs like yours. www.astrosociety.org

All *Sharing the Universe* Videos can be found at:
<http://www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse>



Sharing the Universe is based upon work supported by the Informal Education Division of the [National Science Foundation](http://www.nsf.gov) (www.nsf.gov) under Grant no. DRL-0638873. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



Part #1: Welcoming Visitors

For your astronomy club to remain healthy and growing, it has to both retain current members and have a stream of new members joining the club.

But research shows that clubs have experienced difficulties:

- Shrinking numbers of members
- An aging membership that is not successfully recruiting new and younger members
- Attracting visitors to attend club meetings
- Too many visitors who only attend a club meeting once and never return

Effective practices clubs use to transform visitors into club members:

1. [Attract Club Visitors](#)
2. [Understand the Visitor's State of Mind](#)
3. [Set up a Welcome System](#)
4. [Apply the Greeting Formula at your club meetings](#)

- ✓ [More Tips for Welcoming Visitors](#)
- ✓ [How the Night Sky Network can help](#)
- ✓ [Action Plan](#)



1. Attract Club Visitors

How do you get new visitors to come to your club meetings?

Your club's public astronomy events are one of the best opportunities to let interested people know they can join your club. So along with sharing their astronomy knowledge and views through the telescope, every club member can spread the word about your club.

Many clubs have discovered that members of the public who attend astronomy events are not often aware that the presenters and telescope operators belong to an astronomy club. Or that the club holds meetings that the visitor is also welcome to attend.



If you are talking to someone who shows a more-than-average interest in astronomy, you may have a future club member standing in front of you. The event organizer might want to make sure that **every club member at the event has a few cards or flyers with your club information that can be handed out.**

Suggested approach:

“You seem really interested in astronomy. Our club holds meetings at the community center on the second Wednesday of every month. I’d like to invite you to attend as our guest – no obligation – I think you’d enjoy the speaker and the guy who brings the cookies is a pastry chef. Here’s a card with our website.”

Other misperceptions that visitors might have:

- You must to own a telescope to become a club member (tell them that many members don’t own scopes)
- It is an expensive hobby (yes, it can be, but it doesn’t have to be!)
- You need a lot of astronomy knowledge before you can join (*“Most of us came with an interest . . . not a degree.”*)

If the visitor expresses any of these concerns, give reassurance that all of your club members are at different levels, not all own telescopes (if that’s the case), and you enjoy learning together.

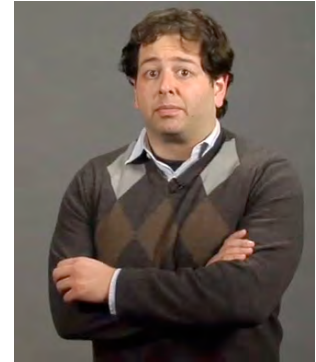
2. Understand the Visitor's State of Mind

When a new visitor walks through the door of your meeting room, you know you've got a very interested astronomy enthusiast who is looking to connect with fellow enthusiasts.

Don't disappoint them and don't scare them away.

Put yourself in the place of the visitor:

- How do *you* feel when you enter a place that is unfamiliar to you?
- Maybe you're not sure what you can expect or what is going to happen.
- Perhaps you feel that everyone is looking at you or that you don't fit in.
- What do you need at a time like that? A warm welcome, a friendly smile, and the simple assurance that "*We're glad to see you.*"



Just be aware of what the visitor wants:

- They want to be acknowledged, but not smothered.
- They want to observe the club meeting, meet people, and be provided the information they need if they choose to join the club.
- Most of all, they want to feel connected without feeling pressured or put on the spot.



For most visitors, the friendliness of your club members is the most important factor that determines if they will return.

3. Set Up a Welcome System

Establishing a procedure to greet visitors to your club meetings increases the odds the visitor will decide to become a member.

Welcome!

Here are tips for setting up a simple structure to get your club ready to greet visitors and make them feel welcome.

You might be thinking, “*All club members are responsible for greeting visitors, right?*” Maybe so, but what often happens is that members are distracted talking to their friends and a visitor walking in will go unnoticed. **It happens all too often that “*Nobody even said hello to me.*”**

Here are the steps astronomy clubs have taken to assure that visitors have a pleasant experience.

a. Recruit a Greeting Team

This team is responsible for greeting everyone coming through the door. Your club might have a “Greeting Coordinator” who recruits greeters, provides training to new greeters, and assures the Welcome Table is stocked.

b. Welcome Table



Have a table at the entrance to your meeting that is staffed by a least two greeters and stocked with information about your club.

It can also be a place where visitors can leave their contact information. Have stick-on **name tags** available for people not wearing a name badge.

Some clubs will give away a small gift for those who visit the table. It’s a great way to put back issues of magazines to good use.

Keep a Welcome Table supply box that might contain:

- Club info sheets / Welcome Packets
- Sign-in sheets & pens
- Event fliers
- Copies of the club newsletter
- General Meeting Agenda
- Stick-on Name tags
- Marking pens
- Welcome gifts like mugs, pens, stickers or back issues of magazines

c. Club Welcome Packet

You know your local club context, so use what is appropriate. These are compiled suggestions of what other clubs have found to be useful to a visitor.

Club Information (could just be a single sheet of paper):

- General information on the club's programs, events, and benefits of membership
- How to get more information (club website, calendar, and/or contact person)
- How to apply for membership, including dues information



TIP: The visitor is more likely to save your Club Information sheet if you print an interesting star map on the back. Night Sky Network offers several star map options: <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/download-list.cfm?SearchString=star%20map>

Optional items:

- Letter of Greeting from the President.
- A brief history of the club.
- List of club committees and special interest groups and who to contact.
- A small gift like a club patch, refrigerator magnet, or NASA bookmark

What NOT to include in a Welcome Packet:



- Full club roster with names, emails, phone numbers. Unless every member has given permission to be publicized this way, this could be considered a privacy issue, especially if the person receiving the packet is not yet a member.

4. Apply the Greeting Formula: Greet, Show, Introduce

Now that you have your *Welcome System* in place, your club is ready to greet visitors to your club meetings.

1. Greet

Staff your Welcome Table with at least two greeters. Greet *everyone* including regular members and any children accompanying the adults (sometimes it's the child that has brought the parent to the meeting!).

Be sure to welcome visitors who are outside of the "normal" amateur astronomer demographic. Some visitors might be operating a mobile device while talking to you, or have non-traditional haircuts, clothes, or body decoration.

What do Greeters say when they see someone they don't recognize?

"Welcome! I don't think I've met you yet? I'm Dave Garrett." OR

"We're glad to have you here. I don't recall meeting you before. I'm Dave Garrett."



(DON'T say "Are you new?" or "Is this your first time here?" You might embarrass yourself or offend a regular member.)



If it turns out this is the first time they have visited, start a short conversation with one of these:

- *How did you hear about our club?*
- *Why did you decide to come tonight?*
- *Do you live in the area?*

2. Show

Show the visitor what they need to know:

- Show the person the materials on the Welcome Table.
- Give the visitor a club flyer or welcome packet.
- Show them the refreshment table and where the restrooms are.
- Make a name tag with their first name.

3. Introduce

Help visitors connect with other members so you can be free to return to the Welcome Table:

- Introduce the visitor to another member, telling the member a little about the visitor. You might say: *"Brooke, this is Joan. Brooke just moved here from Washington. She belonged to*

an astronomy club there and wanted to find out about ours. Brooke, feel free to ask Joan any other questions you might have. Thanks again for coming.”

- Ask a member to sit with the visitor during the meeting.

4. Acknowledge Visitors during the Meeting (but don't ask them to speak!)

As part of the club meeting, the person running the meeting may ask visitors to stand or raise their hand. Ask your members to notice which people raised their hands and say “Be sure to introduce yourself to our visitors at the break.”



It is not advisable to ask visitors to stand up and say something. If you do, you're putting them on the spot – asking them to do “public speaking.” Be careful, even asking a person say their name and city to the whole group is too intimidating for some people.

Avoid frightening the visitors.



“Once a newcomer was sitting next to me and when he saw the President was making all the visitors stand up and introduce themselves, he split out the back and hid in the restroom. He didn't come out until the main speaker started.”

5. Final Check

After the meeting, say goodbye to visitors, and invite them to return next time. Ask them if they have any questions.

- ✓ Do visitors walk away with a flyer or welcome packet?
- ✓ Do they know how to contact someone in your club or complete an application form?
- ✓ Do they walk away with a good feeling about their experience?

If so, you may soon have a new member!



More Tips for Welcoming Visitors

Signage

Help visitors find you!

Do you have a sign (or signs) that directs people to your meeting location? This is particularly important if you meet in a location that has multiple buildings or rooms, like a school campus, museum, or community center.

Quality Refreshments

Provide a table with quality refreshments. Serving food is a time-honored tradition at social gatherings and contributes to a welcoming atmosphere. Many clubs provide a budget for refreshments and have a member who is responsible for bringing them. Some clubs put out a refreshment donation jar that the refreshment person uses to purchase goodies, beverages, and supplies.



Make it easy for everyone to become a club member

Are you driving away younger adults before they even have a chance to join?

Do prospective members need to print out an application, write a check, locate an envelope and a postage stamp and mail it in? For many people, and particularly younger adults, writing a check and mailing it is considered outdated and inconvenient.

How to streamline becoming a club member:

- ✓ **Apply for membership online:** It's OK to provide a paper application a visitor can complete at the club meeting, but for added convenience and to attract younger members, many clubs now use the customizable Night Sky Network online application form.
(Example: http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club-apply.cfm?Club_ID=51)
You can link to the application right from your club website.
- ✓ **Pay dues online:** Many clubs have set up PayPal or other online payment services for dues, donations, and club materials like jackets and hats. Ask one of your web-savvy members to set up Paypal or a similar service for your club, if you don't already have one. Your members (and your treasurer) will thank you for it.



How the Night Sky Network can help



The more club functions that can be accessed online, the more likely younger adults will be attracted to your club. Here are just a few of the online services your club can use on the Night Sky Network:

- Online application
- Magazine renewals
- Event Calendar
- RSVPs to events
- Tracking volunteer hours
- Online training

All this and more is available at no cost through the Night Sky Network:

<http://nightskynetwork.org>

For example, clubs that are members of the Night Sky Network can subscribe to and renew magazine subscriptions online at the club discount price. Just log in and go to the Links page:

<http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/links.cfm>.

For more about the online features available for free through the Night Sky Network:

<http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/apply.cfm>

For assistance with setting up your astronomy club on the Night Sky Network, contact:
nightskyinfo@astrosociety.org

Action Plan: Welcoming Visitors

Make your own plan for implementing practices to attract and welcome visitors.

Already Do ✓	Implement by mm/dd/yy	SUGGESTED PRACTICE
		Develop a Welcome Packet and/or Club Information sheet
		At public events, provide members with club information sheets as handouts for visitors
		At public events, members are in the habit of telling interested visitors about the club
		Set up a Welcome Table at club meetings
		Recruit Greeters to staff the Welcome Table at club meetings
		Apply the Greeting Formula at all meetings: Greet, Show, Introduce
		Provide refreshments at club meetings
		Adequate signage for meeting location
		Acknowledge visitors at club meetings (without making them stand up and introduce themselves)
		Ability to apply for club membership online
		Ability to pay membership dues online (e.g. using PayPal)
		Use Night Sky Network Services for:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online club membership applications
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazine renewals
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event Calendar
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses to events
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking volunteer hours
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online training

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Watch the videos with your Board and club members. Then review these Tips to start transforming *your* club.

Tips for Part #2: Keep ‘em Coming Back



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Part #2: Keep 'em Coming Back

The top reasons why amateur astronomers join astronomy clubs:

- To belong to a community with shared interests and activities.
- To learn about astronomy.
- To learn to use a telescope and other equipment.

But research with astronomy clubs has shown that too often:

- New members are left on their own to find out what the club offers and any rules or procedures that need to be followed, such as controlling their headlights or interior car lighting at dark sky events, or using red flashlights
- A member asking for help is further confused by jargon or put off by a “you should know that” attitude.
- Monthly club meetings involve too much club business that most members find tedious.
- Presentations at meetings are at too high a level, such that most of the club members are lost.

When these occur too often, a member may decide that the club is not responsive enough to the needs of its members and he or she ends up not returning.

For your club to be a healthy, vibrant organization that gives your members years of enjoyment and learning, it has to meet the needs and interests of *all* your members.

Effective practices clubs use to better meet the needs of their members:

1. Create the position of *New Member Steward*.
2. Conduct meetings that members *want* to attend.
3. Provide a supportive learning environment for your members.

- ✓ Tips on Diversifying your Club
- ✓ How the Night Sky Network can help
- ✓ Action Plan



1. Create the position of *New Member Steward*

The New Member Steward helps new members know what to expect. You may give this person any title you like, such as Mentor, Guide, or Coach.



TIP: Procedures that might seem obvious to long-time members are not necessarily obvious to new members. Examples:

- What is your standard meeting agenda?
- What is the procedure for opening and closing your meeting room or using your observing site?
- How do members arrange for an observing session with other club members?
- Who does a member contact to make suggestions for meeting programs or other activities?
- How does the member get club discounts on magazine subscriptions?
- Is the member expected to help out in some way at events?

The New Member Steward is available to orient new members and answer their questions.

The Steward:

- Sends new members a welcome note, including where to get the information the new member might need.
- Orients them regarding club customs and culture, like converting to red lighting inside their car, any procedures regarding use of the club's observing site or meeting location, and any club projects the new member should be aware of.
- Keeps them informed of club events and invites them to join in throughout the first year.
- Makes sure they know about the various opportunities your club offers, including outreach and volunteer training.
- Tries not to overwhelm them with too much information.



Members feel more a part of the club if they are given an item that identifies them as a member.

Some items that clubs provide:

- A name badge that includes the member's name and the club name
- A hat with a club logo
- A membership card
- Many clubs offer club logo items for purchase, like mugs, flashlights, vests, jackets, or shirts



"We provide simple engraved plastic name badges for all our members. It sure helps the newbies ... well, it also helps those of us who can't remember everyone's name. A local awards and trophy shop makes them."

2. Conduct meetings that members *want* to attend

What does your monthly club meeting agenda look like?



TIP: More focus on astronomy, less focus on business & announcements



Meeting Agenda Time Allocation

How much of your monthly club meeting is spent on business and how much on astronomy? Is the invited speaker's start time frequently delayed because of an extended discussion of some aspect of club business?

At your monthly club meeting, do you try to conduct a business meeting complete with readings of minutes, reports from the treasurer and other committees, and discussion of numerous items? You might want to ask how many of your members are **REALLY** interested in that. You might discover that most of the members only tolerate the business portion and become annoyed when it extends beyond a few minutes and interferes with other astronomy-related items on the meeting program agenda.

Making all the members who attend your monthly meeting listen to minutiae like the wording for a flyer, detailed plans for a school astronomy event, or reports on membership dues can be excruciatingly boring for much of the membership.

As a practice, many clubs have found that having business meetings separate from general monthly meeting is more appreciated by the members as well as a more effective and efficient method of making decisions.

So how do clubs separate business from the monthly meeting?

Here are different ways clubs handle it:

1. If your club feels it must have business meetings that are for the general membership, consider not having them *every* month – only conduct them when your Board needs input from the members. And only include the one or two issues the Board needs feedback on. Clubs find this doesn't take more than 15 minutes.
2. Plan a more formal business meeting just once a year to handle elections, annual treasurer's report, awards ceremony, and any significant issues that need member input. Many clubs do this at the December members meeting. The rest of the year, business meetings are held separately from the monthly membership meetings and all members are invited to attend.
3. If you hold Board meetings, invite your members to participate. Discuss all business at the Board meeting. Most clubs find that other members only infrequently choose to attend. So

all members stay informed of decisions, post the minutes of the meeting on your website or attach them in a document to the Board meeting event on Night Sky Network.

4. Schedule the business meeting before or after your general meeting. You might find that not many members will attend and that your membership has confidence in the Board to make the necessary decisions.



TIP: Limit announcements at club meetings

How much time is spent giving announcements at club meetings? Successful clubs have found that limiting announcements to take up no more than five minutes of the meeting is a welcome change. Consider placing announcements in email notices, your newsletter, and/or on your website, where all members can see them, not just those who attended the meeting.



"I was so relieved when we set a time limit of one minute for anyone who wanted to make an announcement. We even have a timekeeper who uses a clicker to signal when they have to sit down."

MORE TIPS for holding club meetings that your members will look forward to attending

1. Take a look at *your* club meetings: What is the balance between business, announcements, and astronomy? Is the amount of time spent on each appreciated by your membership? Or is too much time spent on business and announcements and not enough on astronomy?
2. How are your meetings structured? Do you have meeting programs that include a lot of variety? See "**Ideas to Enhance Club Meetings**" for suggestions.
3. When you first invite a speaker to do a presentation to your club, ask the speaker to aim the level of the presentation to that of the "interested public." Too many technical talks might confuse many of your members. The talks should be accessible to most of your membership.
4. If your speaker is getting too technical, have a member whose job it is to interrupt the speaker and ask, "*Some of our members may be unfamiliar with the term <repeat the unfamiliar term or concept>, could you take a minute to explain what that is?*"
5. **Begin and end your meetings on time.**



Ideas to Enhance Club Meetings

These ideas come from astronomy clubs around the country:

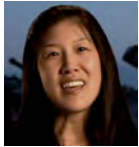
1. Schedule an **annual dinner** with videos and socializing. Show **classic science fiction** movies.
2. Have a meeting where several members **set up “stations”** around your meeting room to share some aspect of astronomy or equipment in which they have an interest.
3. Consider having a **Kids Corner**. Some clubs have found that more members attend meetings if they can bring their children too. The Night Sky Network ToolKits* have a variety of activities to keep 6 – 12 year-olds interested. Astronomy-related movies, videos, NASA lithos, and astronomy applications for mobile phones and other electronic devices can also provide interest. *(Photo: Kids making Pocket Solar Systems. Credit: Alyssa Henderson, Kansas Astronomical Observers)*
4. Hold a **telescope workshop** once a year to tune up telescopes and (for those who may have received a scope over the holidays) introduce new telescope owners to their instruments.
5. Invite **local high school science fair winners** to come in and talk about their projects.
6. Hold a **swap meet** and invite other local clubs.
7. **Invite post-docs as speakers** – many colleges and universities offer a speaker's bureau for new post-docs to get used to talking to the public. These are usually younger people (under 35) and include quite a few women. (Post-docs: graduates who have recently earned their PhDs.)
8. Don't forget **your own members** often have a wealth of experiences and interests to share: historical perspectives, vacation trips that involve astronomy, research or projects they've done, skills they can share. So do members from other clubs.
9. Speakers can come from **your local college or university**, science center or museum, planetarium, even engineering and research firms.
10. Give a ticket to each person attending the meeting and have a **door prize drawing** at the end for a poster, book, red flashlight, or other such item.
11. Check the club calendars and newsletters of **nearby astronomy clubs** for speakers they have used. Contact the person who arranges the meeting program from another club to exchange ideas.
12. Hold an **annual awards** meeting to recognize all members who have contributed to the club.
13. Sell **raffle tickets** and have a drawing for special prizes, if allowed in your area.
14. Introduce one of your **Night Sky Network ToolKits*** by showing the Training Video and trying out a couple activities. You can download **astronomy activities and a variety of PowerPoints** with scripts: <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/download-search.cfm>
15. Use the PowerPoints with speaker recordings from **Night Sky Network Tele-Conferences**. These bring NASA scientists and others in as your meeting speaker – no stipend needed! See the list and download them here: <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/download-list.cfm?SearchString=tele-conference>
16. Show **Sharing the Universe videos** to discuss issues concerning doing outreach with the public or on ideas for growing your club: <http://www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse>



* Night Sky Network ToolKits: If your club is a member of the NASA Night Sky Network (NSN), contact your club's NSN Club Coordinators for more information. <http://NightSkyNetwork.org>

3. Provide a Supportive Environment for Learning

Is the club environment a safe place to ask the most elementary of questions? For less experienced members, it is essential that no question is treated as a “stupid question.” Respond to each question with a respectful answer. We all were beginners at one time. All of us went through a learning process – often with other members to help us. Become a welcoming, respectful mentor.



“In our club, things run well and we sometimes forgot that a lot of our members – maybe a third of the club – don’t know much about astronomy and unless they’d come to us and say, ‘Hey, we’d like to learn about astronomy,’ we’d forget. So we wanted to organize something for them.”

Consider starting Special Interest Groups (SIG) for members who would like to learn more about astronomy (or sharing astronomy with the public), the night sky, and/or operating a telescope – at the introductory level. Here are some ideas other clubs have used:

- Members can use the Night Sky Network Toolkits & Videos, Sharing the Universe Videos, and other Night Sky Network resources as the basis for each astronomy-learning SIG meeting. Your Outreach Coordinator or other experienced member might be interested in leading such a group in order to encourage more participation in your outreach events.
- Request two or three experienced members to help the new telescope owners learn about their telescopes.
- To avoid adding an extra trip in order to attend, consider holding SIG meetings just before (or after) the general meeting and/or at your observing nights.



Tips on Diversifying your Club

Many clubs are concerned by a shortage of younger adults and women among their membership. Clubs indicate that they would like to increase diversity in their club and reduce what many refer to as the “white-hair syndrome.”

Here are some things to be aware of:

Younger Adults (18-35):

- a) May be less confident and easily intimidated. Don’t try to impress them with your knowledge or array of equipment – instead get them talking about themselves and what interests them.
- b) Are more likely to depend on electronics and online sources for information and communication. Make sure your club has online resources for your calendar, paying dues, and communicating with other members.
- c) May have a reduced sense of privacy due to the culture of social media. They may be more candid than older members are accustomed to.
- d) Might be using electronic devices during meetings and events to share their experiences with friends.
- e) Could be potentially intimidated by a lack of other members their own age. Be sure to let them know they are welcome and ask them to invite their friends next time. Avoid being condescending or parental.

Women:

- a) Might be intimidated by a lack of other female members. Introduce them to other women in the club.
- b) Are likely to require a restroom at dark-sky observing sites – more likely than men might. Be sure facilities are available.
- c) Feel a sense of safety with the club – she can attend star parties and observe at remote sites with a group of people instead of by herself. As one woman said, *“It was kind of fun to tell my friends: I partied all night in the dark with a bunch of guys.”*
- d) When appropriate, be sure to welcome families to your events: Tell your members “Bring the whole family” to public astronomy events where other families might attend.



How the Night Sky Network can help



The NASA Night Sky Network provides a variety of resources specifically designed to meet the needs of astronomy clubs:

- **Recorded teleconferences with scientists** to use as “speakers” at your club meetings. Comes with a PowerPoint, a recorded talk, and a written transcript. Find them here (you will need to be a member of Night Sky Network and log in first): <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/download-list.cfm?SearchString=tele-conf>
- **Outreach Training Videos:** www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse
- **Online Astronomy Activities** that illustrate concepts in astronomy clearly – and include videos: <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/download-search.cfm> (for Night Sky Network members) or <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/download-search.cfm> (publicly accessible).
- **Outreach ToolKits:** Contact your club’s Night Sky Network Club Coordinator
- **For more on what the Night Sky Network offers,** watch these short videos: <http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/about.cfm>

For assistance with setting up your astronomy club on the Night Sky Network, contact: nightskyinfo@astrosociety.org

Action Plan: Keep ‘em Coming Back

Make your own plan for implementing practices to meet the interests and needs of club members.

Already Do ✓	Implement by mm/dd/yy	SUGGESTED PRACTICE
		Start and end club meetings on time
		Monthly meeting agenda focuses more on astronomy, less on announcements and business discussions
		Detailed business meetings are held separately from the monthly members meeting
		Ask invited speakers to talk at the level of the “interested public”
		Assign a member who asks invited speakers to explain technical terms
		Vary the monthly meeting programs – try something new
		Provide club members with a badge, hat, or other item that identifies them as a member of the club
		Create position of New Member Steward
		Members are aware of the importance of treating every question (and every member) with respect
		Organize Special Interest Groups for (make your own list): _____ _____
		Use Night Sky Network resources for:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded teleconferences with scientists to use as “speakers” at your club meetings. You will need to be a member of Night Sky Network and log in first: http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/download-list.cfm?SearchString=tele-conf
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach Training Videos to give members tips on sharing astronomy with the public: www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse
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Then review these Tips to start transforming *your* club.**

Tips for Part #3: Cultivating Volunteers



Sharing the Universe videos are produced by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP) from research conducted by the Institute for Learning Innovation, the ASP, and from astronomy clubs like yours. www.astrosociety.org

All *Sharing the Universe* Videos can be found at:
<http://www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse>



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Part #3: Cultivating Volunteers

An astronomy club needs its members to fill a variety of support roles to help the club run smoothly. But research with astronomy clubs has shown that too often:

- Clubs find it difficult to recruit members to fill needed volunteer positions.
- Members who take over a position receive no training or support, causing them to spend way more time than they had expected.
- The same people serve in the same positions for years on end. Such people often: a) experience burnout, or b) don't think anyone else can handle the job, or c) have been in the position so long that the rest of the club expects them to continue and doesn't even consider that someone else should take over.
- Without a regular turnover of volunteers in the management of the club, uninvolved members develop the idea that they need not contribute or that there are no opportunities to do so.
- Members feel unappreciated for the efforts they make in support of the club.



The way many clubs address these issues is to develop and sustain a *culture of service* to the club, where every member expects to eventually serve in some way.

Effective practices clubs use to develop a culture of service:

1. Consider Term Limits to prevent burnout and ossification.
2. Implement Effective Recruiting Strategies
 - a. Have incumbents prepare a description of their job.
 - b. Institute a policy that the incumbent recruits his/her own replacement and commits to training the new person.
 - c. Recruit one-on-one, preferably face-to-face.
 - d. Create the position of Volunteer Coordinator.
3. Make each job manageable.
4. Give volunteers public recognition for their service to the club.

- ✓ [More Tips on Retaining Volunteers](#)
- ✓ [How the Night Sky Network can help](#)
- ✓ [Action Plan](#)
- ✓ [Volunteer Roles Checklist](#)



1. Consider Term Limits to prevent burnout and ossification

People are the heart of your club, and without a variety of volunteers – and new blood – to help run the club, it can stagnate. In addition, if the same people keep the same jobs for a very long time, the rest of the club members might feel excluded or marginalized – with no opportunity to contribute their ideas and services to the club.

Consider instituting “term limits” for these reasons:

- To keep fresh ideas flowing into the club.
- To make members feel the club is inclusive and welcome to new people (and your club doesn’t run the risk of not being able to remove a less-than-effective volunteer).
- To give a potential volunteer assurance that they are not going to be “stuck” in the job longer than the term.
- It supports a club culture where members know they are expected to take a turn serving the club.



Afraid that imposing term limits will leave you with a lot of vacant positions that are difficult to fill? *Implement Effective Recruiting Strategies!*

2. Implement Effective Recruiting Strategies

Which recruiting technique you use depends on what type of volunteers you need. Recruiting volunteers for **public astronomy events** requires a very different strategy than recruiting for **positions on the Board or for committee and support/administrative roles**.

Recruiting for Public Astronomy Events

How often do members volunteer to help at outreach events? Is it always the same group?

Club members may not know what's involved in sharing astronomy with the public. So they may be hesitant to volunteer. So, to introduce members to **public outreach**, invite club members to attend your public events just to see what goes on. Ask them to simply observe the different ways they *might* participate. They don't need to bring a telescope or talk with the public if they're not ready yet.

All they need to do is watch and learn, so they can make an informed decision about participating in a way that fits their interests and skills. This is a no-obligation introduction to public outreach.



The Volunteer Coordinator can send general emails to the membership encouraging participation and offering support for new outreachers. If you offer an **outreach training program**, make sure your members are aware of it. Many clubs use the Night Sky Network Toolkits* to conduct training and give members ideas they can use to excite and inform the public. Your Outreach Coordinator or other experienced member might be interested in leading such a group in order to encourage more participation in your outreach events.



TIP: Refer members to the Sharing the Universe Video series, *Outreach Training*, for tips on successful public outreach: <http://www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse>.

*Night Sky Network ToolKits: If your club is a member of the NASA Night Sky Network (NSN), contact your club's NSN Club Coordinators for more information. <http://NightSkyNetwork.org>

Recruiting for the Board and Committees

Problems clubs experience with recruiting volunteers for the Board or Committees:

- People join the club for their love of astronomy – not love of administration.
- Club members are generally not trained for administrative duties, so they may feel uncertain and unqualified.
- There is no one in the club who actually has the responsibility to recruit for vacant positions.

People are reluctant to volunteer if they don't know:

- How much time is involved.
- What they are expected to do.
- How long they are expected to serve in the position.
- Who is going to help them learn the job.

So who does the recruiting? What does the recruiter need to prepare? How do you recruit and support a volunteer?

Effective policies clubs have instituted to recruit for Board & Committee positions

a) The incumbent prepares the job description

The best person to prepare a job description is the person who holds the job now.

Just have the incumbent list what they do, what tools they use, who their contacts are, and anything they feel is important for anyone holding the position to know.

Checklist for job descriptions:

- Task list:** What steps are involved in doing the job and include any deadlines.
- Contacts:** Anyone the volunteer needs to know about for the job (e.g. a list of media contacts for the publicity coordinator or, for the outreach coordinator, school and scout contacts).
- Resources** needed to learn about or to do the job (e.g. *Robert's Rules of Order* are useful for Board members, bank account and PayPal account information for the treasurer, or sources of speakers for the meeting program coordinator)
- Any special skills needed**
- Any rules or procedures** that need to be followed (e.g. procedure to reserve observing nights at the State Park)
- Time Commitment:** Be accurate regarding the estimated time commitment. Set expectations appropriately. Don't say it takes one hour a month when it actually takes 4 or 5 hours. The person may never volunteer again and might resign from the assignment.
- Term:** what is the term limit and/or expected period of service?



TIP: You may want to make a policy that the Board reviews the job description for accuracy and completeness.

b) The incumbent recruits his/her own replacement and commits to training the new person.

Make it a policy that, when appropriate, the member who currently has the job commits to find *and train* their own replacement – the incumbent is often the most motivated, can best explain the job, and can effectively train and mentor their replacement. Plan a transition period and plan for the incumbent to be the new person’s coach and mentor for the first two to four months.

c) Create the position of Volunteer Coordinator

- Consider appointing a Volunteer Coordinator who is responsible for recruiting volunteers for vacated positions on committees and the Board when the incumbent cannot.
- This person is also responsible for recruiting outreach volunteers.
- Oversees the volunteer recruitment process.
- Plans public recognition for volunteers (see the section “Give volunteers public recognition for their service.”)

d) Recruit one-on-one, preferably face-to-face.

Why not just place a notice in the newsletter? If that has resulted in quickly getting good, qualified members to volunteer, then your club is the exception and you should continue the practice.

What more commonly happens:

An article in the newsletter or an announcement at a meeting asking members if anyone wants to fill board or committee positions can result in either of these consequences:

- **No one responds.**



“We put notices in the newsletter for three months that we needed a new editor. But nobody volunteered or even asked about it. The editor told us she couldn’t do it anymore and had to quit. We went four months without a formal newsletter.”

- **The wrong person responds**, someone who is eager but unable or unwilling to do the job correctly.



“Our Meeting Speaker planner had served for five years and wanted to step down. We made the announcement at a meeting and the only person who raised his hand was a long-time member. He thought our club members should be the ones to give all the talks and within a few months, we didn’t have any professional talks. HE ended up giving the talk almost every other month ‘cause he couldn’t get anyone else to do them. We lost a lot of members that year.”

A much better way to recruit a volunteer is to ask a specific person, preferably face-to-face.

Research has shown this is the most effective way. People can be flattered when you ask them for help, especially if you tell them why you feel they would be good for the position.

This assures that you get the right person for the job, and, it gives you the opportunity to say why you think they are the right person. Be clear on why you are asking this particular person.

Be prepared with:

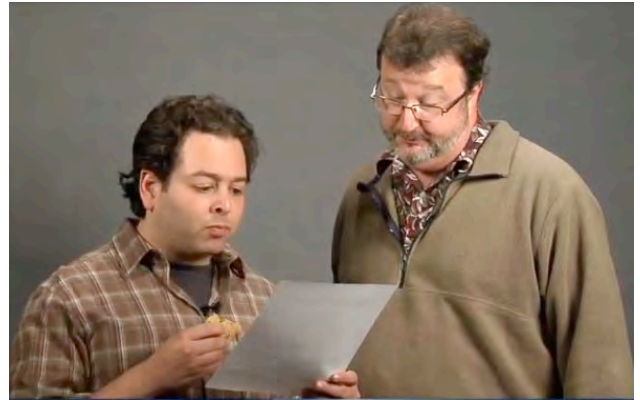
- A written job description
- How much time the job takes and how long the person is expected to serve
- Give assurance that the person will receive guidance and support from the incumbent or from another member who has held the position before.

Recruiting by email. Two approaches here:

1. **If you are sending the message to a selected group of club members:** Instead of sending a general message that says: “*One of you should be able to this job,*” ask their advice on which club member they might recommend for the position. This could result in getting two or three prospects you can personally approach.
2. **If you are personally approaching one member by email:** Treat it the same way as you would face-to-face. Outline what the job entails and how much time it takes. Tell the person why you think he or she is good for the job and that the person will receive training from you (if you are the incumbent). Include a job description in the email.

Steps to recruit:

1. Tell the person what the specific job is.
2. Tell him why she or he is a good prospect.
3. Give a quick overview of the job.
4. **Give the prospect a copy of the job description.**
5. **Assure him/her that you, as the incumbent, will be a coach and mentor for the first few months, as needed.**
6. Gauge the prospect’s interest.
7. Follow up within a few days.



Examples of what to say:

“Michael, you always attend meetings and seem interested in making the club a success. Since I’m stepping down, we’d like to invite you to join the Board as the treasurer next year. It involves depositing checks we receive and paying the bills. We have a bank account and a PayPal account. Almost all the members renew magazines online now, so there isn’t much of that you’d need to do. I found that it takes about three or four hours a month. During renewal time, a little more. I’m happy to get you started and answer any of your questions during the first few months.”

“Terry, I really admire how you’ve served the club and I know you don’t think you’re qualified to fill my role as club President, but several Board members including Craig, the Vice President, suggested we ask you. Both Craig and I can help you through the year and be good resources for you to depend on throughout your two-year term.”

“Lee, the Membership Coordinator is moving out of the area and you seem to get along with people easily. If you were able to take over within the next month, she can show you how the membership is managed.”

Follow up on any expression of interest within a week. The sooner you re-contact them after the initial request, the more likely it is that they will accept.



TIPS

- ✓ Ask younger members to manage the publicity and social media for your club events.
- ✓ Invite younger members and women to take leadership roles. Let them help show veteran members new ways to enjoy and perpetuate the hobby. They need to have ownership of the club, to have their ideas listened to, to be given a place to serve and make a difference.
- ✓ New members are usually quite enthusiastic. Encourage newer members to consider serving as officers or committee chairs. Keep an eye out for new members who regularly attend meetings. Assess them to determine if they would be willing and available to fill a needed position on the Board or on a Committee.

3. Make Each Job Manageable

Consider all the positions your club has and make sure each of them has a reasonable amount of work. A **generally acceptable workload is 3 to 6 hours a month**. This is in addition to regular club events, such as the monthly meeting, board meeting, public events, and club observing events.



TIP: If any of your members are devoting more than eight hours a month to administrative tasks, to avoid burnout you may want to consider splitting jobs up.

Review the list of roles below. Which ones does your club have? How many of these roles are managed by the same person in your club? **If there are members who are wearing more than two or three hats,** the Volunteer Coordinator may want to check with them regarding how they are handling the load.



Common Board Positions:

1. **President:** Prepares agenda and presides at monthly board and general meetings; Provides support to board members and committee chairs as needed to enable them to fulfill their jobs; Represents the club at club and public events.
2. **Vice-President:** Steps in for President in his/her absence; assist President with his/her duties
3. **Treasurer:** Receives all monies and makes disbursements to pay obligations of the club; keeps club's financial records and manages bank account(s).
4. **Secretary:** Records minutes of all Board and Business meetings and distributes minutes to members.
5. **One to five "Member-at-Large" positions.** These are voting members of the Board and often fill other administrative or support roles in the club.

Common Committee or Administrative/Support Roles:

6. **Membership Coordinator:** Tracks and keeps membership records up-to-date, accepts new member applications, sends reminders about renewing membership, keeps track of dues paid.
7. **New Member Steward:** Supports new members during their first year of membership, introduces new members to the club, its culture and activities.
8. **Volunteer Coordinator:** assures that all club positions are filled and the process to recruit is followed. Recruits for positions as needed.
9. **Outreach Coordinator:** Accepts requests from the public and schedules special events, notifies club members of outreach opportunities, gets signups and assures enough members will be present. Cancels and reschedules special events as needed.
10. **Public Astronomy Coordinator:** Manages regularly scheduled events, like monthly star parties: plans dates, plans programs, prepares materials.
11. **Outreach Training Mentor:** Partners an experienced club outreach with new outreach volunteers. Prepares members for outreach and uses Night Sky Network ToolKits, videos, and resources for training.

12. **Meeting Program Coordinator:** Plans and makes arrangements for speakers and programs for club meetings in coordination with the Board
13. **Webmaster:** assures website is up-to-date and operational.
14. **Newsletter Editor:** compiles and does layout and production of the Club Newsletter. Distributes newsletter to membership.
15. **Publicity Coordinator:** Publicizes regularly scheduled events to local media, schools, and other organizations
16. **Meeting Greeter:** Greets visitors to club meetings, provides them with information on the club, and introduces visitors to other members. Assures the Welcome Table is stocked.
17. **Refreshment Coordinator:** Responsible for meeting and event refreshments.
18. **Equipment Manager:** Maintains and manages any club-owned equipment; transports equipment as needed to events.
19. **Meeting Room Set-up Manager:** Opens meeting room, puts out signs, and sets up meeting room with tables and chairs as needed; sets up audio-visual and computer equipment.
20. **Observatory Manager:** Assures all equipment is in working order; manages the schedule for use.

Public Outreach Event Roles:

21. **Public Astronomy Program Presenter:** Prepares and delivers appropriate presentations and demonstrations at public events; prepares relevant visitor handouts such as star maps, telescope tours, or astronomy information sheets (e.g. Solar System Planets).
22. **Telescope Operator:** Operates telescope at public events and prepares “scripts” for objects s/he shows in the telescope.
23. **Event photographer:** takes photos at public events, gets photo releases as needed.
24. **Event reporter:** writes newsletter/website articles about past and upcoming events, encouraging members to participate in the next one. This could be someone who would write a regular column for your club newsletter on your outreach program.
25. **Event Host:** Greets members and visitors at public astronomy events; helps visitors get oriented at the event; has handouts with club information.

4. Give volunteers public recognition for their service to the club

People want to be appreciated for what they do. Public recognition for service to the club (such as managing the website or securing meeting speakers) is as important as recognition for public outreach.

The BIG SECRET about public recognition of volunteers: It's not *just* for the volunteers.

It's also a way for your club to:

- Make club members aware of all the work that goes on behind the scenes.
- Highlight the importance of each position to the success of the club.
- Show members the variety of positions that need volunteers.
- Contribute to fostering a culture of service to the club where all members expect to eventually serve in some way.



Top motivations for people to volunteer:

- An interest in learning something new.
- A strong desire to do something to contribute to the club's mission.
- A sense of obligation, of giving back.
- The prestige, recognition, or connections the position offers.
- To have fun.

Recognition does not need to involve gifts or cash rewards. Very few people are *motivated* to volunteer for the primary purpose of getting some monetary reward or gift (e.g. reduced dues, a special mug). Feel free, however, to offer gifts or perks in *appreciation* for service.



"There are no trophies, no money – what's important is the thank-you. If someone recognizes what you do, that's enough because we're all volunteers – we do it because we want to, not because we have to."

Ideas for Giving Public Recognition

The Volunteer Coordinator can be responsible for thanking volunteers publicly:

- Put a notice in the newsletter a few times a year.
- Have the volunteers stand up and thank them at club meetings.
- Have an annual award ceremony to recognize all the members who serve the club in some way.
- Consider having a special name badge or pin to identify volunteers and the type of service they perform or the position they currently hold. These are passed along to the next member who takes over the position.
- Some clubs give pins or buttons to members who help out at public outreach events.



More Tips to Retain Volunteers

A special note to Outreach Coordinators:



Keep it manageable. Don't over-commit your club.

Consider how much time your members are willing to spend at extra astronomy events, like school star parties, Scout campouts, or booths at community events.

Limit the number of events. If you schedule one or two events every week throughout the year, you're likely to burn out your volunteers. Before committing, remember this guy's story:



"You don't want to exhaust the volunteers. When I first took over as Outreach Coordinator, I'd tell everyone who asked that we'd be happy to hold stargazing events for their group. Between March and June, I committed our club to more than 20 events. I wish someone had really sat me down for 10 minutes."

It's OK to tell teachers and scout leaders, *"We can't do it then. Let's plan for another time (or for next year)."*

Limit the number of invited participants. Make sure the organizer at the facility understands that there is a limit to how many people you can accommodate.



"The teacher said she had 20 students from her class who were planning to come and some would bring their families. But word got around the school and over 600 kids, teachers, and parents showed up. We only had 3 telescopes. What a crazy night."

Useful Reference: Volunteer Management Resource Library: <http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html>



How the Night Sky Network can help



Use the free services of the Night Sky Network to facilitate club administration.

Streamlining and simplifying administrative activities go a long way toward making club jobs more manageable. The NASA Night Sky Network provides a variety of resources specifically designed to meet the needs of astronomy clubs and streamline club management.

For a video overview: <http://NightSkyNetwork.org/about.cfm>

The Night Sky Network (NSN) makes it easier to spread the club duties among several members. Using NSN to manage mailing lists, newsletter distribution, membership, outreach events, volunteer service, and your calendar can make almost any club job easier.

- **Event Calendar** with all info needed about an event: Location, directions, weather report, moon phase, time of sunset, basic sky map, Clear sky chart, member RSVPs
- **Club event calendar widget** you can snap into your website. It displays the events you added to the Night Sky Network. And it's always up-to-date. You don't need to burden your webmaster to keep your events current.
- **Membership management** including membership application, member roster, ability to keep records of membership dues paid, newsletter mailing list, event notifications, and message groups.
- **Online form for the public to request events** from your club (customizable with your own message)
- **Free publicity** for your events through widgets, apps on mobile devices, and social media. Example: Go StarGaze iPhone app: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/go-stargaze/id380833895?mt=8>
- Online tracking of volunteer hours
- Outreach Training Videos
- Online Astronomy Activities that illustrate concepts in astronomy clearly – and include videos
- Online renewal of magazine subscriptions at the club discount rate

For the full manual on setting up and managing your club on the Night Sky Network:

<http://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/docs/HelpCoordinator.pdf>

Ask one of the tech-savvy, online-oriented members in your club to help set up your club on NSN.



"With the Calendar function, Membership Roster, club look-up, and other resources, the Night Sky Network website is a 'One Stop Shopping' experience for club business. Further, I can attend to club business anywhere and anytime."

For assistance with setting up your astronomy club on the Night Sky Network, contact:

nightskyinfo@astrosociety.org

Action Plan: Cultivating Volunteers

Make your plan for implementing practices to cultivate volunteers.

Already Do ✓	Implement by mm/dd/yy	SUGGESTED PRACTICE
		Invite members to attend public astronomy events to see what goes on
		Review and evaluate volunteer roles in the club (Use “Volunteer Roles Checklist” on next page)
		Implement these recruiting policies:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incumbent prepares a job description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incumbents commit to finding and training their own replacements
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit one-on-one, preferably face-to-face
		Implement Term Limits
		Create the position of Volunteer Coordinator
		Implement a program of public recognition for volunteers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place notices in the newsletter
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold an annual awards and recognition ceremony
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make badges with the position names
		Use Night Sky Network resources:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Event Calendar and member RSVPs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Calendar Widget on our club website
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage membership roster
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track Volunteer Hours
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ToolKits and Videos to train members for outreach

Volunteer Roles Checklist for Board and Committee/Administrative Positions

Since multiple members may fill the Public Outreach Event Roles, those roles are not listed here.

CLUB ROLE	Name(s) of Member(s) doing this	Req'd Number of Hours per Month
President		
Vice-President		
Treasurer		
Secretary		
Board Member		
Board Member		
Board Member		
Membership Coordinator		
New Member Steward		
Volunteer Coordinator		
Outreach Coordinator		
Public Astronomy Coordinator		
Outreach Trainer		
Meeting Program Coordinator		
Webmaster		
Newsletter Editor		
Publicity Coordinator		
Meeting Greeter		
Refreshment Coordinator		
Equipment Manager		
Meeting Room Set-up Manager		
Observatory Manager		