

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.

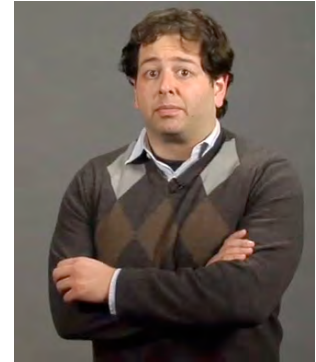
2. Understand the Visitor's State of Mind

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