

ASTRONOMY NIGHT EVENTS

At these astronomy-focused events, amateur and professional astronomers bring out telescopes and binoculars in order to give community members a “guided tour” of anything that is available in the night sky. Host sites are able to personalize their own events by adding additional talks, walks, or activities, though additional programming is certainly not necessary.

In Philadelphia, Astronomy Night is held at approximately 30 different sites that range from bars to battleships to burial grounds. Astronomers are recruited from local astronomy clubs, and both site organizers and astronomers are trained on how to host a star party and engage with a diverse audience. In North Carolina, sites are chosen based on geographic diversity and range from planetariums to State parks. In 2013, almost 5000 people attended this state-wide star party, and almost all of the individual star parties included hands-on activities and interactions with a scientist- a festival best practice. North Carolina’s statewide star parties proved to be so successful that South Carolina followed suit (with support from organizers in NC) in 2014.

Overall, these events involve very little risk to event organizers, as they tend to require a relatively small budget and by nature they are equally as impactful for both small and large groups. Parties can be held year round, and the topic tends to be universally popular and engaging. Most of festival staff time will be dedicated to recruiting host sites and astronomers, as well as matching the two once both have been selected.

TO HOST A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

- Decide whether or not you will require astronomers to provide their own equipment
 - If you do not have the resources to provide equipment, ask astronomers to bring their own.
- Determine your audience
 - How will they find out about the event?
 - Will marketing materials need to be translated into additional languages?
 - Do you have community partnerships which can be leveraged into personal invitations?
- Recruit astronomers
 - Look for local universities with an observatory or astronomy programs.
 - Seek out local amateur astronomy clubs. NASA’s Night Sky Network’s “Astronomy Club Map” is a great place to start looking for one!
- Recruit host sites
 - Consider what hosts could gain from serving as a star party site before approaching potential partners. Philadelphia’s Astronomy Night sites report:

- Increased visibility
 - Free PR/Marketing for the event and organization
 - Increased awareness by attendees of organization's day-to-day activities
 - Do you have existing partnerships with churches, after-school programs, or community based organizations? Use the relationships that you already have to generate excitement and involvement!
 - Do you have colleagues that are involved in outside organizations who could potentially host? Don't know? Ask!
 - In North Carolina's first year, they focused on recruiting host sites that already had astronomy related events so that they wouldn't have to do much match-making with astronomers.
- Consider hosting trainings for site hosts and astronomers
 - Starting in the 3rd year of the festival, Philadelphia hosted separate trainings for both astronomers and host sites. North Carolina recently used a presentation called "Thou Shalt Not Speak Messier: Interpreting Astronomy at Public Skywatching Sessions," which they hope to use with even more astronomers in 2014.
 - North Carolina has developed a helpful Star Party Guide for its stakeholders. See the resources section for more information