

The Astronomy Foundation's Sidewalk Astronomy Model

Most people go through their lives on what amounts to a 2-D planet without realizing even the basics of where Earth is in the solar system, the essentials of what makes stars tick, the makeup of the Milky Way Galaxy, or the larger universe of billions of galaxies around them. The best way to bring astronomy



awareness and enthusiasm to the people is to go to where the people are — cities. This means employing a technique so terrifically pioneered by California groups in the 1970s — sidewalk astronomy.

But what's the best way to go about bringing the wonders of the universe to busy city streets? It's all about location, timing, equipment, and enthusiasm. You don't have to figure out the details alone. With the Astronomy Foundation's Sidewalk Astronomy Model, you'll be reaching potential future skygazers in no time.

Planning your sidewalk astronomy outreach event

Choosing your sidewalk location

- Look for areas with lots of foot traffic in the center of town: Main Street, boardwalks, a town square, etc.
- Locate easy parking close to event location.
- Choose an area that avoids direct headlights.
- Find the nearest available restroom for public use.
- To ensure public safety and accessibility, choose a location that is flat and accessible for people of all abilities.
- Make sure the area has quality cellphone reception and/or WiFi availability for online astronomy applications.
- Get permission. It may be necessary to obtain a permit from the local or county government to hold an organized event.

Setting the date

- Choose a date that is best for observing bright objects not affected by light pollution. For example, a First Quarter Moon is a great time to host a sidewalk event.
- Look for dates of interesting celestial events, such as during a meteor shower, a planetary opposition, or a comet reaching its peak brightness.

- Consider a theme for your event, such as “Perseid/Geminid Meteor Shower,” “Night with the Planets,” “Night with the Stars,” “Lunar Adventures & Mythology,” or “Moon Voyages.”

Preparing event equipment and telescopes

- Make sure there's someone with each telescope you bring who can help passersby navigate the sky, protect the eyepieces, keep participants safe, and field questions.
- Bring telescopes that are easily accessible for people of all ages, heights, and abilities; offer chairs, ladders, and stepping stools.

Helpful hints

- When choosing a date, look for other well attended events in your chosen area held at the same time to increase attendance and participation.
- Consider “Main Street” partnerships. For example, set up near a café and co-host a “Stars and Hot Chocolate!” event, or have a local bookstore set up a small table near your event to sell astronomy books and magazines.

Promoting your sidewalk astronomy outreach event

- Post signs next to your event location.
- Request that your local/county government post your event on their website.
- Create a press release or event announcement for your local newspaper.
- Create a flyer for your event. Email or deliver event flyers to local schools, Science Olympiad programs, Boy/Girl Scouts, museums, universities/colleges, public libraries, and businesses located near your event location.
- Create a Facebook page for your event.



Hosting your sidewalk astronomy outreach event

Engaging the public

- Prepare a formal presentation at sunset that might include “Your Sky Tonight,” “Telescopes 101: How reflectors and refractors work,” and/or “Star Party Etiquette.”
- Discuss light pollution awareness.
- Stop curious passersby to let them know what you are doing and that they are welcome to have a look through a telescope.
- Distribute outreach materials, such as Astronomy Foundation literature, *Astronomy* magazine’s *Discover the Universe* program booklets, “Your Sky Tonight” sky charts, and the International Dark-Sky Association’s light pollution literature.
- Provide your astronomy club’s membership information and meeting times and location.

Helpful hints

- Use these links to find educational materials to distribute:
 - NASA educational resources**
<http://www.nasa.gov/education>
 - NASA’s Kid’s Club**
<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/index.html>
 - Your Sky Tonight**
<http://www.astronomyfoundation.org/infotools>
 - Astronomy* magazine’s *Discover the Universe* program**
<http://www.astronomy.com/discovertheuniverse>
- Decide what objects you will highlight ahead of time (see tips on observing from the city at <http://www.astronomy.com/urbanskies>).

