

## Benefits of NCRAL Membership

(Last updated May 25, 2020)

The Astronomical League (AL) was established on August 30, 1947. The North Central Region of the Astronomical League (NCRAL) was established concurrently. When a club decides to become a member of the AL, it automatically becomes a member of NCRAL. There is no fee associated with belonging to NCRAL, and all its many benefits come at no additional cost.

Today NCRAL consists of 36 clubs, societies, and associations (affiliates) scattered across seven states in the upper Midwest. States in the region with the most to least number AL/NCRAL affiliates are as follows: Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. North Dakota and South Dakota currently have no AL/NCRAL affiliates. Astronomical League members-at-large are also part of the NCRAL membership. Altogether, there are some 1,850 individual NCRAL members.

The goals of NCRAL are numerous, but the most essential are the promotion of amateur astronomy and fellowship among its members. The Region does so through a variety of means, but the most important are Regional conventions, the quarterly **Northern Lights** newsletter, awards and grants programs, and resource guides. These are described briefly below; details can be found on the Region's website at <http://ncral.wordpress.com/>.

- **Regional conventions** are hosted each spring by one of our affiliates. These gatherings are as varied as the locations, but generally consist of invited speakers, tours of nearby astronomical facilities and museums, observing sessions, imaging/poetry contests, club displays, contributed show-and-tell talks, formal discussions, and include plenty of time for camaraderie. Business meetings provide updates and set the direction of the Region for the following year. A closing banquet is the setting for a keynote speaker.
- **Northern Lights**, our newsletter, is compiled and produced by the Region Chair. The newsletter is distributed electronically and at no cost in portable document format (PDF) to each member association's President, ALCor, and newsletter editor for dissemination to their association's membership. Members also may receive it directly through a growing email database. (To add your name to the email list, go to the following case-sensitive URL: <https://goo.gl/gS8SF>). Executive Council members as well as individual association members contribute to the content of this full-color publication. The newsletter is growing in both size and scope and typically runs from 18-24 pages. Back issues of the newsletter can be found on the Region's website.
- **Awards** recognize service provided by our members; these are both awarded at the annual convention. The **NCRAL Region Award** is presented to the one member who has provided the most distinguished service to amateur astronomy within the North Central Region. The **NCRAL Newsletter Editor Award** which names the newsletter editor who best exemplifies the Region's standards of what constitutes a great newsletter. The latter award program provides a cash prize to the sponsoring club in recognition of the fact that it takes more than just a good editor to have a great newsletter; it takes many contributors from within a club as well.
- **Observing programs** specific to NCRAL are on the rise. During 2019 NCRAL approved four **Seasonal Mini Messier Marathon** observing programs, each with its own certificate and pin. The Region is now working on developing an **Astronomical Bucket List** program.
- **Mini grant programs** assist in growing local and regional memberships. The **Member Recruitment & Retention Grant** provides up to \$250 in financial support for affiliates to recruit new members from among the public and to retain current members; the grants must include both aspects. The **Affiliate Recruitment Grant** provides up to \$250 in financial support for affiliates to encourage non-affiliated clubs, societies, and associations to join the Astronomical League and, by default, NCRAL. This grant funds activities such as meals, star parties, joint meetings and such with the intent stated.
- **Astronomy resource guides** are also a benefit of membership in the North Central Region. Currently there are eight guides, most designed for the sake of boosting the hobby of amateur astronomy. Each guide may be modified to include an affiliate's logo, header, and introduction. The guides available in MS Word format, and are as follows (the guides in blue are under development):
  1. *Introduction to Amateur Astronomy*
  2. *TCAA Membership and Benefits*
  3. *Astronomy as a Hobby (newly expanded)*
  4. *The Art of Sky Interpretation*
  5. *Coordinating Public Viewing Sessions*
  6. *Have a Successful Observing Session*
  7. *Buying Binoculars and Telescopes*
  8. *Optimizing Deep Sky Observations*
  9. *Astrophotography 101 (under development)*
  10. *Introduction to Spherical Astronomy (coming soon)*

If an affiliate would like to publish these for free distribution under their own "brand" while giving credit to the authors, they may do so by contacting the authors through NCRAL Chair Carl Wenning at [carlwenning@gmail.com](mailto:carlwenning@gmail.com).

Currently being developed are guides for establishing, building, and maintaining an astronomy club, association, or society, as well as a guide to basic astronomical imaging.

NCRAL is governed by an Executive Council consisting of the Region's Executive Officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary-Treasurer, and Regional Representative to the AL Council) along with its Regional Council that consists of affiliates' presidents and one representative. The Regional Council guides the Region in concert with the Executive Council. The governing Bylaws can be found on the Region's website.

Affiliate with NCRAL by joining the Astronomical League. Visit this site for details: <https://www.astroleague.org/membership.html>



Carl J. Wenning, Chair (2017-2021)  
North Central Region of the Astronomical League