

Benefits of NCRAL Membership

(Last updated June 23, 2023)

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 nearly 40 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 1,900 individual NCRAL members.

The goals of NCRAL are numerous, but the most essential is the promotion of amateur astronomy and fellowship among its members. The Region does so through various 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, and 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://tinyurl.com/NCRAL>). Executive Council members and 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*** recognizes the newsletter editor who best exemplifies the Region's standards of what constitutes a great newsletter. The latter award includes a \$50 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. In 2019, NCRAL approved four Seasonal Mini Messier Marathon observing programs, each with a certificate and pin. In 2023, NCRAL approved an Annual Messier Marathon observing program with three distinct levels of completion.
- **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 things such as meals, star parties, and joint meetings 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 are available in MS Word and PDF versions and are as follows:

1. <i>Introduction to Amateur Astronomy</i>	6. <i>Have a Successful Observing Session</i>
2. <i>TCAA Membership and Benefits</i>	7. <i>Buying Binoculars and Telescopes</i>
3. <i>Astronomy as a Hobby (newly expanded)</i>	8. <i>Optimizing Deep Sky Observations</i>
4. <i>The Art of Sky Interpretation</i>	9. <i>Introduction to DSLR-based Astrophotography</i>
5. <i>Coordinating Public Viewing Sessions</i>	10. <i>Introduction to Spherical Astronomy</i>

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 author Carl Wenning at carlwenning@gmail.com.

Currently being developed is a guide for establishing, building, and maintaining an astronomy club, association, or society.

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, which 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, Immediate Past Chair (2017-2023)
North Central Region of the Astronomical League