

Benefits of NCRAL Membership

(Last updated December 28, 2023)

The Astronomical League 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 Astronomical League, it automatically becomes a member of NCRAL. No fee is associated with belonging to NCRAL, and all 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 include the following: Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. 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, a quarterly newsletter, awards and grants programs, observing programs, and astronomy 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 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, which now includes 500+ subscribers. (To add your name to the email list, visit the 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 grows in size and scope and typically runs 18-24 pages. Back issues of the newsletter can be found on the Region's website.
- **NCRAL blotter** is a monthly newsletter for affiliate presidents, ALCor, and newsletter editors. It is a publication of the NCRAL leadership, disseminated at the beginning of each month and posted shortly thereafter on the Region's website. It consists of a bullet list of items in interest and import that serve as reminders or are too timely to wait dissemination through the Region's newsletter.
- **NCRAL Speakers Bureau** facilitates the acquisition of professional speakers for meetings and other events for our Region's affiliates. Many individuals have indicated a willingness to serve as speakers. Most speakers are available for presentations over Zoom, though some might also be willing to attend club meetings and other events. To arrange for a speaker, please contact the speaker directly through our [NCRAL Speakers Bureau](#) listing.
- **Awards** recognize services our members provide, 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 award comes with a plaque. The **NCRAL Newsletter Editor Award** recognizes the newsletter editor who best exemplifies the Region's standards of what constitutes an outstanding newsletter. The latter award includes a certificate and a \$50 prize to the sponsoring club in recognition that it takes more than just an excellent editor to have a fabulous newsletter; it also takes many contributors from within a club. Nomination deadline typically the end of March each year. See the Region's website for nomination guidelines and forms.
- **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. Application deadline typically the end of March each year. See the Region's website for application forms.
- **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. It includes a special accommodation for our more northerly members.
- **Astronomy resource guides** are also a benefit of membership in the North Central Region. Currently, there are ten 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:

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| 1. <i>Introduction to Amateur Astronomy</i> | 6. <i>Have a Successful Observing Session</i> |
| 2. <i>Membership and Benefits</i> | 7. <i>Buying Binoculars & Telescopes</i> |
| 3. <i>Astronomy as a Hobby</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] Observing 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 contact them through author Carl Wenning at carlwenning@gmail.com.

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>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl J. Wenning'.

Carl J. Wenning, Immediate Past Chair (2017-2023)
North Central Region of the Astronomical League