

NCRAL Convention Planning Guidelines

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Convention Chair 2010, 2016, 2023

Version Date: July 12, 2025

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of NCRAL members whose completion of post-convention and convention-preferences surveys have made this publication possible. Recent convention hosts whose recommendations for additions and clarifications have improved these guidelines are also to be recognized. Of particular note are NCRAL 2019 convention co-hosts Alan Sheidler (President) and Mike Gacioch (Convention Chairman) of Popular Astronomy Club—the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and NCRAL 2023 figure prominently in the most recent revisions.

This guide is a “living document.” As such, it is subject to continual revision in light of new experiences. Feel free to email the author (carlwenning@gmail.com) with any questions and/or additional ideas for improving this document. Doing so can only make future NCRAL conventions more responsive to the needs and interests of convention-goers.

Preliminaries

Hosting an NCRAL convention is considerable work but can be rewarding and fun. After the work is over, it is always satisfying. Some NCRAL-affiliated clubs have hosted an NCRAL convention several times. If it were an onerous task, they wouldn't offer to host again and again.

One thing to remember is that the convention is only about 24 hours long and, in the scope of things, doesn't take all that much work. Yes, 50-100 attendees might be present, but the plans are much the same for everyone. With lots of hands contributing, the workload is light.

This guide has been prepared to assist an NCRAL affiliate in hosting a Regional convention. It advises running a convention; its author and prior hosts will help by answering questions. Hosts take full responsibility for planning and presenting the convention. It is neither the NCRAL leadership's desire nor role to supervise, review, and approve processes, plans, and budgets.

Also, remember that profits generated by affiliate-hosted conventions are shared equally with the Region and constitute the only income the Region regularly receives. The Region receives no annual dues payments to the Astronomical League.

Why host a Regional Convention?

Hosting a Regional convention can offer a range of benefits for various individuals, organizations, and communities. Here are eight good reasons for hosting a convention:

1. **Networking opportunities:** Conventions bring together like-minded individuals, professionals, and industry experts, creating ample networking opportunities. Attendees can establish valuable connections, build and sustain friendships, forge partnerships, and collaborate with others in their field.

2. **Knowledge sharing and learning:** Conventions often feature educational sessions, workshops, and keynote speeches by astronomical leaders. Through informative sessions, participants gain insights, learn about the latest trends and developments, and enhance their knowledge and skills.
3. **Exposure and influence:** Hosting a convention provides a platform to highlight one's club to an interested audience. Doing so can enhance their reputation and influence within their field. Organizing a convention allows individuals or organizations to establish themselves as thought leaders and influencers within the NCRAL community.
4. **Strengthening the community:** Hosting a convention can strengthen the bonds between and within the community of amateur astronomers. It creates a sense of belonging, facilitates dialogue, and encourages participant cooperation. Conventions often foster a supportive and collaborative environment that contributes to the growth and development of the community as a whole.
5. **Engaging less-active members:** Convention planning is a beautiful way to involve less-engaged club members. Many club members need to gain more skills, and hosting a convention can give these members a good reason to get involved.
6. **Personal and professional growth:** Hosting conventions can lead to personal and professional growth. It offers opportunities for self-improvement, expanding one's knowledge base, gaining new perspectives, and staying updated with trends in amateur astronomy. Conventions inspire attendees to set new goals, pursue new opportunities, and strive for continuous improvement. Clubs can and do benefit from such activities.
7. **Profit sharing:** The Region indemnifies the hosting affiliate from loss (maximum \$500) so long as reasonable efforts are made to generate a profit. (This typically means following suggestions found in this document.) In return for this limited indemnification and for its services to the affiliate, Regional policy requires the affiliate to split the profit of the convention with the Region. Historically, well-run conventions net an overall profit of around \$500. When a convention is well planned, the affiliate and Region will each receive half the profit or about \$250 for their efforts.
8. **Economic impact:** Conventions can have a significant financial impact on the host city or region. They attract attendees from various locations who spend money on accommodation, dining, transportation, and leisure activities. This influx of visitors stimulates the local economy, supports local businesses, and creates job opportunities.

Joint Conventions

It is acceptable for an NCRAL affiliate to host a joint convention with another affiliate of NCRAL or an adjacent Region, so long as approval is received during the regular application process. When a joint convention is hosted with two NCRAL affiliates, NCRAL shall retain 50% of the convention profit in light of its \$500 maximum indemnification, and the remainder of the profit will be split between the convention hosts in a pre-determined portion, ideally half and half, though other arrangements are possible.

When one NCRAL and one non-NCRAL affiliate host a convention, NCRAL shall retain a portion of the 50% convention profit in light of a \$250 maximum indemnification, and the remainder of the profit will be split between the convention hosts in a pre-determined portion, ideally half and half, though other arrangements are possible. NCRAL's portion shall be determined based on paid registrations. If 3/5 of convention registrants are from the NCRAL, then 3/5 of the 50% profit will be turned over to the NCRAL. The remainder will be turned over to the co-hosting Region.

When an NCRAL affiliate agrees to host the Astronomical League's national convention (i.e., ALCon), this will suffice for the NCRAL Regional Convention for that year. See the NCRAL bylaws for additional information.

Deciding to Host

Before a club offers to serve as a convention host, its members should take an inventory of resources. Does the club have the necessary leadership and material resources to “build” the convention? Has a working theme been established? Are members ready, willing, and able to support the effort? Can a local planetarium, observatory, dark-sky observing site, science center, or museum be included?

Does the club have someone willing to serve as convention chairperson? Does this person have the capacity to assemble and manage a planning team composed of people with diverse skills? Does the club have enough willing, able, and ready supporters? Do the planners have time to deal with the frenetic activity during the weeks leading up to the convention?

When consulting with a club membership about hosting an NCRAL convention, it’s best not to ask, “Do you think the idea of hosting an NCRAL convention is good?” What needs to be asked is, “If we host an NCRAL convention, will you support the effort?” Many more people think an idea is good so long as they don’t have to implement it themselves.

Theme and Speakers

There is a broad spectrum of convention themes ranging from topics in contemporary research-based astronomy to amateur astronomy. Presenters can span the range from professional astrophysicists to amateur astronomers. While either of the extremes can be worthy of convention themes, it might be best to hold a convention that has a mixture of such topics due to the diversity of the potential audience.

A convention theme is an idea that brings a certain amount of unity to a convention and serves as a guide for selecting speakers and their topics. Care must be shown in the choice of a convention theme, which can sometimes influence convention attendance. “Astronomy is Cool” seems vague and does not convey a consistent theme. “Supernovae” might be too narrow a theme and can result in two speakers talking about the same thing.

Establish your convention theme as early as possible so your speakers can coordinate their talks around it. It is advisable to get the speakers to provide a one—or two-paragraph summary of their discussions well in advance and share these with the other speakers so that they can coordinate. This reduces duplication and improves continuity.

Speakers can either “make” or “break” a convention. Do you know or have access to the right people who can serve as speakers? They might be members of the hosting club or members from the surrounding astronomical community. A well-known keynote speaker might even be brought in from outside the local area to serve as a “draw” to get as many attendees at the convention as possible.

Presentation of Awards

Awards are usually presented before the keynote speaker and immediately following the Saturday evening banquet. While the Regional Chair generally presents awards, all presenters should remember that the transfer process must be visible. Avoid presenting awards behind a lectern or ambo. It is best to present awards in front of a bare wall so that appropriate photographs can be taken.

Facilities/Settings

It's ideal when four things can be located adjacent to one another during a convention: parking, accommodations, convention hall, and dining facilities. It's excellent when convention attendees can arrive for the convention and park and not have to leave the site until Sunday morning, having stayed overnight on Friday and Saturday.

It's a big "plus" for any NCRA convention to have the event at a hotel, convention center, or nature center where people don't have to go off-site for accommodations. Sometimes, people prefer to skip a particular speaker or event or might be tired or not feeling well, and having their accommodations nearby can be most advantageous.

A rural outdoor nature center can be ideal, though many successful NCRA conventions have been held in larger cities. Turnout can be good despite remote locations and spartan accommodations because (at least in part) these things were available along with a dark sky observing area in one place.

Questions

Should you have any questions about convention hosting, consult the author of this publication, the Regional Chair, or any other Regional officers. Prior convention chairpersons are also excellent sources of information. Visit the NCRA website at <http://ncra.wordpress.com> for contact information for regional officers and affiliates.

Information

Why do amateur astronomers attend NCRA conventions?

NCRA's Convention Preferences Survey, conducted in 2018, showed that amateur astronomers attend NCRA conventions mainly to (1) socialize with friends and those with similar interests and (2) learn more about the science of astronomy. These were tied for first place. Running a close second and third were (3) to learn about new observing equipment and (4) to take a vacation or merely to get away from home for a while. The first three reasons should be carefully considered when designing a convention.

To the contrary, the main reasons that amateur astronomers do not attend NCRA conventions are as follows: (1) schedule conflicts, (2) being unaware that there is a convention, (3) the cost is too high, and (4) it is usually too far to travel. Convention hosts can do little to address concerns 1, so they must consider factors 2, 3, and 4. Getting the word out about the convention early and often is critical. Also, hosts should only invest vast amounts of money into the keynote and other invited speakers if the added expense can be justified. Note that the TCAA hosted NCRA 2023 sixty miles north of the Bloomington-Normal vicinity to make the convention more accessible to the NCRA participants in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Promotion of the Convention

Paid advertising isn't necessary to promote a convention. Hosts can freely promote a convention through the Astronomical Leagues' *Reflector* magazine, the Region's *Northern Lights* newsletter, website, Facebook page, targeted email, YouTube videos, etc. If a video is made, there is no need to send out DVDs or such. Post the program on YouTube or another accessible server and promote a hyperlink through email. This was done for ALCon 2018.

According to the 2018 Convention Preferences Survey, most amateur astronomers in our Region learn about conventions through the following routes: an affiliate's newsletter, an announcement by a club official, NCRA's **Northern Lights** newsletter, and the AL's **Reflector** magazine. Many survey participants indicated they would like to receive an email from the Region with information about the convention. Now that NCRA has an email list including about 1/5 of the membership (and growing), the convention host should work with the Region's Chair to get the word out through this means. Hos

When promoting the convention, promote talks – not speakers – unless you have a speaker whose name recognition alone can draw participants. Unknown speakers will not likely increase attendance; however, their topics might well do so.

Cautionary note: Post-convention surveys have shown that most attendees learn about conventions through the Region's media – newsletter, emails through the email database, or website, or directly from the convention host. Few attendees mention learning about conventions through word of mouth or their affiliates. Special efforts must be made to get affiliate newsletter editors into the loop if they are to be an effective means of communication.

When to Begin Promoting the Convention

When asked in NCRA's 2018 Convention Preferences Survey, "How far in advance do you prefer to learn about NCRA conventions to be able to attend?" here were the results:

9.1%	more than a year in advance
30.3%	7-12 months in advance
43.9%	4-6 months in advance
15.2%	2-3 months in advance

Again, convention hosts are advised to use every available means to get the word out early and often to the membership, including members at large.

Convention promotion should begin immediately at the latest NCRA convention before your affiliate with the host. Each year at the annual business meeting, 5-15 minutes is set aside for the next convention host to promote the following year's convention (e.g., promote NCRA 2021 at the NCRA 2020 convention.) Take advantage of this opportunity to promote your location, facility, theme, speakers, etc.

Get the word out early, often, and via as many means as possible - email, Facebook, US mail, the **Northern Lights** newsletter, AL calendar, *Sky & Telescope*, *Astronomy*, AL **Reflector** newsletter, Cloudy Nights, and local newspapers and TV. Personal contact is also very important. Consider, at the very least, speaking to astronomy clubs and at star parties within 100 miles of your location to promote our event. To do this, you must have a tentative agenda and speaker list to promote the event.

Whenever you begin to promote your convention seriously, have a solid schedule available before convention registration opens, absolutely before the early registration discount ends. Many will not register for a convention without knowing the program's content in detail.

Convention Dates

NCRA conventions have historically been held in the spring. During the NCRA 2018 post-convention survey, May over April was decidedly 2-to-1 favorable.

When choosing convention dates, avoid dates of national holidays and religious holy days. Avoid dates that conflict with other significant events, such as ALCon or regional star parties.

Check your town's calendar for events so there isn't a "rush" on hotels and other facilities that can result in higher prices. Graduations, local festivals, sporting events, and such come to mind. Also, check with your convention center to ensure concurrent events won't interfere significantly with what has been planned.

Convention Program

Invited speakers could fill the entire program. Everyone likes to hear from the experts. However, contributed speakers may also be solicited. These speakers – more or less average amateur astronomers – might have something fascinating to show or share, and a spot in the program (say on Friday evening) would be ideal for them. NCRAL 2016 was the first to include both, and it was successful because of the variety it added to the convention.

Clear the program with the Regional Chair before disseminating it publicly. Before introducing the keynote speaker, due consideration must be given to the annual business meeting on Saturday and the awards and remarks presented after the Saturday evening banquet.

Duration

The convention program traditionally runs from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening. This, however, is not a mandate. More recently (NCRAL 2019), the program was run from Friday noon through Sunday noon. The duration of the convention program is at the discretion of the host. Remember that during the 2018 NCRAL Convention Preferences Survey, 60.6% of those surveyed preferred a Friday/Saturday convention, and 34.8% wanted a Saturday/Sunday convention. Conventions that span Friday afternoon through Sunday morning might have a greater attraction to potential registrants.

Friday Evening Reception

Hosting a Friday evening reception with little to no formal activities has become a tradition. This provides an opportunity for participants to gather and socialize. The event typically features an open room with comfy seating, tables, and food and drink. Alcoholic beverages are acceptable by way of tradition, but the presence of alcoholic beverages can often depend upon institutional (e.g., hotel, campus) policies.

Number and Types of Talks

The quality of convention talks should be emphasized over the number of talks. More is not always better. After the host has identified several prospects for giving talks, these should be reduced so that only the best speakers and talks are presented. Saturday morning and afternoon talks can range from 30 to 60 minutes, including time for questions and answers. The keynote address is always given after the Saturday evening banquet and typically lasts one hour, including questions and answers.

NCRAL doesn't recommend big names or celebrities for speakers. Big names cost a lot and often can't provide a better presentation than folks from local colleges, universities, and societies have. Consider inviting speakers your club knows personally. They will do an excellent job of tailoring their talk to your group. Think of speakers who have either spoken previously at your affiliate's meetings or seen at other events you have visited to hear them speak. It is always best to know that your speakers will be good.

Talk Topics

During the 2018 NCRA Convention Preferences Survey, participants were asked, “What sort of focus would you prefer to see at a given NCRA convention?” The following responses were received:

6.1%	hard science
3.0%	astrophotography
7.6%	observing
81.7%	“I prefer a mix of the above topics.”

When asked what specific topics would entice them to attend an NCRA convention, the following key topics were cited in order of preference: TOP TIER: astronomy, deep sky objects, practical observing; MIDDLE TIER: planetary observing, astrophysics, public outreach, do-it-yourself projects; and BOTTOM TIER: astrophotography, planetary science, AL observing programs, space program, and observation basics.

A Mix of Talk Types

During the 2018 NCRA Convention Preferences Survey, participants were asked, “Where would you like to see emphasis placed in future NCRA conventions? The following responses were received:

10.8%	All invited talks (special guest talks typically lasting 45 to 60 minutes)
38.5%	Mostly invited talks with a few contributed talks (volunteer 15-minute talks)
49.2%	An even mix of invited and contributed talks

Surprisingly, these data are at odds with current convention practices. It has been a tradition to have only invited speakers. This tradition was broken at NCRA 2016 when amateurs were invited to contribute talks. These talks were presented on Friday evening and were well received. Convention hosts should consider including this option.

Be Careful with Convention Language

Be careful with convention-related language. For instance, be sure to distinguish carefully between presentation styles, each suited to different goals and audiences:

- **Lecture** – Format: One-way delivery of information by a speaker; Best for: Teaching, formal education, expert talks; Strengths: Efficient transfer of knowledge, clear structure
- **Discussion** – Format: Interactive exchange between presenter and audience; Best for: Smaller groups, exploring ideas collaboratively; Strengths: Encourages engagement, critical thinking
- **Workshop** – Format: Hands-on, interactive sessions often involving group tasks or exercises; Best for: Skills training, collaborative learning; Strengths: Practical, experiential, high participation
- **Panel** – Format: Multiple experts discuss a topic, often with a moderator; Best for: Exploring multiple perspectives; Strengths: Diverse viewpoints, dynamic interaction

- **Demonstration** – Format: Showing how something works in real time; Best for: Technology, tools, processes; Strengths: Concrete, visual, hands-on learning

Also, be careful with the sometimes misrepresented “Star-B-Q” used during some conventions. The terminology seems to suggest a variant of a Bar-B-Q where pork is served with BBQ sauce. A recent national convention’s “Star-B-Q” featured tacos, beans, and rice, much to the disappointment of some who attended.

Sub-themes of Convention Planning

There are at least six sub-themes that might/should be incorporated under the central theme to make sure that the convention has something for everybody:

- *The Art of Observing* (techniques and observing programs, eyepieces, etc.)
- *The Art of Imaging* (astrophotography, image processing, cameras, filters, software, etc.)
- *Member Education* (courses for new and/or established members, meeting activities, special events, etc.)
- *Public Outreach* (public viewing sessions, Astronomy Day, sidewalk astronomy, newspaper columns, social media, etc.)
- *Facilities and Equipment* (observatories, telescopes and accessories, planetariums, etc.)
- The Science of Astronomy (“hard” science)

Pacing

Again, one of the primary reasons that amateur astronomers attend Regional conventions is to socialize – renew old relationships and make new ones. If the convention is too fast-paced, there is little time for socializing. The TCAA hosting NCRAL 2023 included a two-hour sit-down reception on Friday evening and 30-minute breaks mid-morning and mid-afternoon on Saturday. A social hour was also included before the evening banquet. This allowed ample opportunity for people to socialize and helped to make the convention a success. Avoid a schedule that is over-stuffed with content and malnourished with socialization. Both are needed for a properly paced convention that guests will find rewarding and enjoyable.

Keeping to the Schedule

Keep the convention speakers on schedule. Let them know their time allocation in advance and hold them accountable for it. The only exception to this rule is the business meeting, which sometimes runs long. If business meetings are scheduled as the last event on Saturday afternoon and before the evening banquet – often preceded by a considerable break – then additional time is available if needed. If, for some reason, the schedule does get squeezed, 30-minute break times can be shortened by 5 or 10 minutes to make up the time deficit. This can’t be done with 15-minute breaks.

Parallel Sessions

Be very careful with the use of parallel sessions. With two sessions running simultaneously, convention hosts risk having underutilized resources (low attendance at one session compared to another) and sometimes force attendees to make undesirable choices – choosing one activity over another when both are desired. Parallel sessions probably should be avoided in all but the most unusual circumstances. Still, parallel sessions can be advantageous if care is taken when selecting competing topics.

Convention Extras

If the host has a conveniently located planetarium or observatory, efforts should be made to incorporate these into the program, especially observatories. In the 2018 NCRAL Convention Preference Survey, 69.7% want to see the local planetarium, and 87.7% want to see the local observatory.

Carpooling vs. Buses

If you use carpooling to move convention goers from one point to another, this must be planned and executed very carefully. Convention-goers need to know about carpooling as early as possible so they can plan accordingly. Convention hosts should assist in making these arrangements. They also printed instructions on how to get from point A to point B and back again should be provided to each driver. Busses with experienced drivers should be used if the drive is long. Each bus should include a knowledgeable representative from the hosting affiliate on board who can serve as a guide.

Activities for Travel Companions/Children

In the 2018 NCRAL Convention Preferences Survey, 94.4% would like to learn about available activities for adult travel companions. 27.8% would like to know about optional children's activities.

Are NCRAL conventions suitable for children? Historically speaking, the answer appears to be no. Most conventions have never had a single child or even youth in attendance. Unless events for this age group are precisely planned, we cannot recommend that children attend. Most attendees tend to be older adults with considerable knowledge and experience in amateur astronomy. It is unlikely that topics of mutual interest could be provided significantly within the traditional NCRAL convention setting.

Breaks

Breaks serve two essential purposes: (a) they provide times and settings for much-needed informal conversations, and (b) they can be shortened to bring the convention back on schedule if it is running behind due to unforeseen events (e.g., broken or missing technology) or speakers who have gone over their time allotment.

Historically, breaks during NCRAL meetings have been only 15 minutes. People need more time to leave their seats, refresh, and return before introducing the next speaker. This changed in 2018 when the NCRAL convention hosts included a 30-minute break at the advice of a prior convention host. The 30-minute breaks were strongly approved of in the post-convention survey. Comparable results were shown in the 2023 survey.

Breaks should include a variety of fortifying refreshments and treats. Avoid only hot beverages; include cold beverages; have both nutritious and sugary snacks available for those who need a picker-upper. Water should be widely and freely available throughout the day.

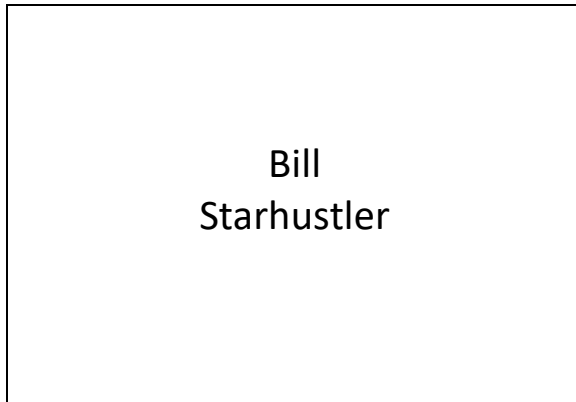
Breaks should occur in locations with plenty of room for attendees to spread out, sit down, and socialize.

Signage

Evident signs around and within the facility directing participants to meeting rooms, banquets, restrooms, planetariums, etc., are essential. Proper identification of the type of food being served will also benefit meals if served buffet style.

Name Tags

Nothing is worse than attending a convention and seeing people you know whose names you can't remember. The convention name tag serves to identify convention attendees for the convenience of others. Convention name tags should always contain the first and last names and identify the affiliate. The name tag may also include a conventional logo, but the logo should not be obtrusively large. The attendee's first name should be written large, and the last and affiliate names should be smaller. The lettering should be as large as possible to make the wording readable from a distance. Here are two examples of poorly and nicely done tags.



Avoid small lettering on name tags; such letter is hard to read from a distance.



What a name tag should look like; name and affiliation are clear.

Observing Program Recognition

It would be nice, somewhere in the agenda, to acknowledge all AL Master Observers in the group (first done at NCRAL 2017) and also to recognize all who completed AL observing programs during the past year. This need not be a "formal event" with certificates; it would suffice if they were only asked to stand for recognition. In the 2018 NCRAL Convention Preferences Survey, 70.8% indicated that they want to see this done.

Door Prizes

Consider asking for complimentary door prizes from manufacturers and distributors. Having a few higher-quality items is often superior to numerous lower-quality items.

It can take much work to get high-quality door prizes. NASA is a good source. The Night Sky Network is also good. Museums are sometimes good for passes. But if you want telescopes, cameras, filters, etc., you need to bug the heck out of vendors. Consider telephoning, emailing, texting, and mailing. Be sure to put someone in charge of door prizes and prioritize placing phone calls because emailing, texting, and mailing can be relatively ineffective.

People LOVE door prizes! It would be great if everyone could go home with a door prize from a convention. Still, if you get too many door prizes, their distribution can be time-consuming unless great care is taken. Drawing 5-15 tickets at once, calling out the last 3-4 numbers, associating tickets with a list of door prizes, publicly displaying that list, and having people pick up their prizes later at the registration desk is likely the best approach.

Consider having separate door prize drawings for precious items, such as a grand prize.

Remember that most amateur astronomers purchase what they want or need today and don't rely on door prizes to acquire needed items.

Avoid budgeting any part of the registration fee for door prizes.

Be sure to include door prizes in the business meeting to get people to attend. This was done at NCRA 2023 with nearly 100% attendance!

Presentation Room

Be sure to select and use a presentation room that provides good visual and audio access to the guests and the speaker. A ready room with comfortable, unidirectional seating is preferred. (Rounds are fine for meals but problematic when listening to speakers.) A flat room with an elevated platform or stage for speakers and visual media is also acceptable. The room should have considerable darkening capability—heavy light-block drapes or blinds—and the hosts should know how to control the lighting.

Presentation Room Conveniences

Be mindful of the lecture room temperature. While hosts might feel warm rushing from place to place, those sitting still for hours can get chilled. Ask from time to time if the temperature is about right.

Keep participants stocked with water and other refreshments throughout the day if possible.

Ensure that the convention attendees know the locations of restrooms, dining facilities, etc.

Recycling and Eco-friendliness

Be mindful of the need for recycling and the preservation of natural resources. Avoid using items that cannot be reused or at least recycled. For instance, water in serving glasses is better than water in bottles. If bottles are used, then at least provide a means for recycling. Print only what is necessary. Avoid plastic bags. Make unnecessary items available through a website or other such means.

Media

Speakers today almost invariably use PowerPoint or similar presentation software in their talks. Ensure access to laptop computers, video projectors, and laser pointers. It is advisable to have backup equipment as well. Always consult with speakers about their audio/visual needs so that the appropriate media are available for their use.

There are some concerns about image scales, such as Standard (4:3) or Widescreen (16:9). Today's computer and video projectors can handle both formats. However, the fundamental limitation is the screen on which PowerPoint slides are projected. Speakers should use the Standard (4:3) format when preparing presentation slides unless a widescreen is available.

Opening Registration

Some 40% of those who completed the NCRA 2023 post-convention survey indicated they would like registration to open at least three months before the event. Avoid "soft" openings where incomplete or potentially inaccurate information is presented. There should only be "hard" openings with complete details

and registration available. Be careful to “shield” your convention website from prying eyes until it is officially announced. Some people will begin searching for your convention website before you release it. For instance, if you use something like www.ncral2020.com or link your developing web page to your club’s website, like www.tcaa.club/ncral2023, people will probably find it before your website is ready. Some will even register with incomplete and inaccurate information, leading to future problems.

Registration Fee

The registration fee is expected to cover the cost of the convention entirely unless outside sponsors have been obtained to cover some of the expenses, such as the Twin City Amateur Astronomers did during NCRAL 2016. The registration fee is determined by the total convention cost divided by the number of expected registration-paying participants. Be conservative in your estimate of the number of paying participants. It is better to run a profitable convention than the opposite.

Work to keep the registration fee down but not so low as to impinge upon the quality of the convention. When asked in the 2018 Convention Preferences Survey, “What is the maximum amount you are willing to spend on registration fees (not including meals and lodging) to attend an NCRAL convention?” these were the answers:

39.4%	less than \$100
50.0%	\$100 to \$200
9.1%	\$200 to \$300

The bottom line is that if the convention registration fee goes above \$100, we will begin to lose prospective attendees. Still, most NCRAL members are “well-healed” retirees who don’t mind paying a little extra if necessary.

Early-bird and Late/On-site Registration

It is strongly suggested that convention registration take place with an “early bird discount” for those who register at least several weeks before the start of the convention. There should be a hard-and-fast date for early bird registration and late registration periods, after which only on-site registration will be accepted. How often have hosts heard, “My registration form and fee are in the mail”?

The “early bird” fee and an “after this date” fee, typically separated by \$10 to \$20 (say a 5% to 10% discount for early registration – never call it a late penalty), are used to encourage early registration. This can be very helpful during convention planning and helps to save on needless printing and materials gathering. This difference in the registration fees should not be so significant as to discourage those who register late from attending.

Registration should always include a request for contact information, including email addresses, so 1) the host can seek and provide follow-up information (see below) and 2) the Region can build up a database of convention attendees that can be used for direct emailing in future years.

Use of Credit Cards and PayPal

If the host decides to take credit cards during registration, they shouldn’t forget to increase prices by a small amount to account for credit card usage fees. (Some call this a convenience or transaction fee.) If you aim to keep conference costs down and just reach the break-even point, failing to account for the typical 3%-4% transaction fee can result in a convention loss.

Some attendees prefer to avoid using credit cards. Be sure that you give them the option of paying by personal check using US Mail.

Non-NCRAL Participants

Non-NCRAL amateur astronomers are welcome to attend and participate in NCRAL convention activities. However, because NCRAL conventions benefit NCRAL membership, increasing the registration fee by \$5 to \$10 is advisable. Still, to promote AL and, therefore, NCRAL membership, this additional fee may be waived at the discretion of the host in consultation with the NCRAL Regional Chair. In such cases where the additional registration fee is waived, some effort should be made to entice non-members and their clubs to become affiliates of the Astronomical League and, by default, NCRAL.

Registration Information

What information should be provided and collected for any NCRAL registration process? Consider including all of the following:

- Convention dates, times, location, and theme
- Speakers and topics or titles
- Convention registration fee schedule (including “early bird,” late, and on-site costs)
- Meal options include several meals, meal preferences, and pricing
- Convention photo pricing and availability (if prints are to be sold)
- Commemorative items (e.g., t-shirts, souvenirs) if they are to be sold
- Complete contact information of the applicant, including email address
- Application form with “send to” address information
- Information about who to contact if anything is unclear

It is essential to include “a la carte” rather than “all in one” pricing so no one is required to purchase things they do not want. 67.7% of members surveyed prefer à la carte pricing to a fixed registration fee that includes everything. This flexibility makes it easier financially for those not so well-healed to attend NCRAL conventions.

Registration Follow-up

There should always be some form of acknowledgment after registration fees are paid. It is often sufficient to send a follow-up email. Host clubs should regularly send out updates in the months leading up to the event, including a detailed program, a description of food choices, and alternative possibilities for non-astronomy family members to attend. It is essential to send out regular updates about the program and detailed information about traveling, lodging, parking, etc.

Contacting Registrants Before the Convention

Contacting registrants with reminders and giving them critical information before their arrival on-site can be highly advantageous. NCRAL 2023 registrants received a double notification the first two weeks and five days before the convention started. The email included the convention program and an extensive list of critical information” that every participant was urged to read before arrival on-site. This made check-in a breeze, and no one was left wondering about essential items.

Expectations, Indemnification, and Profit Sharing

All NCRA conventions are expected to be self-supporting. A convention host should be able to pay all associated expenses from convention registration fees and, ideally, generate some income for both the host and the Region.

The official policy of NCRA (approved spring 2019) is that the host affiliate is indemnified against monetary loss by NCRA up to a maximum of \$500, assuming efforts have been made to establish and adhere to a reasonable budget. Ideally, a budget will consider all income and expenses and have a built-in \$500 to \$1,000 “cushion” to help ensure profitability and avoid loss.

In exchange for this indemnification, the Region rightfully expects to share in the profits of any convention. The host club and the Region will split convention profits (income minus expenses) equally. Keep in mind that the only income that the Region receives is from convention-related profit sharing. This income pays for plaques, cash awards, certificates, mini-grants, and limited travel expenses for the Chair and Regional Representative to the Astronomical League national council meeting at ALCon.

State Sales Tax

One significant cost that should be avoided is state sales tax. If the hosting affiliate is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, they should try to get a tax-exempt status and letter from the state not to have to pay sales taxes on things purchased for the convention. Whoever is organizing needs to ensure they make a point of this for everything related to the event. It depends on the location, but the sales tax is as high as 9.5% in some areas.

Lodging Costs

Work to keep the lodging costs down but not so low as to impinge upon the quality of the convention. When asked in the 2018 Convention Preferences Survey, “What is the maximum amount you are willing to spend on lodging to attend an NCRA convention?” these were the answers:

12.3%	\$75 per night
38.5%	\$100 per night
32.3%	\$125 per night
12.3%	\$150 per night

Additional Lodging Considerations

If you book a convention hotel, the facilities are often free of charge as long as you can guarantee booking many rooms. That could help keep the convention registration fee down. Be careful to avoid getting roped into a contract whose terms a club cannot honestly be expected to meet.

People are more or less willing to spend \$100-\$125 per night for a hotel room. It's, therefore, best to let the hotel rate rise if you can keep the registration cost down. (Shared, such spaces are available at a fraction of the total cost.)

Avoid Contracts that Bind NCRA

No convention host should enter contracts binding NCRA, its officers, or members. NCRA is not to be made accountable for payments or other obligations. Only the leadership of NCRA has the authority to bind the organization.

Meal Costs

Work to keep the convention-related meal costs down but not so low as to impinge upon the quality of the convention. When asked in the 2018 Convention Preferences Survey, “What is the maximum amount you are willing to spend on all convention-related meals to attend an NCRA convention?” these were the answers:

6.4%	\$15 to \$20
12.7%	\$20 to \$30
20.6%	\$30 to \$45
27.0%	\$45 to \$60
33.3%	\$60 and above

Again, these numbers reflect the “well-healed” financial status of many of NCRA’s members.

Additional Meal Considerations

Meals should include both meat and vegetarian options. Beef and chicken are good choices. Avoid pork to provide as many food choices as possible for those who do not eat pork for religious reasons.

8-person round tables are better for conversations. Each table should have pitchers of ice water.

Master of Ceremonies Duties

Ensure the Master of Ceremonies knows their duties concerning keeping the convention on schedule and announcing and thanking speakers. They should also inform the approaching end of a session at least five minutes in advance so the speaker can finish appropriately. Limit post-presentation questions, reminding the attendees that the speaker will be available for additional questioning during break time. If the speakers are to receive token gifts (e.g., a coffee mug), they should be provided to the speakers immediately after the conclusion of the Q&A session.

Zoom or Not to Zoom?

That is the question. After careful discussion of this matter by the TCAA Planning Committee in 2023, it was agreed that sessions should neither be broadcast by Zoom nor recorded for future playback. The Committee felt that this would defeat the convention’s purpose of bringing amateur astronomers together for socializing and that some would not attend because of the convenience of watching from home without paying convention costs. Those who attend pay for the convention. It is unfair to make the convention-goers pay while those who choose to stay at home can view the sessions for free.

Annual Council and Business Meetings

The annual council and business meetings are two primary reasons for the convention. Hosts typically need to plan for a one-hour council/business meeting for the members to hear reports, vote in elections, and address other business matters that regularly come before them. The council/business meeting is usually scheduled late on Saturday afternoon as the last business order before the pre-banquet break. Still, holding the meetings at this point in the agenda is not a requirement. A council/business meeting was held successfully at NCRA 2019 starting at 8 AM on Saturday.

Before finalizing the convention program, talk with the Regional Chair about time requirements and other needs for the business meeting. The Region's Executive Officers conduct the business meeting.

Post-convention Survey

Starting with the NCRAL 2018 convention, NCRAL is now conducting online post-convention evaluations. These evaluations will help the hosts understand how well the convention went and, more importantly, help future convention hosts better understand how to prepare for next year. To see an example of this survey, go to the following case-sensitive URL: <https://goo.gl/9YhLJt> (2018) and <http://bit.ly/2J6l1bg> (2019).

Convention hosts should work with the Regional Chair before the meeting to update the post-convention survey and add new questions that might be advantageous.

After the convention, the post-convention survey should be completed online (and not as paper handouts) to ensure anonymity, increase the convenience of those completing the survey, and assist with data analysis.

Regardless of encouragement, only about half of all convention attendees will complete the online survey.

Important Budgeting Information

Speaker Honoraria

- The only guideline for honoraria is to keep it reasonable so that the registration fee and other non-NCRAL sources of revenue can cover expenses.
- Bringing in big-name speakers can be expensive. Travel, honorarium, hotel, meals, and other expenses often can exceed \$2,000 per speaker. With 50 attending a convention, those costs can eat up to \$40 per registrant for just one speaker. Big names don't always bring high NCRAL convention attendance; keeping registration fees low is essential. Low registration fees help to bring members of NCRAL together.
- An honorarium of \$100 for locals is more than enough; if the club is affiliated, they tend not even to accept honoraria.

NCRAL Officers

The Executive Officers attending conventions do so at their own expense. No consideration is to be provided to them that is not offered to every other attendee unless they are invited speakers.

A-la-carte Registration fees

Consider separating the banquet cost from the registration fee because not everyone will attend the banquet for whatever reason. The same can be said about lodging costs. Giving prospective attendees options is an excellent way to make convention attendance more appealing. It helps to keep the cost down for those who want it that way. Some don't care, but others do.

Expected Attendance

It's not possible to predict in advance how many will register for any one convention. Centrally-located, well-promoted conventions with good themes, exciting topics, and qualified speakers have, in the past, drawn nearly 90 registrants. Conventions not promoted or on the Region's boundaries are typically drawn from 30 to 40 registrants. Keep this in mind as you estimate your expected attendance for budgetary purposes.

Preparing a Budget & Setting the Registration Fee

Before setting the registration fee, hosts must decide their “break-even” attendance. This is much different from expected attendance. Break-even attendance is the number of attendees needed to pay all the bills if only a minimum number attends the convention. While you might expect 75 to attend, the budget is that only 50 will attend.

BUDGET CONSERVATIVELY, and count on fewer outside attendees than you might honestly expect.

A budget should be utilized to ensure a profitable outcome. Keep in mind the following general definitions:

Expected income – expected costs = expected profit

Cushion = amount set aside for unanticipated expenses, not less than \$500

Registration fee = (expected profit + cushion)/number of attendees.

It is permissible to generate more than \$500 profit from a convention with the above formulas (one recent convention netted \$1,400 for both the host club and the Region), but remember that convention attendance can be fickle. A high registration and/or meal fee can keep away hoped-for attendees; a low registration fee and reasonably priced meals can help draw attendees.

Be sure to keep in mind whether your own planning team or club members will be expected to pay for registration. Some clubs do not charge their planning team members for basic registration (but do charge them for meals).

Consider finding sponsorships to increase income. Do you have favored businesses, local or otherwise, that might consider sponsoring a break or something to that effect?

Getting vendor displays (and charging a display fee) is nice, but often rather tricky; most won't come to attend an event as small as an NCRAL convention. Nonetheless, vendors are often generous with door prizes to draw attention to their services.

Planned Budget Deficits

While all conventions should generate a small amount of profit or at least break even from a budgetary viewpoint, it is acceptable - with the prior authorization of the NCRAL Executive Officers - to plan a convention budget that includes a small deficit (<\$500) if the purpose of that deficit is to bring in unusually interesting or qualified speakers that typical convention registration fees would not otherwise wholly cover.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships can be used to under right certain functions. For instance, at NCRAL 2016, several \$1,000 sponsorships allowed a meager registration fee.

Budgeting Procedures

Budgeting for a convention can make all the difference between breaking even and a financial disaster. Conventions are expected to be self-supporting. Suppose there is a shortfall due to unforeseen circumstances.

In that case, the NCRAL can move to cover expenses with a limit of \$500 (\$250 in joint ventures with another Region) if reasonable efforts have been made to balance income with costs.

Budgeting requires carefully considering sources of expected revenue and expense areas. Below are a few of these elements of budget planning:

Income

- Registration Fees*
- Vendor Fees
- Fees for the meals
- Sponsorship support**

Expenses

- Honoraria for invited speakers:
 - local and regional talent \$100 to \$250
 - national talent \$500
 - institutional speakers usually contribute their services without an honorarium
- Travel costs for invited speakers
- Room & board for invited speakers
- Room usage
- Media usage
- Printing
- Banquet expenses, including gratuity (if any)
- Complimentary banquet meals for staff/guests
- Buses (if any)

*Registration Fees – Registration fees normally are expected to cover all expenses associated with a convention unless supplemental support is obtained through grants, gifts, or other types of support. Typically, registration should be completed through the host's website, but on-site registration should still be possible. Due to the need to produce added materials to address the unpredictable needs of on-site registrants, the on-site registration fee will be somewhat higher than that available online.

**Sponsor Support – Such support may be used to lower the registration fee for a convention as an enticement to increase registration numbers. The Twin City Amateur Astronomers at NCRAL 2016 obtained \$1,500 for sponsorship from major dealers of astronomical supplies for two refreshment breaks.

Planning Steps

These guidelines will assist those considering or agreeing to hold an NCRAL Convention. The Region has one convention per year – usually in April or May. Most conventions are scheduled to begin on Friday evening and end on Saturday evening.

I. Things to consider before offering to hold a convention:

- Are your club members willing to expend the time and energy it takes to plan and hold a one-and-a-half-day convention of 50 to 100 amateur astronomers?
- Can you access adequate facilities for holding the Saturday evening banquet for 50 to 100 people?

- What financial backing can you expect from your club and other sources? (Registration fees are expected to cover the costs of the convention. Sometimes, vendors are willing to pay for space or contribute in diverse ways. The Regional will usually attempt to cover any shortfall in funds. (More on projecting costs and dealing with expenses will be found in later Regionals of this guide.)
- Are there dates available at the location where you propose holding the convention? (Watch for conflicts with other major conventions, holidays, and astronomical events.)

II. Offering to hold a convention:

Before the convention, the offer to hold the convention should be made at least 2-5 years in advance (arrangements can be made if the request is made with a shorter lead time and an unfilled opening). Contact the Regional Chair to determine which annual conventions need hosts (e.g., NCRA 2022, NCRA 2024, etc.). The offer to hold a convention should consist of a written communiqué to the Regional Chair and should include the following:

- A commitment by an NCRA-affiliated astronomy club, astronomical society, etc., to host the convention.
- The preferred days and dates.
- The names, addresses, and phone numbers of the individual(s) who will act as local program chairperson(s).
- Requests must be placed with the Region or its Executive Officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, ALCor).
- If needed, the sources and adequacy of funds beyond those collected as part of the registration process.

The Regional Chair will then present the offer at the next annual membership convention for discussion and vote for approval.

III. 1 year before the approved convention:

It is customary for the host of the next NCRA convention to present information to the membership at the prior NCRA convention, provide informational details, and encourage attendance. For instance, Popular Astronomy Club, which agreed to host the NCRA 2019 convention, gave a brief PowerPoint-mediated presentation at the NCRA 2018 convention hosted by the Door Peninsula Astronomical Society.

IV. 10-12 months before the approved convention:

Approximately one year before the planned convention, the local organizing committee should meet and proceed as follows:

- Inform the Regional Chair of its plans and progress toward implementing these plans. It is often convenient to plan and select a theme for the convention, such as “Voyages of Discovery” or “Dark Skies.”
- Ensure that the Region’s Webmaster and the *Northern Lights* newsletter editor are informed as soon as possible of all plans so that the membership can be notified of the convention and what is being planned.
- Divide the responsibilities for carrying out the plans among the club’s members:

1. Reserve facilities and arrange for refreshments
2. Plan the banquet and contact the speaker
3. Seek keynote and other plenary speakers
4. Contact and invite vendors (if desired)
5. Recruit members to act as ushers and staff the registration/reception desk
6. Gather information on local motel and dining accommodations (as appropriate)
7. Contact businesses for support if appropriate.

V. 7-8 months before the approved convention:

Hear progress reports from the organizing committee members and decide on the following financial matters:

- Invited speaker expenses, including board, room, travel, and honorarium. The decision as to the number of invited speakers depends on their availability and the funds available.
- Banquet expenses, including speaker and guests
- Souvenir costs (e.g., plaques), if any, are to be provided (The Region will bear the cost of the Regional Award and Newsletter Editor Award.)
- The fee to be collected from vendors, if any
- Refreshment and treats costs for breaks
- Costs for producing printed programs, name tags, etc.

VI. 6-7 months before the approved convention:

- Banquet room for sufficient for the usual number of participants, 50 to 100 people.
- Room for plenary session 50 to 100 people.
- A room for commercial displays by vendors, such as laboratory equipment and publications.
- Confirm arrangements for banquet and plenary speakers, including obtaining the title and subject matter of talks and the costs involved. Also, reserve accommodations for the speakers.
- Arrange for receiving, printing, and promoting talk titles and abstracts in the printed program.
- Arrange for the receiving of images and vitae of all invited speakers for use in promotion and the printed program.

VII. 5-6 months before the approved convention:

- Generate a preliminary program announcing the central theme and invited speakers and send it out to Regional Executive Officers, newsletter editor, and webmaster for review and dissemination.
- Include 30-minute break periods if possible and avoid a program that is “too busy.”
- Contact vendors by offering them the opportunity to show their products provide door prizes and/or refreshments, etc. (See attached list of vendors.) Indicate the charge, if any, and the space size that will be provided for them.
- Work out a detailed budget to help ensure that the convention loses no money. All Regional conventions are expected to be self-supporting. Set registration and fees accordingly. Consult the budgeting information below for important information.

VIII. Three months before the approved convention:

- Contact the food catering office to confirm places, dates, menu, and times for meals and other refreshments.

- Make a phone check to see what vendors are participating.
- Work carefully with the Region's webmaster to ensure essential information appears on the NCRAL website.
- Work carefully with the ***Northern Lights*** editors to ensure essential information appears in the NCRAL newsletter.
- Check with the Regional to determine what awards, if any, will be presented and when. Awards are presented during the Saturday evening banquet.

IX. 6 weeks to 1 month before the approved convention:

- Arrange for a master of ceremonies or members to chair the various sessions.
- Re-confirm attendance with speakers and inform them of accommodations arranged for them.
- Send acknowledgment to presenters, informing them of the time and place for their presentations.

X. 2 weeks before the approved convention

- Put together a final program that includes the talk title, abstract, speaker image and vitae, and other appropriate descriptions such as room location. Consider including a building map if applicable.
- When assembling the program, keep in mind the following points:
 1. The general program begins on Friday afternoon or evening and concludes with the banquet on Saturday evening.
 2. Avoid scheduling invited speakers in parallel with any other activity.
 3. As you develop the convention program, avoid spreading yourself too thin. Avoid assuming all responsibilities for running the convention yourself. You cannot manage your duties if you serve as a program moderator and are needed elsewhere. Also, be careful not to rely too strongly on student help unless students can be trusted completely to fulfill their duties promptly and professionally.
- Send the final program with descriptions to those who have pre-registered, which should include the following:
 1. A request that they inform their colleagues that late registration is acceptable.
 2. A list of the participants registered for each of the workshops.
- Prepare extra program copies for distribution for those registering on arrival and others.
- Alert campus security of the convention and confirm parking arrangements.
- Check with co-hosts (if any) to see if any changes in their agenda(s) might affect your convention plans.

XI. The week preceding the convention

- Arrange for a table, place, and a roster of workers for running the registration desk.
- Arrange for helpers to usher people to various locations (pick up speakers from the airport and get them to their hotel rooms if needed).
- Give the caterer a final count of meals required for the banquet, and check to see that the refreshments will be delivered at the appropriate times and places.

- Prepare a list of convention participants, tickets for the banquet and any other unique events, seating assignments for the banquet (if there is to be a head table), and signs to direct people to appropriate locations.
- Prepare name tags for those who have pre-registered, and be prepared to have name tags for guests who register on-site.
- When making name tags, please complete the FIRST NAME LARGE, the last name, and the club/society affiliation a bit smaller. First names should FILL THE NAME TAG and be large enough to be easily read from 3-4 feet away.
- Make a final check to assure guest speakers, commercial exhibitors, and other special guests are informed of the times and places where they are expected to be and other provisions that have been made for their stay and presentations.
- Obtain money for a cash drawer of about \$200 in small bills.
- Prepare for on-site registration.
- If you pre-registered attendants through a website, be sure to have their information on hand.
- Be sure that session chairs know they must introduce speakers and limit their talks to the times specified in the convention program. Stress with invited speakers, the need to stay on time, and indicating clearly how much time they have for their talk, questions, and answers. Q&A periods should run no more than 5-10 minutes and must be included in the allotted time. Attendees may continue discussions with speakers during the extended breaks.
- Prepare unique name tags for guests so they can be used to distinguish hosts from others. This will allow them ways to get their questions answered more quickly.
- Make sure you arrange to have one or more members continuously present at the convention who are proficient with modern audio/visual equipment (e.g., laptop computers, video projectors, sound systems, and even room lighting).
- Preload speakers' presentations onto a master computer. Encourage speakers to send presentations before the conference; discourage the use of presentations using their computers. Nothing worse than A/V hold-ups. Sometimes, you will have speakers requiring their personal computers because of special software. This is acceptable, but knowing what is needed for the interface in advance is imperative. Be sure to practice changeover during downtime.

XII. Day of the convention, arrange for the following

- Put up signage to direct people to proper locations.
- Be sure all doors are unlocked, rooms are ready for use, and audio/visual equipment is in place.
- Check out in advance that all media are working correctly.
- Have backup equipment (laptop, video projector, microphone system) available in the event of need.
- Be sure registration materials and personnel are in place.
- Have people available to direct exhibitors and presenters to proper rooms.
- Check to see if refreshments are in place.
- Make sure that someone is available to introduce authorities and speakers.
- Make the last check on banquet preparations.
- Set out your cash drawer with money to make changes for registration payments.
- Have on-site registrants complete a registration form to be turned over to the treasurer, along with all convention receipts at the end.

XIII. Following the convention, arrange for the following

- Take care of money, ensuring it is deposited after being counted and accounted for.

- Be certain invited speakers can depart in a timely and safe manner.
- After settling accounts locally, settle accounts with the treasurer of the Region.
- Write thank you letters or thank the following verbally: sponsors, including the school administration, participants, workers, exhibitors, and especially colleagues who helped.

APPENDICES

Sample “to do” list from NCRA 2019 for the May 3-5 event.

Category		Leader	Due Date	Status
Conference Price			30-Sep	
	Facility		30-Jun	
	Food		30-Aug	
	Attendee gifts		15-Sep	
	Signage		30-Aug	
	Supplies		15-Sep	
	AV		15-Sep	
	Speakers (meals and honorarium)		15-Sep	
	Correspondence		15-Sep	
	Website		15-Sep	
	Activities		15-Sep	
	Welcome Bags		15-Sep	
	Manpower		30-Jul	
General				
	Determine Theme			
	Group and conference photos		Conference	
	Send pictures of prize winners to sponsors		5/6/19	
	Design Program		3/15/19	
	Solicit Sponsors		2/15/19	
	Publicity in Astronomical publications			
	Design conference logo/graphic (Shirt, program)			
	Design letterhead			
Facility				
	Conference Rooms			
	Complete and Sign Banquet Event Order		4/15/19	
	Room Block			
	Conference room layouts		4/15/19	
Food				
	Friday (Dinner)		30-Aug	
	Saturday (Lunch, Dinner)		30-Aug	

	Final counts to the caterer		4/24/19	
Gifts and Logoed products				
	Latest order date for a simple gift			
	Latest order date for portfolio		3/15/19	
	Order T shirts		4/12/19	
	Order Mugs			
	Attendee simple		15-Sep	
	Attendee extended		15-Feb	
	Speaker (club mugs?)		15-Sep	
	Door Prizes		12-Apr	
	Design a T-shirt and find a supplier		31-Jan	
	Welcome bags ready to assemble		30-Mar	
	Do we need permission to use the AL Logo on products?		15-Sep	
Signage				
	Club banner			
	Order Conference Banner			
	Directions/Instructions		15-Apr	
Supplies				
	Pricing		15-Sep	
	Procure		30-Mar	
	Flip charts, Tape		30-Mar	
	Markers		30-Mar	
	Big sheets of paper (signage)		30-Mar	
	Name badge holders		30-Mar	
	Print Name badges		4/15/19	
	Blank tag and Marker for on-site Badges		30-Mar	
	Drawing Tickets			
	Print conference agenda handout		4/15/19	
	Conference playbook		4/15/19	
	Table tents (food ID)		30-Mar	
	Clicker (Slide Advance)		30-Mar	
	Batteries		30-Mar	
A/V Needs				
	Projector			
	Screen			
	Microphone (podium and lavalier)			
	Podium			
	Laser pointers			

	Computer			
	Backup computer			
Speakers				
	Friday Schedule		15-Oct	
	Saturday Schedule		15-Oct	
	Sunday Schedule		15-Oct	
	Bios and photos for speakers		15-Oct	
	Permission to post presentation		15-Feb	
	Collect Presentations		19-Apr	
	Post Presentations		26-Apr	
	Develop Astrophotography 101 Outline		1-Feb	
	Develop an Outreach Workshop Plan		1-Feb	
	Develop a Panel Discussion Plan		1-Feb	
Correspondence				
	Correspondence with presenters		2/15/19	
	Update 1 to Carl for <i>Northern Lights</i>		18-Aug	
	Update 2 to Carl for <i>Northern Lights</i>		18-Dec	
	Update 3 to Carl for <i>Northern Lights</i>		18-Mar	
	Update attendees with the agenda		As needed	
	Reminder on Hotel Block Ending		3/15/19	
	Final email to attendees		4/19/19	
Website				
	Ongoing update of Website (Registration, FAQ, Speaker bio/picture, QC info link Add the posted date and updated date to all documents		as needed	
Registration				
	When does registration open			
	Define data needs for Dino			
	Test site for registration			
	Select site for registration			
Activities				
	Trivia Competition			
	Descriptions for Harvester and Arsenal Tours			
Manpower				
	Registration Table			
	Moderator			
	Timekeeper			
	Question answerers (ambassadors)			
	Main contact with Stoney Creek			



NCRAL

2019

**Astronomical Voyages of Discovery:
Past, Present & Future!**



FRIDAY MAY 3rd, 2019

- 9:00 AM Visit John Deere Pavilion and John Deere Store
- 10:00 AM John Deere Harvester Works– Factory Tour
- 12:00 PM Registration Opens (until 6:00 PM)
- 12:00 PM Participants bring DIY creations to show / Vendor setups
- 1:00 PM Rock Island Arsenal Museum Tour
- 1:00 PM Solar Observing and Tours of the PACMO
- 1:00 PM Best Practices for Community Outreach Seminar by Mike Gacioch (until 2 PM)
- 2:00 PM Astrophotography 101 by Dino Milani, Rusty Case, and Terry Dufek (until 4:00 PM)
- 4:15 PM Welcome by Chairman Mike Gacioch, Giveaway #1, Brief History of the Popular Astronomy Club by Roy Gustafson
- 4:45 PM Mingle, visit vendors, discuss DIY projects over dinner and cash bar
- 6:00 PM Inter–club Trivia competition
- 6:45 PM **PRESENTATION #1:** A Relativistic Century: Eddington, Einstein, and the Great Eclipse by Dr. Lee Carkner
- 7:45 PM **PRESENTATION #2:** Voyages of Discovery by Carl Wenning
- 8:30 PM Move (caravan) to the John Deere Planetarium
- 9:00 PM Tour John Deere Planetarium and Gamble Observatory

SATURDAY MAY 4th, 2019

- 7:30 AM Registration Opens and questions answered /networking
- 8:00 AM Giveaway # 2 / NCRA Business Meeting chaired by Carl Wenning
- 9:15 AM **Brief Day Overview** by Mike Gacioch and Alan Sheidler / Giveaway #3
- 9:45 AM **PRESENTATION #3:** Discussion of Historical Tests of General Relativity Theory by Dr. Robert Motel

Continued in the next column

- 10:45 AM **PRESENTATION #4:** Meteorites: Messengers from Space and Time by Dr. Paul Spier
- 11:45 AM Meet at PACMO for Group Photo
- 12:15 PM Soup, Salad, Sandwich Buffet/ Give Away #4
- 1:00 PM **PRESENTATION #5:** Voyages of Discovery in Radio Astronomy: Past, Present and Future by Dr. Esteban Araya
- 2:00 PM **PRESENTATION #6:** Gravitational Waves by Dr. Robert Mitchell
- 3:00 PM BREAK
- 3:30 PM **PRESENTATION # 7:** Our Coolest Stellar Neighbors: the Role of M Dwarf Stars in the Search for Earth 2.0 by Katie Melbourne
- 4:00 PM **PRESENTATION #8:** Tweeting to the stars with the Burke– Gaffney Observatory and learning about galaxy evolution using simulations. By Tiffany Fields
- 4:30 PM **PRESENTATION #9:** Asteroid Research at the Monmouth College Adolphson Observatory by Bridgette Davey
- 5:00 PM BREAK (Cash Bar)
- 5:30 PM **BANQUET** (Buffet)
- 7:00 PM Give Away #5/ NCRA awards / Introduction of the keynote speaker
- 7:15 PM **KEYNOTE PRESENTATION:** Different Views of the Sky; American Indian Views of Astronomy (and a look at where we are going in the future) by Dr. Steven Spangler
- 8:15 PM **CLOSING REMARKS** by Mike Gacioch and Alan Sheidler
- 8:30 PM Evening Observing Session with PACMO and/ or Dark Sky Observing at Menke Observatory (until midnight)

SUNDAY MAY 5th, 2019

- 9:00 AM Give Away #6/ Panel Discussion Bettendorf High School: Involving students in Astronomy (Chris Like, Alan Sheidler, and students)
- 10:00 AM Tour Bettendorf HS planetarium with Chris Like