Engaging communities in statewide astronomy outreach

Amy Sayle, PhD
Coordinator for NC Statewide Star Party & Carolinas Solar Eclipse Party (NC portion)
Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, UNC-Chapel Hill
The April 2022 Festival features hundreds of amazing in-person and virtual events.

FIND EVENTS
Annual NC Science Festival (now in 12th year) → Annual NC Statewide Star Party (now in 10th year)

www.ncsciencefestival.org/starparty

Photo credit: Joe Pedit
Biggest Statewide Star Party for the public in the universe (we think)

On the same weekend in April, 35 to 55 Star Party events (exact # depends on year; above map from 2017)
Statewide Star Party elements

- Event hosts must apply
- Different theme each year
- Star Party kits provided
- Training
- Matchmaking with astronomers
Some sites in path of totality, most not. Total attendance 90,000+

Eclipse poster designed by Tyler Nordgren
Carolinas Solar Eclipse Party: Partners

+ Eclipse Party hosts & their partners
How to coordinate successful skywatching events that reach communities across your state (or region)

A few tips and lessons learned . . .
1. Find good event hosts

Consider networks you already have
- NC Science Festival

Consider those who know astronomy
- Planetariums, observatories, science centers
- Universities with physics/astronomy departments
- Astronomy clubs active in public outreach

Consider those who know how to put on programs & who can reach audiences you want to serve
- Science teachers
- Environmental education centers (NC-EE listserv: >2000 subscribers!)
- State parks
- Public libraries
2. Help make matches

• New event hosts who need to partner with experienced hosts?
• Astronomy clubs that need venues?
• Hosts/venues that need astronomers?
• Groups that want to attend an event, or volunteer at one?
3. Successful events have partners

U.S. Congressman David Price demonstrates “a new frontier in constituent service.”
4. Expect to have astronomers only if you’re in totality. Partial only? The organization may also lose its astronomy staff.
5. Offer training to event hosts

• In-person, if possible
• Consider requiring 2+/site to participate

Leading fellow hosts in the Pocket Solar System activity

Each site prepared an event action plan
6. Offer a variety of activities (test them 1st!)
(indoor and outdoor, different ages, etc.)
Carolinas Solar Eclipse Party: Kits with 13 astronomy activities

A partially packed kit

We also trained 100 educators on “mini-kits” at workshops and conferences
7. Expect lots of eclipse enthusiasm—even for partial-only events

Some of the 5000 people who came to Morehead Planetarium and Science Center (max. eclipse 93%)
Final tip:
You probably can’t buy too many eclipse glasses.
To learn more . . .

NC Statewide Star Party:
ncsciencefestival.org/starparty

NC Science Festival spokesbot Kelvin can’t wait for the next solar eclipse

Credit: UNC Development Marketing