Partnering to Enhance Education and Public Engagement Programs

Best Practices in Partnering

Collaborating with partners is a fundamental aspect of the Lunar and Planetary Institute’s (LPI) educational and public engagement efforts. Partnerships strengthen programs by providing diverse resources, expertise, and expanding the potential audience.

Partnerships take time to build.
Each partner needs to learn about the other institution’s experiences, resources, and needs. Trust and respect need to be earned and demonstrated [1]. Not only does this require a certain amount of time to pass; it also requires the investment of time by the members of the organizations.

Partnerships require ongoing respectful communication.
Partners have insights into their community’s needs, interests, and experiences. These partnerships require two-way communications; both partners can provide valuable input as programs are planned [2,3].

Partnerships require recognition of strengths, resources, and mission.
Successful partnerships leverage each organization’s strengths and resources. While the missions of each organization may not be similar, they need to be compatible for the partnership to function. For instance, partnerships may flourish between organizations focused on serving a particular demographic or a community, and others primarily providing a particular service or resource to a variety of communities.

Partnersing for Engagement Events

Working with outside organizations to hold public events provides a richer experience for the audience, and enables LPI to reach a more diverse audience.

LPI holds several SkyFest public events per year, featuring activities for children, telescopes for night sky viewing, and a short scientist lecture. LPI partners with the NASA Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society and ARES educators, who conduct activities and share valuable resources such as lunar samples.

Partners have helped connect LPI to diverse audiences, such as families at local libraries, and new such as librarians and camp professionals around the United States and teachers throughout the Houston area.

Partnersing for Workshops

LPI conducts trainings to provide NASA content and resources to informal and K-12 educators. LPI has partnered with the ARES Science Engagement Staff, multiple state library associations, the Harris County Department of Education, the American Camp Association, and Johns Hopkins University’s Applied Physics Laboratory, among others, to deliver workshops.

Working with other NASA programs and missions has allowed workshop participants to access subject matter experts, laboratories, and resources beyond what LPI alone can provide.

Partnersing to Improve our Performance

Partners provide valuable insight into ways to modify programs, to improve the overall impact or adjust for different audiences and changing objectives. LPI has received valuable input from the different communities we serve, as well as from NASA education colleagues.

LPI has benefitted from evaluation of our programs by colleagues at the Planetary Science Institute, the Harris County Department of Education, and McREL.

For more information about LPI’s education programs and partnerships, contact Christine Shupla at shupla@lpi.usra.edu.

References: