

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Open Space: Participatory Space Education and Outreach (8)

Author: Ms. Karen Lopez
Canada

Dr. Angela Gibson
American Public University System, United States

THE SUCCESS OF COMMUNITY BASED GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES IN SPACE EDUCATION
AND OUTREACH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract

Raising awareness on issues in space necessitates individuals and groups to inform, educate, relate, and mainstream information for public outreach. Educational outreach can stem from formal and informal groups. Outreach may develop organically, may originate from a request from a designated official or official organization, or grow from a perceived need or threat.

During the United States Government Shutdown in October of 2013, NASA, along with all government media sources, went dark as federal employees were restricted from any activities connected to government positions. Websites and social media accounts shut down, yet space activities still went on. Space and STEM enthusiasts expressed frustration to the shutdown and lack of information on the verge of several landmark events.

Creating the hashtag ThingsNASAMightTweet and launching their own social media campaign, a core group of individuals organized, developed a strategy, and created a grassroots effort that trended on social media. Efforts included promoting space outreach from international space agencies and individuals, mirroring international cooperation aspect of space exploration.

The work was picked up by mainstream media, got the attention of Astronauts and celebrities such as William Shatner, and increased outreach to the general population. Messages offered educational outreach to teachers and classes, and increased traffic to NASA and global space-related accounts. During the nearly three week shutdown the @NASA account on Twitter gained more followers and hit the five million mark. Using Keyhole statistics at the end of the initiative the ThingsNASAMightTweet hashtag included over 25 million impressions, a reach of over 4.5 million, over 3,000 users including participation from dozens of countries around the globe and over 11,000 posts.

This presentation will include information on how the core group developed a grassroots strategy, connected with organizations and individuals to crowd source information, created a community organized support group with delegated actions, and truly made an impression on social media and beyond all without NASA involvement. Additionally, this presentation will review data collected from social media sites, interviews of participants, and statements from key stakeholders to provide evidence of success.

Included in the presentation is the continued the work with the capstone to the ThingsNASAMight-Tweet initiative: a live Question and Answer Twitter session of three space-related scientists and researchers for AskTweeps and a reorganizing of the core group in February to launch a WhatIsNASAFor two-day campaign. Methods, tools, challenges, triumphs, short-term and long-term impacts, lessons learned, future plans and data will be shared.