

# PLANETARIUMS AS CONDUITS

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**Abstract: The NASA Explorer Institutes (NEI) initiated a series of workshops and focus groups to identify strategies to implement effectively the NEI goals and objectives. In January 2005, The Great Lakes Planetarium Association (GLPA) and NASA Glenn Research Center (GRC) jointly conducted a focus group entitled *Planetariums as Conduits to NASA's Target Audience*. The GLPA/GRC focus group results, which specified seven action items to the mutual benefit of NASA and planetariums, were incorporated into the larger NEI survey. NASA subsequently announced \$1.2 million in internal funding opportunities for informal education programs.**

## **GLPA Initiates a Focus Group**

The Great Lakes Planetarium Association (GLPA) and NASA Glenn Research Center (GRC) conducted a two-day focus group to generate strategies on how NASA and the planetarium community can help each other achieve their respective goals to increase understanding of and interest in earth science, space science, and technology. GLPA invited participants from regional planetarium associations across the nation, from NASA regional centers representing all sciences and technologies, and from other relevant parties who could further the focus group objectives.

A summary of the GLPA focus group, shown below, was presented at a March 2005 meeting in New York with ten other focus groups from informal education.

### Who:

24 planetarium educators from across the nation and 12 NASA educators from multiple NASA centers.

### Where:

NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio

### When:

January 27-28, 2005

### Key Goals & Objectives:

To generate strategies on how NASA and planetariums can help each other achieve their respective goals to increase understanding of and interest in earth & space science, and technology.

### Lessons Learned:

- NASA and the planetarium community each have much to learn about what the other offers and of the constraints in which each operates.
- NASA and the planetarium community have existing infrastructures, capabilities, and programs in place that, conjoined, can greatly amplify the impact on our common, targeted audiences.

- Effective, ongoing communication in a variety of forms and channels between NASA and the planetarium community would significantly advance the goals of both parties.

### Accomplishments:

The focus group participants identified the strengths and potentials of NASA and of the planetarium community; generated seven strategies by which NASA and the planetarium community could advance their respective missions; and collectively prioritized future joint actions. The top four strategies are:

1. Jointly draft a roadmap to develop annual themed programs based on NASA missions, astronomical & space events, or anniversaries.
2. Establish a liaison or single-point-of-contact method for NASA/Planetarium collaborations;
3. Combine features of NASA Explorers Schools and Solar System Ambassador Programs into a planetarium-specific program;
4. Engage formal educators for the development and implementation of pre- and post-visit materials.

### Unanticipated outcome:

So many noteworthy ideas were generated within subgroups that the merits of each could not be fully conveyed to the larger group in such a short time. Many of the notions raised in brainstorming sessions are smaller actions, yet these valuable ideas would yield favorable results with minimal (if any) investment. We encourage NASA reviewers to peruse the suggestions that were not developed fully.

### Website:

For a list of the focus group managing team, all participants, all strategy details, all ideas generated, and the Final Report, please see our website at:

[www.transitofvenus.org/focus.htm](http://www.transitofvenus.org/focus.htm)

## **NASA Compiles the Results**

NASA compiled the results from six pilot professional development workshops and eleven focus groups, including the

GLPA effort. The 17 initiatives demonstrated how NASA could integrate its mission with informal education venues. NASA reported, “The Informal Education Division plans to support projects in four categories in FY05: Professional Development Workshop Opportunities, STEM Teaching Tools and Products, Infrastructure Development Projects and Partnerships for Sustainability. All NEI projects will be conducted by NASA Field Centers in partnership with members of the informal education community.”

The NASA final report in its entirety is at [http://education.nasa.gov/pdf/122593main\\_NEIReport\\_Final1\\_rev508.pdf](http://education.nasa.gov/pdf/122593main_NEIReport_Final1_rev508.pdf).

### NASA Announces \$1.2 Million Funding Opportunity

NASA released an internal funding opportunity for its field centers, JPL, and other NASA installations, to be conducted in partnership with informal education venues. The initiatives will be funded at a minimum of \$25,000 and a maximum of \$150,000, with approximately \$1.2 million available to support the effort.

GLPA partnered with JPL to implement the item that had the highest recommendation at the GLPA focus group—the Road Map. As proposed, the planetarium community and NASA would collectively decide what missions, anniversaries, and celestial highlights would be embraced and developed by the two parties for, say, five to ten years out. As of the end of October 2005, GLPA is awaiting the announcement of successful grant applications.

Details of the funding opportunity are announced at [http://education.nasa.gov/divisions/informal/overview/F\\_2005\\_Funding\\_Opportunity.html](http://education.nasa.gov/divisions/informal/overview/F_2005_Funding_Opportunity.html).

Documents with ideas and strategies generated from the focus group [Planetariums as Conduits to NASA’s Target Audience](http://www.transitofvenus.org/focusgroup/post-focus.htm) are listed at <http://www.transitofvenus.org/focusgroup/post-focus.htm>.

	Day 1: Thursday	Day 2: Friday
<b>Everyone</b> (Moderator: Liz Monroe-Cook)	<a href="#">Positives &amp; Potentials</a> <a href="#">Bring this strategy to life</a> <a href="#">Things to remember about NASA and planetariums</a>	
<b>Group 1</b> (Moderator: Liz Monroe-Cook)	<a href="#">Group 1 Challenges</a>	<a href="#">Group 1</a> <a href="#">Group 1: formal education</a>
<b>Group 2</b> (Moderator: Jim Sweitzer)	<a href="#">Group 2 Challenges</a>	<a href="#">Group 2</a>
<b>Group 3</b> (Moderators: Bob Bonadurer & Rob LaSalvia)	<a href="#">Group 3 Challenge: relationship, resource, production</a>	<a href="#">Group 3: Project</a>
<b>Group 4</b> (Moderators: Joel Halvorson & Chuck Bueter)	<a href="#">Group 4 Challenge: major events</a> <a href="#">Group 4 Challenge: standards</a> <a href="#">Group 4 Challenge: underserved</a>	<a href="#">Group 4: internships</a> <a href="#">Group 4: single point of contact</a>

[Final Report](#) of the Focus Group  
[Poster elements](#) to be exhibited at New York meeting, March 14, 2005.  
[Photos from the Focus Group](#)