NASA's Museum Alliance – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Museum Alliance?
The Museum Alliance is a community of practice comprising informal science educators at museums, science centers, planetariums, NASA Visitor Centers, Challenger Learning Centers, observatories, zoos, aquariums, parks, and nature centers who wish to share NASA information with their visitors.

It is intended to bring current NASA Science and Technology to visitors through professional development of the museums' staff, advance notice of NASA events, and provision of materials such as visualizations, access to NASA experts, educational materials, etc.

It is a free service and the only requirements are that you be a staff member at one of the above types of institutions, respect all embargoes on pre-released news items, and report to us on a quarterly basis how you use the information we provide.

History of the Museum Alliance
The Alliance began in 2002 as the "Mars Museum Visualization Alliance", or "Mars Viz," a partnership between JPL's Informal Education Office, the robotic Mars Exploration Program, the Space Science Visualization project, and museums, science centers, and planetaria across the country to bring the adventure of exploring Mars to students, educators, and the public. Due to the success of "Mars Viz", the model was expanded to include other NASA content areas encompassing space science, Earth science, space exploration, microgravity, aeronautics research, and space technology.

Who is eligible to participate in the Museum Alliance?
The Museum Alliance is intended for staff at institutions that meet the following requirements:
- Are a legally organized public or private non-profit institution or part of a non-profit organization or government entity;
- Are essentially educational in nature;
- Use and interpret objects, images, and/or a site for the public presentation of regularly scheduled programs and exhibits;
- Carry out the above functions primarily at a physical facility/site; and
- Have at least one paid or unpaid professional staff person with museum knowledge and experience.

The American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics states:
"Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of this world." The Code also acknowledges the variety of sizes and types of museums, "Their numbers include both governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos." To this we add NASA Visitor Centers, Challenger Learning Centers and observatory visitor centers, as well as aviation museums and park visitor centers. The Code also notes "The museum universe in the United States includes both collecting and non-collecting institutions.

Although diverse in their missions, they have in common their nonprofit form of organization and a commitment of service to the public. Their collections and/or the objects they borrow or fabricate are the basis for research, exhibits, and programs that invite public participation." (Reference: http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums)

So although we are called the Museum Alliance, we try to serve all of the types of organizations listed above.

Why must Museum Alliance Partners register?
When Mars Pathfinder and the Sojourner Rover landed on Mars in 1997, the internet traffic was the largest for any single event up to that time. We expected the internet traffic for the landings and operation of the twin Mars Exploration Rovers and MSL-Curiosity to be much larger than that—and it has been. A primary goal of the Museum Alliance is to make sure museums, science centers and planetariums have unimpeded access to the images from the spacecraft, so that they may share them with their audiences.

In addition, registered partners have access to technical assistance, email notifications of upcoming mission and press events, DVDs, professional development, and the opportunity to advertise their organization's NASA-related exhibits, programs, activities, and events on public NASA websites. In return, registered users agree to:
• Comply with NASA/JPL processes on release of news and images, and
• Report audience numbers and demographics.

How can I register?
Fill out the application form by visiting us at https://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/About/Application. (We may also register the IP address of your computer, to allow access to certain parts of the Museum Alliance website that are behind security firewalls.)

What happens after I submit the application form?
After the Museum Alliance Administrator reviews and approves your application, you will be sent a "Welcome!" email. You will also be added to one of the Museum Alliance list serves, which you will select in the application (currently "Main", "Earth-Sun", and "Announcements Only" list serves). (To be removed from one of these list serves, please e-mail Anita.M.Sohus@jpl.nasa.gov or Carla.J.Johns@jpl.nasa.gov.)

In addition, you will have access to the internal, password-protected Museum Alliance website.

How can I share the adventures of space exploration with our visitors?
Through NASA TV, the web, and your knowledge. Our job is to deliver NASA content to you quickly: the data, access to people, and stuff. Then you can utilize the info to do what your own organization does best. For example, many museum educators are using the images and video in their daily live programming and classes. Many museums hold live events for significant events such as mission launches or landing on Mars. We hope that Alliance partners will network with each other and share products and tools that they develop.

Are there any other requirements for membership in the Museum Alliance?
We request your reports on how you use NASA images, content and other information. The simple on-line report form ("Event Submission") on the internal Museum Alliance website asks

you for basic information about your activities, including approximate audience numbers. It is important for us to have this data in order to respond to inquiries from NASA Headquarters and other entities such as the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).

What types of activities should I report?
We want to share how you use NASA content, whether or not it came directly from the Museum Alliance. That includes images, videos, stories, and educational resources in your galleries, exhibits, and multimedia shows, as well as student activities, teacher professional development, public programming, and special events. However, please do not report your fund-raising events (e.g., your annual gala). And you should not double report if you already report to another NASA program.

Is there any penalty if I don't report?
We request information on your NASA-related events, so we can demonstrate the effective use of public funds to NASA Headquarters through providing the infrastructure and data. Without your help in this reporting, our partnership will not be able to show the benefits.

So what's in it [the reporting] for us?
The public Museum Alliance website https://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/ is currently set up to advertise your museum events and activities. Visitors can see what is going on by location or by chronology, enabling them to plan to visit your facility. Conversely, we can show our NASA sponsors that you—our customers—are using the services and materials we provide. To advertise your event, login to the internal Museum Alliance website and select the "Event Submission form" under the "Advertise!" link in the left navigation bar.

What if my event is local and I can't accommodate more than my invited audience (for example local teachers)?
We'd still like you to tell us about it by filling out the "Event Submission" and "Report Impact" forms, but we won't post it on the public websites.

Will my venue appear on the Museum Alliance map?
Yes, twice! When your registration is approved, your organization will be added to the map of Museum Alliance partners (https://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/Connect). When you submit an activity, the location of the event will be added to the map of Museum Alliance partners' activities (https://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/Visit).

How does this all work?
We are a community of practice. Partners communicate regularly through list serves and regularly scheduled professional development conversations (teleconferences). The conversations give you the opportunity to speak directly with NASA experts and ask questions about NASA processes, mission events, etc. When there is breaking news to share, we try to set up "breaking news" telecons to allow you to talk directly with mission personnel and get the information you need to share current events with your audiences, unfiltered by the news media.

The list serves and the telecons allow Museum Alliance partners to network with each other and share information. The telecons are recorded; transcriptions and audio files are archived on the member website along with the presentation materials. We encourage you to use the presentation materials in your own work.

We continue to use telecons as the greatest common denominator among our participants. We have been told that many organizations have bandwidth issues or institutional firewalls that make webinars difficult or impossible. In addition, telecons remain the most flexible medium.

Professional development telecons are intended for your professional development as a Museum Alliance partner. They can help you prepare for upcoming events and presentations. They are NOT to be shared LIVE in classrooms, museums or other venues, including social media (tweeting, blogging, etc.) Please do NOT share the telecon call-in information (phone number, passcode, etc.).

What questions do you have? If we can't answer them, we'll find someone who can. Want to borrow, build or buy a spacecraft model? We can give you helpful information. Have a special request for speakers? Let us know and we'll try to accommodate you.

All in all, the Museum Alliance is meant to be the front door to NASA content that museums have long asked for.

What will be on NASA TV and what will be on the internet?
NASA TV is a primary source for event commentary, interviews, videos, and press conferences, especially at the time of major mission events. NASA TV is typically broadcast through satellite and cable as well as streamed on the internet. For information and schedules, bookmark: http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/nasatv/MM_NTV_Breaking.html#.UfFgPu3V-2Q

To subscribe to receive NASA press releases and other information directly, send a blank e-mail message to hqnews-request@newsletters.nasa.gov. In general, we do not repost news releases. We try to avoid cluttering your mailboxes!

The web is an inexpensive, efficient path to deliver images and information to classrooms, auditoriums, or kiosks. Images and video will be made freely available via NASA TV and over the internet.

Certain information may be available only on the internal website for use by the Museum Alliance partners and not the general public.

How do the teleconferences (telecons) work?
Our participants have indicated that low-tech options work best, so we deliver professional development using teleconferencing services that allow tens to hundreds of people to be on the line at the same time. We pay for a toll-free number (U.S. and Canada) for you to dial in. The service also provides us a participant list, audio file, and a transcript after the telecon.

The speaker's presentation materials are uploaded to the internal Museum Alliance website in advance of the telecon so partners (especially those with only one phone line or low bandwidth) can download the presentation before the scheduled telecon.

When you call in, you will be asked your name and affiliation. An operator will announce that the call will be recorded.
Note: Please mute your phone. If you do not have a mute button, press *6 to mute or *6 to unmute when you wish to speak. Also do not put your phone on hold as some systems play music, which is distracting to the speaker, participants and transcriber.

During the conversation, feel free to ask questions at any time. Please identify yourself and your organization when you speak —it helps the transcriber and also makes the call more personal and fun.

The telecons are announced via the Museum Alliance list serves and are posted on the Museum Alliance internal website. We try to adhere to a regular schedule, but mission events (too many or not enough!) may change the schedule.

Typically, we provide at least a week's notice of a telecon. The current scheduled times are as follows:

Hubble: First Thursdays of the month, 12:30 p.m. Pacific (3:30 p.m. Eastern)
Earth's Moon: Second Tuesdays, 12:00 p.m. Pacific (3:00 p.m. Eastern)
Earth Science: Second Thursdays, 1:00 p.m. Pacific (3:00 p.m. Eastern)
Mars: Third Tuesdays, 12:00 p.m. Pacific (3:00 p.m. Eastern)

Occasionally we may schedule a "Breaking News" telecon on very short notice. This was extremely popular in the early days of the Mars Exploration Rovers and Curiosity rover missions. The intent is to give you access to the news directly from mission personnel.

We also ask for your feedback; for example, in what format would you like images or visualizations (what can you use, or what can't you use?). Would you use a particular product? If so, how, and when would you need it?

Will I get presentation materials?
Yes, most of the Museum Alliance speakers release their PowerPoint™ slides for your use, trusting that you will use them appropriately in your own presentations once you have participated in the telecons or read the transcripts.

Are there any restrictions on how I can use NASA images?
Once images are released to the public, you may show them to audiences, put them on websites, or print them. Each image will include a credit line, which we ask that you retain.

If you wish to make a commercial product using an image from a JPL-managed mission, please refer to JPL's image use policy at http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/images/policy/ and be aware that you may need to sign a license agreement with the California Institute of Technology (which manages JPL for NASA). If you wish to make a commercial product using other NASA products, contact Debbie Rivera (drivera@nasa.gov) at NASA Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Are there any restrictions on using images or information labeled as "embargoed"?
Yes! You may not use the images or information for public distribution until the date and time indicated on the Museum Alliance internal website. You may ready them for use, however, as long as you do not display them before NASA releases them to the public.

Is there any penalty for ignoring the embargo?
Yes! Your institution will lose access to the Museum Alliance, and such privileges for all other institutions may be jeopardized by the actions of a few. We appreciate your diligence on this issue and your help in building trust in our partnership.

Will we get videos?
Depending on their budgets, NASA missions are sometimes able to supply animations and visualizations on DVDs, including HD and MPEG files. Most videos are posted on NASA's homepage and services like YouTube, but higher-resolution versions may be available—just ask us and we will find out for you.

Will the near-real-time images from Mars, Saturn, etc., be full color?
Sometimes. The near-real-time images will be raw images, that is, unprocessed, so they will be in black and white. However, raw images from MAHLI and the Mastcam on the Curiosity rover are occasionally in color. Processed images, including color and stereo, will be made available through the press releases and mission websites.

How do we get color images?
As color images, mosaics, panoramas, anaglyphs, or animations are created from the raw images, they will be made available through press releases and mission websites.

Will planetariums get all-skies and full-dome images?
Depending on available resources, it's foreseeable that some all-skies and full-dome image products will be produced. We would very much like to provide these, so we will keep this on our radar screen. If you make such products and would like to share them freely with Museum Alliance partners, please send them to us and we will post them on the internal website.

How do we get non-image data?
Other data, such as spectra, will most likely be made public through press releases. Real techies may want to learn to use archives such as the Planetary Data System (PDS) or the NASA Space Science Data Center (NSSDC).

How will we get "stuff"?
The Museum Alliance list serves are the primary method for alerting you to opportunities and information. We also post presentations, audio files, and transcripts on the password-protected, internal Museum Alliance website, as well as large higher-resolution files that folks sometimes request.

Periodically we send DVDs, posters, and other materials to you through the U.S. mail. If materials are in short supply, only one person per organization will receive them and we ask that you share them with your colleagues.

We encourage you to visit http://www.nasa.gov/ frequently for the latest NASA news and information. In addition, NASA invites you to connect and collaborate through various social media outlets by visiting: http://www.nasa.gov/connect/index.html#.UfFsiu3V-2Q

Also, enroll in the NASA Education's Express E-mail service. Recipients will be notified of upcoming education events, including competitive solicitations and other calls for proposals, requests for information, and student opportunities. Visit the following URL to register for this service: http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/Express_Landing.html
For automatic notification of competitive opportunities for scientific and technical research, program management and administration, and other announcements, please register with NSPIRES at http://nspires.nasaprs.com/external/.

In Summary . . .

We are continuously improving and expanding the Museum Alliance to include other NASA content areas. We value you as a community of informal science educators who are dedicated to bringing current science and technology to your audiences. We look forward to continued feedback from you on focus areas that interest you most, and will seek to expand in those areas.

In addition to providing visual materials, we will continue to provide professional development opportunities for museum staff through regular interactions with NASA scientists and engineers. We would like to continue to advertise your NASA-related events and exhibits on our website, so people in your local areas as well as those vacationing have quick and easy access to event information.

And, we're always interested in hearing your ideas and receiving your feedback!