

Hosting a Public Asteroids Club Event

This document contains suggestions for hosting a larger public gathering of the Asteroids Club. Please improvise as you see fit and let us know what ideas worked best for you.



Goal:

Create an environment in which deference is given to fully hearing out the information that supports the threats (asteroids) being discussed. This is not a debate where equal time and identical process is afforded to both sides of an argument. The goal is primarily to fully understand the argument made by the presenters out of respect for our initial premise that this “side” is better able to assess the threat being advanced. It is more like an open viewing night at an observatory, where the participants invite others to look through a telescope at an object they might not have seen before, or have not seen with such fine resolution and clarity.

Basic format: Two asteroids will be advanced in a program with a total of one hour devoted to each asteroid. The asteroids will always be ones advanced by different political ideologies so that conservatives will advance one argument while liberals listen, after which liberals will advance an argument while conservatives listen.

Who is involved: The meeting is convened by two people with different politics but with an existing relationship. This relationship is critical to the ultimate success of the Asteroids Club event. The conveners work together with Asteroids Club leadership to plan the program and make it successful. The conveners may choose to each bring an expert in the topic area to participate in the discussion.

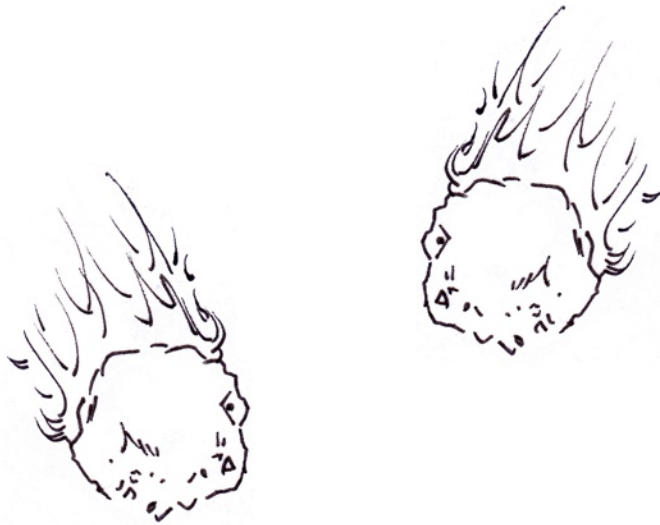
Preparation for evening: The two conveners are the primary participants and may choose to provide the basic facts that support their argument prior to the program. It is their job to make the argument a solid one, avoiding overly partisan memes too often used in our civic discourse and that will prevent recognition of their asteroid. Their cooperation with each other sets a model for other participants.

Food opens hearts. Open minds follow open hearts. Food can be a useful addition to your event, even if it’s as simple as dessert and coffee. Consider a “Take-out Tuesday” event where people bring their favorite take out and a drink and enjoy it during the program. Or you might want to invite 2 or 3 food trucks from your city to park outside the event for arriving Asteroid Club guests.

Format of the evening

Share mission statement: *“Any time two people with differing political identities mutually acknowledge that the other side may see some real threats more clearly than does one’s own side, the Asteroids Club has been convened.”*

Share an inspirational quote about civility or moral humility.



Reminder of rules of Conduct (you may wish to put these on a table tent card on each table or up on a projection screen):

• **This is not a debate.** People generally use reasoning and the process of a debate to find evidence to bolster their existing beliefs. Debates can often increase polarization.

• **No clapping** beyond acknowledging introductions, then appreciation for all involved at the end of each segment. We’ve found that as a discussion proceeds that often the audience breaks into teams and claps when they approve.

Team Clappers aren’t great listeners and their clapping is building rather than easing team division.

- **No demonization** of a person or a position.
- **No mind-reading.** Do not assume you understand someone else’s motivation or intent.



Procedural notes:

- Remember there are two civility bells in the audience, one in the hands of a conservative and one in the hands of a liberal. The introduction of the civility tends to be almost magic in its ability insure that participants self-edit their less civil impulses. It almost never has to be rung, only introduced.
- When there is a factual disagreement that can't be resolved inside 1 minute, we'll put the issue up on the blackboard (or computer screen) and save it for another day.
- In order to get in as many comments or questions, we'll limit questions to 45 seconds each.

Introduction of conveners who mutually acknowledge in front of the audience (who agree by proxy) that the other side may see some real threats more clearly than does one's own side. A reminder to each from the moderator that at the same time they're likely more aware of the asteroid, the other side is likely to see their blind spots much more clearly.

Conveners distribute list of facts they consider important, if they have them.

Reminder by moderator of the principle of reciprocity – each convener's ability to be well understood rests on his demonstrated effort to understand his partner's asteroid. Each convener asks the audience if they're with him or her in that commitment (with a spirit of enthusiasm, you're with me right?!))

Reminder that the goal is of the evening is to acknowledge each asteroid. Reminder that for the purposes of the evening we consider them on the same team.

Convener #1 introduces his expert (Convener #2 steps off stage)

Part 1, Initial argument, made however the Convener #1 wishes - 20 minutes

Part 2, Moderator, Convener #2 discuss asteroid with Convener #1 (and expert as applicable) – 8 minutes

Part 3, Q & A with audience: Focus on elaboration of argument and moderator questions - 10 minutes (factual disagreement that can't be addressed goes up on board)

Part 4, Audience breaks into those who saw the asteroid pre-meeting and those who did not necessarily. *Listening group*: Led by Convener #2, Vote as to who sees the asteroid, suggest modifications that would garner larger percent agreement in the group. *Asteroid proposing group*: Led by Convener #1, discuss any deeper/broader understanding of the asteroid and awareness of how those who don't see the asteroid see it – 15 minutes

Part 5, Closing statement by Convener #1 presenting the asteroid and by Convener #2 receiving it; note particularly strong parts of the other person's argument, advance possible future actions – 7 minutes

[7th inning stretch](#) - stand in place, possibly even sing “take me out to the ball game” for a little All-American bonding.

[Same process is repeated with Asteroid #2 and Convener #2.](#)

[Closing framing by moderator:](#)

The Asteroids Club doesn't look for a binary outcome but instead a better appreciation for dimensions of the asteroid and – generally – of the nuances of the problem. We hope you leave today with your view of people who believe these two asteroids are critical – and of the asteroids themselves – transformed in some minor or major way. And it is our hope that you'll bring that telescope with you as you leave tonight and use it in your daily life.