

Hill Country Night Sky Month Event and Activity Suggestions

This document is meant to help you generate ideas for possible events, contests, and activities to host as part of Hill Country Night Sky Month. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact info@hillcountryalliance.org.

Before jumping into the list of suggestions, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Who do you want to engage?** Is there a certain age group, or a certain geographic area, or a certain sector (general public, business owners, government officials, etc.)?
- **Who can you partner with?** Are there any local institutions or organizations that already are or could become champions for the night sky? Some examples of valuable local partners might include schools, electric utilities, local parks, the chamber of commerce, a prominent local business, the local government, the Lions or Rotary Clubs, local Keep Texas Beautiful groups, etc.
- **How will you promote it?** We will help promote it through the NightSkyMonth.org website, our HCA newsletter, and social media: #NightSkyMonth. What are other good ways for you to promote the event in your area? Check out our promotional toolkit, including our sample press release, for more on this.
- **COVID safety.** Unfortunately, we all have to keep COVID safety in mind this year. If you are considering an in-person event, please ensure that social distancing will be possible and make sure to check-in with your local government for additional guidelines or rules.
- **Contests** of many kinds – poetry contests, art contests, photography contests, songwriting contests, and so on—with a night sky theme are good options to get the community involved in a COVID-safe way. People can enter their submissions over the internet. It might be practical to have an in-person event for folks to share their submissions with the community, or that can take place over the internet as well.
- **We are here to help** – please let us know if you would like to discuss any of these ideas or your own ideas and we will be happy to assist! Email info@hillcountryalliance.org

EVENT IDEAS

Virtual Star Party

Plan an Instagram or Facebook live tour of our night sky with an astronomer. HCA can help you identify and connect with the experts needed to offer a virtual star party to your community.

Stellar Stories and/or Songs

Broadcast campfire stories and stories about the myths represented in the stars, sing campfire songs and night-sky themed songs. This can be live or pre-recorded, so that people can listen while looking up at the night sky from their homes. You can also invite the community to submit the stories they love. You can do this on Facebook, Youtube or Instagram live or post pre-recorded. (This can also be combined with a story or song contest.)

Invite an Author

Invite an author to read their book or an excerpt of their story and share it with your audience live or pre-recorded. There are a number of books on light pollution and the night sky written for adults and children. Contact us at info@hillcountryalliance.org for a list of potential authors.

Art Night

Show night-sky-themed art and have artists or others talk about what the pieces mean to them. (This can also be combined with an art class or contest.)

Astrophotography Class

We have lots of excellent astrophotographers in our region, and many more people who would love to learn this rewarding craft. Work with a skilled astrophotographer to create a class online – folks can tune in and improve their skills from their back yards.

Story Time for Kids

Invite kids and families to listen to a bedtime story about the night sky using Facebook live or other online platforms. Suggested books: [“Cassandra and the Night Sky” by the Hill Country’s own Amy Jackson](#), [“There Once was a Sky Full of Stars” by Bob Crelin](#), [“Good Night Sky: A Children’s Bedtime Story” by E.M. Makins](#).

Expert Interview or Panel Discussion:

HCA can help you identify and connect with the experts needed to create an educational talk or panel for your event. Subjects could include astronomy, the impacts of light pollution on nocturnal wildlife in Texas, the value of astrotourism to our communities, or the 2024 solar eclipse coming to our region.

Make a Night Skies Presentation to City Council or Other Community Leaders

We can help you arrange to give a presentation on night skies preservation and its many benefits to your community's city council, school board, commissioners court, chamber of commerce, civic clubs, religious groups, or students. If you don't feel qualified to give such a presentation, we can connect you to someone qualified, as well.

*For all of these events and contests, please use **#NightSkyMonth** on social media so the Hill Country sees it!*

CONTEST IDEAS

There are a few things you need to have in place to run a successful contest, including judges, evaluation criteria, and prizes (even if they are tokens or gags). The Hill Country Alliance and the Blanco County Friends of the Night Sky both have experience running contests and we are happy to help if you need any assistance!

Night Sky Essay Contest

Invite your community (select an age group, or open it to multiple age groups) to share their thoughts and feelings about the night sky or night sky preservation, in prose. Submissions or excerpts can be printed in the local paper, added to your group's website or social media, or recited during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Story Contest

Invite your community (select an age group, or open it to multiple age groups) to share original stories about the night skies, or the night in general. Submissions or excerpts can be printed in the local paper, added to your group's website or social media, or recited during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Art Contest

Invite your community (select an age group, or open it to multiple age groups) to share their night-sky themed art. All submissions or just winners can be printed in the local paper, added to your group's website or social media, projected onto a wall downtown, or displayed and discussed during a Night Sky Month event.

Night Sky Photography Contest

Invite your community (select an age group, or open it to multiple age groups) to share their night time photography as well as photography of dark sky friendly lighting in your community. Submissions can be printed in the local paper, added to your group's website or social media, projected onto a wall downtown, or displayed and discussed during a Night Sky Month event.

Submissions from the contests listed above can be compiled into a magazine or small book that can be sold or given away in the community. There are online services that can help with layout and printing. The Hill Country Alliance can point you in the right direction if this is of interest.

Night Sky Video Contest

Invite your community to share short videos about the night sky to promote night sky friendly lighting and night sky preservation in your community. Submissions can be shared on the web.

Halloween Costume Contest

Invite your community to dress up to celebrate the night sky for Halloween. Adorn yourself as an astronaut, engineer, space traveler, Dr. Who, an alien or anything that makes you want to marvel at the wonders of the universe above our heads. Share photographs and submit photos of your community wearing their costumes through social media to celebrate Hill Country Night Sky Month.

Better Lighting Contest

Invite your local community to improve their outdoor lighting, and make it fun! Invite folks to share their commitment to preserving night skies by posting before and after photos through social media.

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ACTIVITY IDEAS

Community Science - Globe at Night

Invite your community to participate in the monthly [Globe at Night community science campaign](#) from October 8th to the 17th. Set a goal for the number of observations collected in your community. You can take this one step further and join the Globe at Night Adopt a Street Program.

Share the Stars with Kids

Check out the [Dark Sky Rangers](#) program, the [Family Sky Heroes activity](#) and other activities for all ages from the [Astronomy Society of the Pacific](#). Learn how to find constellations using [Uncle Al's Skywheels](#) or [Skymaps.com](#).

Lighting Retrofit

Night Sky Month is a great time for lighting retrofit projects in your community. They can be at high-profile locations, like the County Courthouse, a school, a ballfield, or the supermarket, or they can be more low key, at people homes around town. In any case, we can help you get the word out and educate the community on how to do it and *why*. Some bigger retrofit projects,

sports lighting, for example, can take months of planning and consideration; Hill Country Night Sky Month is a great time to kick-off those discussions. You might even be able to engage a local hardware store as a partner for discounted or donated light fixtures, if any are needed. Contact us at info@hillcountryalliance.org for assistance.

Conduct a Lighting Survey

Conduct a lighting survey at your local school or library or downtown. Use this as a way to cheer on the usage of [proper night sky lighting](#) or to promote improvements to your community's existing lighting. Email us at info@hillcountryalliance.org for assistance.

Make Your Neighborhood a “Night Sky Friendly Neighborhood”

If there is a Home Owners Association where you live, your neighborhood can be designated as Night Sky Friendly by [adopting this simple language](#) into your HOA agreements. [Visit our webpage](#) for more information about this program and/or contact us at info@hillcountryalliance.org for more information and assistance.

Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program

Encourage local business to become Night Sky Friendly through HCA's Night Sky Friendly Business recognition program. [Visit our webpage](#) for more information about this program.

Become a member of your local Friends of the Night Sky group

The Texas Hill Country is home to a growing number of [Friends of the Night Sky groups](#) throughout the region. They would love for you to be involved! If your county does not have a group yet and you would like help starting one, please let us know at info@hillcountryalliance.org.

Become a Hill Country Night Sky Steward

[Join a growing list of Hill Country neighbors](#) who have pledged to preserve the night sky through the use of night sky friendly lighting at their homes and businesses.

Become a member of the Texas Chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association

The International Dark-Sky Association began its mission to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting in 1988. [Join the Texas Chapter of the IDA](#) and support their efforts, connect with other dark sky advocates from around our region, share resources and become a member of the worldwide movement.

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