

Step-by-step: space evening

Great for: Everyone **Fun factor:** ★★★★★ **Effort:** ★★★★★ **£ potential:** ★★★★★

Want an event that's truly out of this world? A space evening makes a great event for the whole family, and it's reassuringly educational too. Add in a stargazing element, and it's a way to get outside in the darker months.

Step-by-step

1. **Three months before:** Agree on a date with the school. As it will be an after-school event, ensure a keyholder will be on site. Book the facilities and people who will make up your event. If it's a planetarium, make sure you have room for it, or call in some experts to speak about space. Source any equipment you may need, such as telescopes.
2. **Two months before:** Plan the activities you're going to have at your event - seek inspiration from Pinterest. If they involve recycled materials, set up collection points and appeal to parents to donate their recycling.
3. **One month before:** Publicise the event on posters, noticeboards and newsletters. Sell tickets via your usual channels. If you have hired a planetarium, allocate visitors time slots to experience it. Appeal for volunteers: you'll need a few volunteers to check tickets on arrival, help set up and clear away, and to organise activities for the children. If you're providing food and refreshments, a few volunteers will be needed to serve them.
4. **Two weeks before:** Prepare an information sheet for the participants. You might want to include a map of the school showing where activities are located and including timings of talks and demonstrations.
5. **One week before:** Run your final appeal for volunteers and ensure there are enough people for each job.
6. **On the day:** Supervise erection of the planetarium. Set up any activities and resources.
7. **After the event:** Hold a post-event debrief to discuss what worked well and what needs tweaking for next time. Thank your volunteers and ask for feedback. Tell your community how much was raised and how it will be spent.

Tips & advice

Date: To stargaze, it needs to be dark early enough for children to attend, which makes it an ideal event for October to mid-March - your event can only last from sunset until bedtime. If you'd rather hold it at a different time of year or earlier in the day, you could focus the event around the planetarium and space-themed activities and remove the stargazing element.

Speaker: Most importantly you'll need an expert. If you don't have a suitable volunteer, then

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contact the Federation of Astronomical Societies, who have details of groups across the UK. Work with your expert to understand what equipment is required and who will provide it. Check your PTA insurance summary to see what is covered. Where other organisations (paid or otherwise) are bringing equipment, they must have their own insurance cover in place. Ask them to provide a copy of this prior to the event.

Activities: Supplementary activities will give visitors more to do, especially little ones who won't want to stare at the sky in the cold for too long. It's also a good back up in case it's too cloudy to do any stargazing. Activities may include experiments, craft or junk modelling activities, demonstrations, space quizzes, or even a space-themed treasure hunt in the dark.

Attendees: When you send out letters promoting the event, provide a list of items for guests to bring, such as torches and folding chairs. Make it clear that anyone bringing their own telescopes or binoculars does so at their own risk. Have some red cellophane on hand to stick over torches, minimising light pollution. Make it clear to parents that they're responsible for their children and that they shouldn't be left unsupervised. Make it clear what will be on sale at the event so that people know whether to bring their own refreshments or enough cash to buy what you have on offer.

Refreshments: Decide what refreshments to offer: hot chocolate will be especially welcome on a cold evening. If you want to sell mulled wine, remember that a TEN licence will be required. Are you providing food? Keep it simple with hotdogs, or continue your astronomical theme with star-shaped biscuits.

Boost profits: Raffles and prize draws are a good way to make extra money.