



Beyond the International Year of Astronomy 2009: An Invitation to Partner with Canadian Astronomers to Excite Underserved Youth About Science

Throughout Canada, thousands of astronomical activities organized in 2009 by volunteers from diverse organisations enabled almost two million Canadians to celebrate the International Year of Astronomy (IYA). IYA was a global education and public outreach effort by 148 nations with the approval of the United Nations General Assembly and the support of UNESCO organized globally by the International Astronomical Union. As we neared the end of 2009, we reflected on its successes while building on the momentum of this wonderful year to continue offering engaging programs to the public and to bring astronomy to new and important audiences.



IYA was a success thanks to the hard work of thousands of volunteers. It is through them that so many people looked up at the night sky to be amazed by the beauty and vastness of the Universe, or had their imaginations stimulated by the links to music, art or other activities to



astronomy. Through the partnership of the Canadian Astronomical Society (CASCA), the Fédération des astronomes amateurs du Québec (FAAQ) and the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), the astronomical community partnered like never before to coordinate activities and develop interesting programs with diverse organizations throughout Canada, such as the Canadian Space Agency, the National Research Council of Canada,

Canadian planetaria and science centres, science teachers' associations, libraries, parks, Let's Talk Science, etc. The resources, human and material, of our partnership are committed to having an impact long after 2009 -- "Beyond IYA".

Thanks to a grant from the NSERC PromoScience program, our partnership has hired a part-time education and outreach coordinator with the mandate to bring astronomy to youth, especially from underserved communities who don't usually get much access to science and technology programs. We would like to offer these young people the opportunity to develop an interest in S&T, and to consider careers which involve them.



While many groups could be considered "underserved", our energies will focus on youth in:

- remote or rural communities ,
- inner cities, and
- Aboriginal communities.

Some astronomical activities are already being organised within those communities, but from our extensive IYA experiences we know much more could be done and would be welcome. Our plan is to concentrate our efforts in the next few years on:

- **Parks:** The many IYA activities in local, provincial and national parks have been great successes and provide a strong foundation upon which to offer more activities in remote and rural areas where darker skies prevail.
- **Schools:** Even though astronomy is part of the pan-Canadian school curriculum, not all teachers feel very comfortable with the subject. Helping teachers and schools with our new products and approaches will introduce more kids, including from underserved communities, to science and technology through astronomy.
- **Libraries:** Libraries are everywhere, including in underserved communities (inner cities, remote areas...). It would be appropriate and useful to continue and expand a partnership with them and offer our knowledge and expertise in order to organise more astronomical programs in these communities. This is already underway in the Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria and other areas.



With abundant IYA experiences and resources in hand, the Canadian astronomical community has a lot to offer. But to achieve our goals, we want to continue—and to increase—our collaborations with programs and organisations already experienced in offering activities for underserved communities. Through such partnerships our organizations can help each other – and others -- to ensure the maximum impact of limited resources. Working together we can identify the needs and connect them with existing resources, in an effective and lasting way. We are looking for ideas, experiences, and partnerships that offer effective, high-impact, wide-reaching methods of reaching underserved communities. Anyone interested in collaborating in this exciting adventure should contact the education and outreach coordinator, Julie Bolduc-Duval (jbolducduval@cegepth.qc.ca) [after 2010] or John Percy (john.percy@utoronto.ca)

Web sites: CASCA: www.casca.ca, FAAQ: www.faaq.org, RASC: www.rasc.ca,
IYA Canada: www.astronomy2009.ca