

SOFIA Outreach and Workshops

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Topics in this presentation

Transition from the SOFIA Community Task Force (SCTF) to the SOFIA Users Group (SUG) and the Science Outreach Group (SOG).

SOFIA presence and participation in the American Astronomical Society (AAS) Meetings.

Ideas for SOFIA Workshops, and plans for one in mid-year 2014.

SCTF transition to SUG and SOG

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The SOFIA Community Task Force (SCTF) had been in existence for several years prior to the start of science operations by the observatory. It consisted of members of the SOFIA staff and several astronomers not part of the project. It was led by Bob Gehrz. SOFIA became operational, and the SOFIA Users Group (SUG) was formed in early 2012, with Bob Gehrz as the chair. By that time, and since then, the science staff at SOFIA increased in numbers. Consequently, there was a natural evolution in the way the SCTF operated. The teleconferences, which were the main regularly scheduled activity of the SCTF became dominated by Science Mission Operations (SMO) members, with very little external participation.

The transition away from the SCTF to the Science Operations Group (SOG), which will be described below, was intentionally done in a gradual fashion. This was done to keep the continuity in operations as well as to implicitly recognize the importance of science outreach for the project that had been led by the SCTF. We anticipate that there will be valuable interaction between the SOG and the SUG.

The SCTF was dissolved, and the SOG created in the middle of September, 2013. The SOG consists of SOFIA staff scientists (USRA and NASA, and local DSI), members from the program management, and from SOFIA Public Outreach. The SOG managed to meet just once before the government shutdown, and has met once since work restarted. The specific tasks that the SOG will undertake include two that were done by the SCTF - keeping track of meetings of interest to SOFIA, and organizing talks about SOFIA at Universities and other institutions. The details of how we will proceed are under discussion, and it is to be noted that the specifics of what can be accomplished are influenced by the Research and Outreach travel budget available to the SMO.

As part of the transition we have preserved the tele-talks, which are being organized by Dan Lester (University of Texas, Austin) with help from R. Sankrit (SOFIA/USRA). These will continue as the SOFIA Community Tele-talks, retaining both the concept and the actual people who form the SOFIA Community. Advertising these talks, and growing the community is one of our goals.

SOFIA at the AAS Meetings

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The American Astronomical Society (AAS) meetings are the most important general meetings for the US astronomical community. They provide an excellent opportunity for the SOFIA project to interact with users of the observatory as well as potential users. It is also a venue where SOFIA needs to showcase itself.

The baseline plan is to have a SOFIA booth at all AAS meetings, winter and summer, and additionally to hold a SOFIA Splinter Session at the winter meetings. It is to be emphasized that these are the baseline plans, and the possibility for an enhanced presence and expanded agenda will be discussed while planning for any particular AAS meeting. For instance, when appropriate, we may propose for a Special Session oriented towards SOFIA Science, hold a workshop, or request a Town Hall or invited talk.

We expect that there will be at least one or two staff scientists supporting the SOFIA booth, available to answer questions about proposals, observing, and other technical issues. We plan to have dedicated laptops connected to the internet that will allow us to demonstrate the web-tools and the Data Cycle System (DCS) including the Science Archive.

SOFIA Workshops

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Three general orientations are possible for the contents of SOFIA Workshops - (i) proposals and observing, which targets new users, (ii) data analysis, which at the current time focuses on those who already have SOFIA observations, but which eventually will include archive users, and (iii) scientific results. In the case the third was dominant, we would organize a conference rather than a workshop, and that would be of interest to a wider group of astronomers than just those interested in using SOFIA.

There are discussions underway within the SMO to organize a workshop sometime in the middle of 2014, most probably before the summer AAS meeting, that will focus on the first two aspects, but will include some time for the third. A strawman outline would be a 2.5 day event, with one day each for (i) proposals and observing and (ii) data analysis, and half a day of science talks, plus the opportunity to present posters.

Another opportunity for workshops was alluded to earlier, in the discussion about AAS meetings. It is conceivable that we could hold a mini-workshop during the AAS as has been done by other observatories. The scope of such a workshop and timing are yet to be discussed.