What is the Museum Alliance?
Last Updated 2/11/2008

1. What is the Museum Alliance?
The Museum Alliance is a community of practice comprising informal science educators at museums, science centers, planetariums, observatories, zoos, aquariums, and nature centers who wish to share NASA information with their visitors. It is intended to bring Current NASA Science and Technology to museum visitors through professional development of the museums' staff and provision of materials such as visualizations, access to NASA experts, educational materials, etc. It is a free service; the only requirements are that you be staff at one of the above types of institutions, that you respect any embargoes on pre-released news items, and that you periodically report to us how you use the information we provide.

The Alliance began in 2002 as a partnership [the Mars Museum Visualization Alliance, or Mars Viz] between NASA's robotic Mars Exploration Program and museums, science centers, and planetaria across the country to bring the adventure of exploring Mars to students, educators, and the public. Due to the success of Mars Viz, the model is being expanded to include other NASA content areas encompassing space science, Earth science, space exploration, microgravity and aeronautics.

We have a current emphasis on sharing NASA activities related to International Polar Year, so we are reaching out to zoos and aquariums during this time to see if this model works for them as well as it does for the science centers and planetariums.

2. Who is eligible to participate in the Museum Alliance?
The Museum Alliance is intended for staff at organizations that
- Are a legally organized public or private non-profit institution or part of a non-profit organization or government entity
- Are essentially educational in nature
- Use and interpret objects, images, and/or a site for the public presentation of regularly scheduled programs and exhibits
- Carry out the above functions primarily at a physical facility/site
- Have at least one paid or unpaid professional staff with museum knowledge and experience.

The American Association of Museums' Code of Ethics states:
"American museums are infinitely diverse . . . their common denominator is making a 'unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world'." The Code also acknowledges the variety of sizes and types of museums: "Their numbers include both governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos." To this we add NASA Visitor Centers and observatory visitor centers, as well as parks visitor centers.

3. How will people be able to share the adventures of space exploration?

Through NASA TV, the internet, and you. Our job is to deliver NASA content to you quickly: the data, access to people, and stuff. Each of you then uses that info to do what your own organization does best. For example, many museum educators are using the images and video in their daily live programming and classes. Many museums hold live events for significant events such as landing on Mars or shuttle missions. Planetarium directors and others realize they are learning geology through a real case study (Mars exploration) rather than linearly through a geology course. Alliance partners network with each other and share products and tools that they develop.

4. How does this all work?

The Museum Alliance is a community of practice. Partners communicate regularly through listservs and regular telecons. The telecons allow you to ask questions directly about NASA processes, mission events, etc. When there is breaking news, we try to set up "breaking news" telecons to allow you to interview mission personnel directly. The listservs and the telecons allow Alliance partners to network with each other and share information. The telecons are recorded; transcriptions and audio files (.mp3) are posted on the private website.

If you have questions we can't answer, we'll try to find someone who can. If you want to borrow, build or buy a spacecraft model, we can give you helpful information. If you have special requests for speakers for live presentations, etc., we will try to accommodate you. The Museum Alliance is meant to be the front-door to NASA that museums have long asked for.

5. What will be on NASA TV and what will be on the internet?

NASA TV will remain the primary best source for event commentary, interviews, videos, and press conferences, especially at the time of major mission events, for example. For information and schedules, bookmark http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/nasatv/MM_NTV_Breaking.html. To subscribe to receive NASA press releases and other information, send a blank e-mail message to hqnews-subscribe@mediaservices.nasa.gov.

The internet is a cheap, efficient path to deliver images and information to classrooms, auditoriums, or kiosks. The images will be made freely available via NASA TV and over the Internet. You also may elect to register to have images from the Mars rovers and Cassini delivered to you over the internet on a free subscription basis (see Tech Talk below, items 27-29, expanded service).

Certain information may be available only on the password-protected private website for use by the Museum Alliance partners and not the general public.

6. How do the telecons work?

Our customers have indicated that low tech works the best for the most people, so we deliver professional development using teleconferencing services that allow tens to hundreds of people to be on the line at the same time (although our high has been about 100). We pay for a toll-free number (U.S. and Canada), a participant list, an audio file, and a transcript. The speaker's presentation materials are uploaded to the Museum Alliance website so that participants (especially those with only one phone line or low bandwidth) can download the presentation before the scheduled telecon. When you call in, you will be asked your name and affiliation. An operator will announce that the call will be recorded. During the conversation, feel free to ask questions at any time. If you are not in a quiet place, please mute your phone. If you do not have a mute button, press *6 to mute and *6 to unmute when you wish to speak. Try not to be on a cell phone as those usually create noisy lines. Please identify yourself and your organization when you speak the first time—it helps the transcriber and also makes the call more personal and fun.

The telecons are announced via the Museum Alliance listservs and are posted on the Museum Alliance website. We try to stick to a regular schedule, but mission events (too many or not enough!) may change that. We try to give you at least a week's notice of a telecon. The current reserved times are:

First Thursdays, 12:30 Pacific (3:30 Eastern): Hubble
Second and Fourth Thursdays, noon Pacific (3 Eastern): Earth science
Third Tuesdays, noon Pacific (3 Eastern): Mars
Last Thursdays, 11 a.m. Pacific: Cassini

Occasionally we may schedule a "Breaking News" telecon on very short notice. This was extremely popular in the early days of the Mars Exploration Rover missions. The intent is to give you access to the news unfiltered by the media, direct from the mission personnel.

We also ask your feedback on our plans; for example, in what format would you like images or visualizations (what can you use, or what can't you use?). Would you use a particular product? If so, how, and when would you need it?

7. Why must Alliance Partners register?
When Mars Pathfinder and the Sojourner Rover landed on Mars in 1997, the internet traffic was the largest for any single event up to that time. We expected the internet traffic for the landings and operation of the twin Mars Exploration Rovers to be much larger than that—and it has been. A primary goal of the Museum Alliance is to be sure that museums have unimpeded access to the images from the spacecraft, so that they may share them with their audiences. To this end, we set up dedicated servers that only registered users may access, to keep the traffic on these servers manageable. Registered users have access to technical support, e-mail notifications of upcoming mission and press events, DVDs, professional development opportunities, and the opportunity to advertise their organization's NASA-related events on public NASA websites.

8. How do we register?
Fill out the signup form at http://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/alliance/. You will need to select a Login Name and Password, as well as a Challenge Question and Answer. We will also register the IP address of your computer, to allow access to certain parts of the Museum Alliance website that are behind firewalls.

9. What happens after I submit the application form?
You will not get an immediate reply when you hit "submit" but you will hear from us within a day or two. Your application will be scanned to be sure your organization fits the customer profile (i.e., staff at museum, science center, planetarium, zoo, aquarium, observatory visitor center, nature center). A member of our tech support staff will register your IP address and send you confirmation and the URL of the private website. You will also be added to the Museum Alliance listservs that you select (currently Solar System Exploration and Earth-Sun). To be removed from one of these listservs, please e-mail Anita.M.Sohus@jpl.nasa.gov .

10. Are there any restrictions on how we can use NASA images?
Once they are released to the public, you may show them to audiences, put them on websites, or print them. Each will include a credit line, which we ask that you retain. If you wish to make a commercial product using an image from a JPL-managed mission, please refer to JPL's image use policy at
http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/images/policy/ and be aware that you may need to sign a license agreement with Caltech. If you wish to make a commercial product using other NASA products, contact Debbie Rivera at NASA Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

11. Are there any restrictions on using images or information labeled as "embargoed"?
Yes. You may not use the images or information for public distribution until the date and time indicated on the Museum Alliance website. You may ready them for use, however, as long as you do not display them before NASA releases them to the public.

12. Is there any penalty for ignoring the embargo?
Yes. Your institution will lose access to the Museum Alliance privileges, and such privileges for all other institutions may be jeopardized by the actions of a few. We appreciate your diligence on this issue and your help in building trust in our partnership.

13. Are there any other requirements for membership in the Museum Alliance?
We request that you report to us how you use the images and other information. The simple on-line report form ("Report Events") on the Museum Alliance website requests basic information about your events, including audience demographics.

14. Is there any penalty if we don't report?

Your organization may not be considered for other opportunities. The reason that we need this data is so that in providing the infrastructure and data, we can report to NASA Headquarters the effective use of public funds. Without your help in this reporting, our partnership will not be able to show the benefits. The reporting process begins at http://informal.jpl.nasa.gov/museum/Advertise/ .

15. Can we Advertise our NASA-related events on NASA websites?
Yes. The Mars, Cassini, Solar System Exploration, and STEREO websites are currently set up to advertise your museum events. These sites get millions of hits. Visitors can see what is going on by location or by chronology, enabling them to plan to visit your facility. Conversely, we can show our NASA sponsors that you—our customers—are using the services and materials that we provide. Just fill out the Advertise form on the Museum Alliance website.

16. What if my event is local and I can't accommodate more than my invited audience (for example local teachers)?
We'd still like you to tell us about it by filling out the Advertise and Report forms, but we won't post it on the public websites.

How will we get "stuff"?

The Museum Alliance listservs are primary ways to alert you to opportunities and information. We also post presentations, audio files, and transcripts on the password-protected Museum Alliance website, as well as large higher-res files that folks sometimes request. Periodically we send DVDs, posters, and other materials to you through the U.S. mail.

You may also like to subscribe to the NASA Express listserv for announcements related to NASA's Education Program:
http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/Express_Landing.html

17. Will we get presentation material?
Yes, most of the Museum Alliance speakers release their PowerPoint™ slides for your use, trusting that you will use them appropriately in your own presentations.

18. Will we get video?
The Mars Exploration Rover missions have been able to supply animations and visualizations on DVDs, including HD and MPEG2 files on DVDs to those who can use them. Other missions may do so depending on their budgets. Most videos are posted on the web these days; higher resolution versions may be available, just ask.

19. Will the near-real-time images from Mars, Saturn, etc., be full color?
No. The near-real-time images will be raw images, that is, unprocessed, so they will be in black and white. Processed images, including color and stereo, will be made available through the press releases and mission websites.

20. How do we get color images?
As color images, mosaics, panoramas, anaglyphs, or animations are created from the raw images, they will be made available through press releases and mission websites.

21. Will planetariums get all-skies and full-dome images?
Depending on time and resources, it is possible that some all-skies and full-dome image products will be produced. We would very much like to provide these, so we will keep this on our radar screen.

22. How do we get non-image data?
Other data, such as spectra, will most likely be made public through press releases.

Tech Talk

23. Why do you need my static IP address?
For security reasons, to assure access to certain data and to assure the Museum Alliance site is accessible only to the Museum Alliance partners (not the general public). Static IP addresses are a more secure method than passwords.

24. What is my IP address?
An IP address is an identifier for a computer on a network using the internet. The application form automatically reads and inserts your IP [internet protocol] address. If this is not the computer you will generally be accessing the site from, enter the IP address of the computer you will generally be using. An easy way to determine your IP address (if you don't know how to find it on your own computer) is to go to the computer you will be using to access the Museum Alliance website and point your browser to http://whatismyip.com. If you do not register an IP address with us, you will not have access to certain areas of the website. You may register the IP address of more than one computer (i.e., office and home) by sending an e-mail to Anita.M.Sohus@jpl.nasa.gov.

25. Why doesn't my IP address work when I try to access the Mars Museum Visualization Alliance site?
If your IP address falls within any of the three ranges below, please talk to your network administrator to obtain your "real" IP address as these ranges are normally used for local networks only.
   10.0.0.0 - 10.255.255.255
   172.16.0.0 - 172.31.255.255
   192.168.0.0 - 192.168.255.255

26. What if I don't have a static IP address?
Supply one IP address and send an e-mail to Anita.M.Sohus@jpl.nasa.gov stating that your organization uses rotating IP addresses; our technical folks will work with you on this.

27. Why are there "basic" and "expanded" options for participation?
We know that the resources of museums, science centers, and planetariums run the gamut from high to very low. Our hope is that even if you all you have is a telephone and a computer, you will benefit from the Museum Alliance team's efforts to help you take your audiences along on our explorations.

28. What is the difference between the Basic and Expanded options?
The "basic" option assures you access to the dedicated website, e-mail notifications of schedules and news, use of the listservs, professional development opportunities (mostly via regular telecons), DVDs, and the opportunity to advertise your organization's mission-related events on NASA's public web pages. The requirements for the "basic" option are to:

• Comply with NASA/JPL processes on release of news and images.
• Report audience numbers and demographics.

The "expanded" option assures you all of the above, plus: automatic internet delivery of images by some missions (primarily the robotic Mars missions). The requirements for the "expanded" option are to:

• Supply IP address of machine that will be used to access the dedicated website and receive the internet deliveries of images.
• Sign and return a License Agreement for use of free JPL-proprietary software, FEI Client (File Exchange Interface) (request this form from Anita.M.Sohus@jpl.nasa.gov).
• Install FEI Client on machine at your organization (works on Linux, PC, and Mac operating systems). (Due to the volume of data expected, you may want to dedicate a machine for this purpose, or save things off your hard disk regularly.)
• Comply with NASA/JPL processes on release of news and images.
• Report audience numbers demographics.

29. How do I get the FEI Client software?
When you sign up for "expanded service," you will be sent a license agreement for JPL's proprietary File Exchange Interface (FEI) Client software. When you return the signed license agreement to us, you will be contacted by one of our technical staff with instructions on where to download the software, and how to install it.

30. What platforms does FEI Client support?
FEI Client supports Unix, PC, and Mac OS X.

31. What other technical requirements are there?
If you subscribe to receive the near-real-time images, you will probably want to dedicate a computer to this effort, as the data volume could be as high as 100 GB.

Another way to handle the data volume is to regularly save the images off of your hard disk.

If you do NOT subscribe to receive the near-real-time images, there are no special computer requirements.

32. What file format will the images be in?
The images will be delivered as JPEG, TIFF, and SVG files.

33. How will we be able to display these images?
Anyway that works for you. We have modified a piece of slide-show shareware called "SVG Viewer," (Scaleable Vector Graphics), which is available for download from the Museum Alliance website. The images will display well on screens ranging from a laptop to plasma screens to theatre screens up to 20' (although 12' is probably the best). The graphics and text will remain crisp.

34. Will other NASA missions use this process to distribute images?
Each mission has its own data structure and processes. We hope that other missions will take advantage of what we've learned in this alliance in order to make their images available in near-real-time also. Your feedback will be very helpful in this area. The Mars Program will continue to use and improve this for future Mars missions (which launch every two years).

In Summary . . .

We plan on continuing and improving the Alliance, and expanding it to provide other NASA topics. We value you as a community of informal science educators who are dedicated to bringing current science and technology to museum audiences. We look forward to continued feedback from members on focus areas that interest you most, and will seek to expand in those areas.

In addition to providing visual materials, we also plan on continuing professional development opportunities for museum staff through regular interactions with NASA scientists and engineers. We would like to continue to advertise your NASA-related events and exhibits on our site so that people in your home areas have quick and easy access to event information.

And, we're always interested in hearing *your* ideas.