

AAS Solar Eclipse Task Force: Lessons Learned 2014-2024

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Lessons Learned from Plans and Preparations for the 2017-2024 Solar Eclipses
Splinter session June 11, 2024: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Kate Russo: Local Community Preparedness

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I would like to introduce Kate Russo. She is on the taskforce. She has come all the way from Australia to help us. And she's been helping people prepare for eclipses for even longer than I have. And so she has a lot to share in 7 minutes.

Okay. So can I just remind everyone that a total solar eclipse happens somewhere in the world once in every 18 or 18 months or so? So it's not just about the U.S. eclipses, but we have learned some pretty impressive lessons over the past decade because of the US.

So it is about building on the experiences that we've learned from before. And I started doing community Eclipse preparations from 2012. And so, of course, there's an Australian connection there. And so I was able to get the lessons learned from that eclipse. I became the eclipse coordinator for the remote Faroe Islands in 2015, and I was able to capture the lessons learned from there.

And it was the first time really, that there was a need for something to be able to have something tangible to pass on to the future eclipse planners. And so I did my first white paper around that time. But obviously the 27 eclipse sorry, 2017 eclipse was a really, really big opportunity to capture some pretty important lessons. So I went all out with my own research on this.

I did a needs analysis of community planners across the path. I was doing free consults with communities and I was interviewing people at different time points. After the eclipse, I actually went into communities and interviewed the coordinators, the mayors, people who were there. I gathered a lot of the easily accessible reports to be able to pull together really good, solid, evidence based strategies about how to proceed for the future eclipses, including the 2024 eclipse.

So I put together the white paper, but one of the key messages from that is who's in charge. Because this is the biggest barrier to people starting early. So we were able to really preempt that and help people along. And so it's now about the 24 eclipse that we just had and the lessons that we can learn from that, because there are huge lessons here.

But can I just get a show of hands? Who is an eclipse chaser? You know who you are. Just hands up. Okay. So for all those people, it's a I'm a psychologist. It's a

trigger warning. I'm going to show an image that's going to be very distressing for you. Obviously, the the path. There's a lot to say about this.

I can talk for 7 minutes, but I won't. But it didn't really play out how we were expecting to. There's a lot of lessons in this, and I think some of the important things are Texas. It's important that we capture some of the lessons here because Texas was meant to be the place where we had the best chance of clear skies.

A lot of the media programs were centered in Texas. A lot of the research projects. A lot of chasers were going there. And the way the clouds happened, people had to relocate across out of the state. And we had a mass exodus there. And so there were some really important lessons to learn. Michael is going to be doing a presentation shortly on the visitation.

Laurie will be talking about transport impacts. So I'm just going to focus now on some of the things about community planning. Some of the lessons that I think are really important that we capture now for future benefit. The first of these is how we decide on scope. So in my past whitepaper, I showed people how to do an eclipse strategy.

You know, you assemble your team, you develop your strategy, and you boldly go where No one's gone before. The scope is really important. And what we've learned from this eclipse, I think, is that people can go large. So, you know, those communities that actually went massive, they were big events that were appealing to 40,000 people. Big stadium events that were happening.

So that's what I mean by going large sometimes. Other groups came in and that was the impetus about why these communities were going large. And I have some questions about that. Is that actually good for the community? Is that helpful? Does it put them at risk if there are some events that happen like what we've just experienced in 2012?

Does that mean that they actually then are vulnerable? The other way to go is to go high profile. And by that I mean you can be a very small community. You're not planning really big, massive things, but your messaging is really high profile. And there are a lot of great examples on that, isn't there, about communities that put themselves out there.

So they're using the eclipse as a platform to really go for it. And then there are other places that go under the radar, and they don't really promote themselves in a big way, but they actually get a lot of benefit from it. And the thing is that communities don't volunteer to host an eclipse. It just happens. And there's some point they have to decide on that.

So really important lessons. And the only way we can get this is by looking at case studies. So we need to look at the pros and cons of each of those areas and the impact because then it would be really great for the communities in 44 and 45 to say, Hey, do you know if you go large? Just keep an eye on these sorts of factors and here's this is that the other area that I think is a bit problematic that we need to look at is consumer behaviors.

And I've put consumers rather than eclipse chaser behaviors because we need to move away from the fact that everyone coming into the path of totality is an eclipse

chaser. And we have to think about them as consumers because it has big impacts on accommodation. So we have major problems this year and actually previous years with, you know, the four night minimums at true hard core eclipse chasers just don't buy into that.

A lot of people then get really annoyed and frustrated. There's then assumptions that everything's quite booked and then you can't you know, there's no room available. So there's a lot we need to look at because the accommodation is the first thing that people do, you know, for future eclipses, first thing you do, you book accommodation. There's so much more to say about that.

But I, you know, just in terms of brevity, I'll I'll keep moving forward. But the consumer behavior is an area that I think we need to expand on. And again, we can get that through case studies. So what went well? In fact, there was so many things that went well for this eclipse. And it must be said that even though US eclipse chasers were a bit bummed out by the whole experience, if you were on the cloud, most most people who were there actually really enjoyed it.

So don't think that everybody is like an eclipse chaser and that it was desperate. It wasn't. And yesterday it was so great to hear from these communities across the path, doing great things. They had a great experience. And it's it's beyond visitation, though. It's not about numbers of people coming in, numbers of vehicles, not about dollars spent, the PR value.

Those things are really important. But actually, the biggest thing that has come from this eclipse is the importance of the building, of the relationships, the scaffolds, the networks. And if everything is aligning, if your community development is aligning with the way that you're planning the eclipse, that's the magic of success. That's how you do it. And so... and Deb will be talking a bit more about how that's the relationships have been formed.

But I think that's one of the most powerful things that have come from this eclipse, really. And Kat and Greg will be talking about, you know, the impact of STEM and other outreach activities on really reinforcing these networks. And the taskforce, I think, did a great job at being able to provide the networks, the structure, the, you know, the workshops that were happening, all the resources on the web recording, all these sessions, all that is fantastic because that helped the community leaders be able to then do that feeling very supported within their own communities.

There's so much to say about that. And Dennis will be talking a bit more about libraries and schools and really libraries of where the star of communities, what they and you know, many of us did library presentations and it was just great for that to hear how vibrant things became. So if there is a call to action, well, there is a call to action.

If you are a community eclipse coordinator, you're probably thinking you're winding down, everything's over. But there's a little bit of documentation that needs to be followed through. And this is really important for us to be able to capture the lessons. So here's what you need to do. You do that. You need to capture the impact. Those are the visitor numbers, you know, the direct, the direct spend, the PR value you need to do your after event reports.

You know, the ones that you would do at the end of the month or the end of the quarter. Use those two things to then write a case study and submit that to the IAC bulletin. So this is a really great initiative that the IRS has done and supported. So it's a special edition of the Celebrating the Wonder of Science in the Shadow.

Don't be put off. So I think a lot of communities have been put off by the fact that it says science, but actually it's capturing the lessons of how we prepared for the eclipse. So write that up and then once you write that up, do a media release and then point to that because that's your legacy any time in the future.

There's another eclipse. Journalists are always looking for communities who've had this experience. They will be able to find you. We will be able to find you to pull out the lessons learned. And of course, Gold Star case studies Deb doing things in Rochester. A lot of places do not have the resources like Rochester does, but Perryville is another one, which is a gold star.

And from a state level, Ohio really rocked in how they approach things. And if you're really not sure about how to write a case study to submit to the IRS, it's really simple, straightforward. Scanlon has made the process very friendly. And I wrote something for which captures what I wanted to do, was to write it as a model that other people can follow.

So I did this. You can have a look at it, and, you know, it's putting any information that you have there. And I use photos to tell the story. The narrative about it. I included videos as well. You can make it a short or as long as you want, but just publish something and put it in there. So I just want to say that it's been a real joy to be part of the task force actually for the past ten years or so.

And I feel a big loss because everyone's wanting things down until 2044. But of course Australia, we're picking things up. So my goal, I would love to have an international solar eclipse taskforce because I will be continuing doing these. I'll be continuing to capture these lessons for the future. And of course, in 2044 and 45, I will have more lessons from Australia that can then inform what you guys do that too.

So it's always about building and reflecting and building some more that don't have to reinvent the wheel. Thank you.