

Link to their form report: <https://form.jotform.com/233117382136148>

Prompts:

Please provide a summary of this year's activities (250 words)

Starry Skies North continues to serve as Minnesota's premier organization dedicated to protecting our planet from artificial light at night. But it's not just Minnesota—we continue to advocate in our surrounding states and provinces, too! We kicked off 2023 with the news that we were approved for 501(c)3 status, a process we began in 2022. Being a registered 501(c)3 organization has provided us access to many tools, resources and benefits that allow us to grow and pursue our mission (e.g. Google Workspace, PayPal and GitHub professional accounts).

We continued to grow in 2023 by launching a paid membership program and committee-based work. We hosted or participated in over 65 different events across the region, and we reached over 5,000 attendees. We launched our Dark Sky Friendly Business initiative, which will provide DarkSky lighting education and certification to businesses of all sizes across the region. The first business to receive this certification was Fitger's in Duluth, MN. We grew our partnerships with other organizations such as the regional and state parks systems and the Voyageurs Conservancy. Lastly, Starry Skies North is very proud to have received the 2023 Bob Gent Community Leadership award from DarkSky International! Looking forward to 2024, we are rising to meet the challenge of developing a robust organization that will grow and take concrete actions towards protecting the night sky for years to come.

How many dark sky outreach programs/events did you host in 2023?

24

How many dark sky outreach programs/events did you participate in (not host) in 2023?

41

How many volunteer hours do you estimate were spent on DarkSky International during 2023? (If chapter, please sum all hours from chapter participants. ex. Shirley 20, Mark 4 = 24)

1500

How many people total attended dark sky outreach programs/events you offered in 2023?

Please estimate.

6000

How many people were reached by your outreach efforts online? (Social media, newsletter lists, etc.) Please estimate.

2000

Were you featured in any media? If so, how many mentions?

Please list and link any media features here.

Open-ended prompts:

What would you like to see more of from DarkSky International in the future?

Individual contributions:

- More chapter to chapter support to understand how other chapters are operating so that we can learn more from each other.
- More direct action that we can pass along to our members.
- More support for chapter outreach and advocacy, including an update to DarkSky International's Model Lighting Ordinance
- Institutional Access to Command Media and Guidance Media from National and International standards organizations, such as IES, ANSI, and CIE.
- Establishment of collaboration & cooperation relationships between DarkSky International and advocacy organizations whose interests intersect with our own (Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, Audubon, many others), along with support for flow-down of those relationships to State, Regional, and Local offices, i.e. help chapters build partnerships that can amplify our outreach and advocacy efforts..
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Synthesized response for report submission:

We'd like to see:

- More support for chapter outreach and advocacy, including an update to DarkSky International's Model Lighting Ordinance. More chapter-to-chapter collaboration in order to pass along lessons learned on how to operate and prevent duplication of work.
- Institutional Access to Command Media and Guidance Media from National and International standards organizations, such as IES, ANSI, and CIE.
- Establishment of collaboration & cooperation relationships between DarkSky International and advocacy organizations whose interests intersect with our own (Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, Audubon, many others), along with support for flow-down of those relationships to State, Regional, and Local offices, i.e. help chapters build partnerships that can amplify our outreach and advocacy efforts..

What was your greatest challenge in 2023?

Individual contributions:

- Being spread too thin
- Our greatest challenge was getting and keeping more volunteers engaged. Like in 2022, the most work was done by a core group of members/volunteers. This group has certainly expanded, but it's still taxed. We lost some volunteers and engagement because we weren't able to follow through on initiatives (eg there were articles written for the newsletter, which never happened, and efforts on the SQM that didn't happen so folks didn't stay engaged).
- Recruiting and training volunteers.
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Synthesized response for report submission:

Our greatest challenge in 2023 was being spread too thin, partly due to challenges recruiting, training and retaining volunteers. This will be crucial for us to address in 2024 as we continue to grow and desire to do so without burning out our core group of volunteers. All of our valued volunteers, board members and contributors have fantastic ideas; our challenge is implementation in an inclusive manner to sustain our growth.

What are your top 3 goals for 2024?

Individual responses:

- Meet all financial reporting requirements including our first YE return as a 501(c)(3)
- Enable more cashless donations and purchases using the most common platforms (e.g. Venmo, PayPal, Apple Pay, etc) and make them easy to use via QR codes displayed at tables
- Experiment using the Zettle Reader at our tables (PayPal's option for reading credit cards, etc. - I received 3 readers 2 weeks ago).
- Provide and communicate more ways for direct action to reduce light pollution. We have a solid, core group of members and volunteers that don't need the 101 educational spiel anymore, or who we don't need to convince. They want specific, tangible ways to act in their communities!
- Grow initiatives and volunteer involvement in a sustainable and consensus-building way. So far there's been some 'running fast with scissors' which is great to get things off the ground, but it's not sustainable or inclusive. One person often takes on a lot of work and makes decisions for everybody, only because often people don't contribute to helping make the decisions. This isn't the singular fault of a leader, board member or volunteer, but a symptom of a collective lack of prioritization and standardization of operating procedures geared towards getting input and buy-in from the most amount of people.
- Get more urban night sky places near and around the Twin Cities metro certified!
- Write up the white paper on the SQM initiative to get it more stood-up. I believe this will give the folks who have expressed some interest (eg MAS with meters sitting on the shelf) more incentive to make progress and contribute.
- Increase our communications capabilities and online presence by recruiting social media and website volunteers (these are important for outreach and advocacy, but are also key enablers for recruitment).
- Grow the Mid-Continent Chapter Incubator by fostering the launch of a Wisconsin DarkSky International Chapter and grow Starry Skies North by opening another Minnesota chapter office
- Greatly expand our Advocacy capabilities by formally launching our Dark Sky Friendly Business Initiative and re-launching our Great Light Minneapolis Initiative

Synthesized response for report submission:

Starry Skies North has spent a lot of time building out a strategic plan for 2024 that includes many goals, so I've tried to generalize our diverse goals into three high-level descriptions.

Robustness: Develop our operations, communications capacities and financial resources to support a robust, non-profit certified and volunteer-led organization that can continue to grow beyond 2024.

Advocacy and outreach: Launch and expand our multiple advocacy and outreach initiatives including our Dark Sky Friendly Business certification, partnerships with related organizations and educational outreach.

Concrete actions:

Balance bringing in people who are new to the dark-sky movement with those that are looking for deeper ways to make an impact. We plan to accomplish this by taking concrete actions with accountability to protect the night sky such as certifying more night sky places in the region, generating public results from our sky quality meter network, continuing committee-based work and communicating specific roles that volunteers can take.

Anything else you would like to share?

Individual contributions:

- The revenue sharing from DarkSky International was a key enabler for our chapter activities and growth in 2023, and we strongly encourage DarkSky International to continue the program in 2024
- The revenue sharing from DSI was a pleasant surprise that we hope continues into the future.
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Synthesized response for report submission:

We greatly appreciated the revenue sharing from DarkSky International in 2023, and we strongly encourage the continuation of the program in 2024! For future annual reports, it would be nice to know what is asked for, and what the International Organization wants us to track, earlier in the year. For example, in 2022 the amount of events at night was requested, but in 2023 it appears not to be. If we knew what the form looked like by even mid-summer, that would make it easier on the person preparing the report!