



AfAS Outreach Committee

Terms of Reference

1. Background

The African continent is home to a vast diversity of peoples, languages, and traditions. One of the many unifying threads that binds nations is the sky above, that holds a special place in African cultures and thinking. Astronomy outreach aims to align this unification with the knowledge revealed by science on the Universe.

The African Astronomical Society (AfAS) itself was reconstituted in 2019 in an exciting era of African astronomy. The continent is host to some of the largest global infrastructures, such as SALT, SKA/MeerKAT and HESS; this has provided an initial impetus for universities to offer courses at all levels in astronomy. The resultant increase in visibility and interest in astronomy amongst the public now needs to be nurtured further by enhancing the public's understanding of contemporary research and its benefit to society, as well as improving science literacy through ongoing public engagement activities.

Many countries in Africa have active and enthusiastic astronomy practitioners who can be found within amateur astronomy associations, tertiary institutions, science centres, schools and college clubs. The Outreach Committee of AfAS, therefore, needs to be an active participant in this ecosystem, supporting their work, encouraging new groups and people, and connecting all of them across Africa.

2. Strategic Objectives of the Outreach Committee

- 2.1. To support and enhance existing astronomy outreach efforts across Africa.
- 2.2. To establish and coordinate a network of astronomy outreach professionals across Africa, building on existing formal/informal partnerships.
- 2.3. To increase science and astronomy literacy across Africa and enhance the presence of astronomy in the public domain.
- 2.4. To create and curate reliable and accessible resource material on astronomy for the general public, learners and teachers.
- 2.5. To promote astronomy in African countries where currently there is little or no interest.

3. Duties of the Outreach Committee

- 3.1. To implement specific astronomy outreach projects which are aligned with the objectives of the AfAS constitution.
- 3.2. To encourage practitioners to use astronomy to attract African youth and women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.
- 3.3. To facilitate the formation of Working Groups on specific themes which are aimed at the public.
- 3.4. To create popular multilingual resource material.
- 3.5. To encourage pan-African collaborations for specific topics in outreach and document the work done for future use.
- 3.6. To maintain a regular presence on social media to keep the public informed, engaged, and raise awareness.

- 3.7. To support the work of amateur astronomy associations and assist in the formation of new associations with an emphasis on regions where astronomy is not well developed.
- 3.8. In collaboration with the fund-raising committee, raise funds to support the planned activities of the Outreach Committee.

4. Composition of the Outreach Committee

- 4.1 Membership of the AfAS Outreach Committee is voluntary. Only members of AfAS can be nominated to be members of the Committee. Non-members of AfAS can be nominated, provided an application for membership is accompanied by the nomination. Self-nomination is permitted. All nominations must be accompanied by a brief motivation from the nominator as well as an abridged biography of the nominee, which does not exceed 1 (one) page. Nominees need to accept their nominations through an e-mail to the AfAS Secretariat. Nominations for membership to the Committee will be reviewed by a Selection Committee and presented to the AfAS Executive Committee for endorsement. The Selection Committee will be appointed by the Secretariat in consultation with the current Chair of the AfAS Outreach Committee.
- 4.2 The AfAS Outreach Committee shall comprise at least 8 (eight) members, the majority of whom shall be independent non-Executive Committee members of AfAS.
- 4.3 Specialist advisors and/or working groups can be appointed by the AfAS Outreach Committee to provide advice and/or perform specific tasks allocated to them by the Committee.
- 4.4 Other members may be co-opted into the committee when required, and the AfAS Executive Committee needs to be consulted on these appointments.
- 4.5 The members of the Committee should collectively have sufficient qualifications and experience to ensure that the objectives are achieved.
- 4.6 Only members of the Committee have the right to attend Committee meetings, although, other individuals may be invited as observers and/or advisors to attend all or part of any Committee meeting as and when deemed appropriate.
- 4.7 Individuals in attendance at Committee meetings by invitation may participate in discussions but do not vote on resolutions or form part of the quorum for Committee meetings.
- 4.8 Committee members who have their committee membership terminated for whatever reason or those who have resigned prior to the end of the Committee's tenure will be replaced with new members who will serve until the end of the Committee's term of office. The normal recruitment process will be followed. However, should a member leave the AfAS Outreach Committee within 6 (six) months of the expiry of the term of office of the Outreach Committee, no replacement will be appointed unless total membership falls below 50% plus 1 member.

- 4.9 At the end of the term of office of the current committee, for the purposes of continuity, no more than 3 (three) of the current members may be requested by the AfAS Executive Committee to remain for another term.
- 4.10 The Committee will elect a Chair and Deputy Chair from amongst its members; the tenure of members of the Committee will be aligned to that of the Executive Committee, which is normally 3 (three) years commencing at the beginning of the AfAS financial year (April to March).

5. Meetings of the AfAS Outreach Committee

- 5.1. Meetings will be held at least every second month, and the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, will issue a meeting schedule for the year no later than the end of April of a financial year. The duration of each meeting will be set by the Chair based on the agenda for a particular meeting.
- 5.2. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, will draft the agenda for the meeting and issue the draft agenda for comment/additional agenda items no later than 2 (two) weeks prior to a meeting. The Secretariat will issue the final agenda no later than 1 (one week) prior to the meeting. The Secretariat will ensure that any documents that are required for any agenda items will be issued together with the final agenda.
- 5.3. In the absence of the Committee Chair, the deputy will chair the meeting. Otherwise, the members present may nominate and elect one of their members to chair the meeting.

6. Minutes and meeting papers

- 6.1. The minutes of each meeting of the AfAS Outreach Committee will be prepared by the Secretariat, who will have one of its staff present at each meeting. The minutes of each meeting will be issued to all members no later than 10 (ten) working days after a meeting for review by the members. However, the Chair will be required to endorse the draft minutes prior to issue to all members.
- 6.2. Outside of meetings, all communication between members shall take place through email to ensure all committee members are kept up to date with all work and discussions.

7. Attendance of Meetings by Members

- 7.1. A quorum of the Committee shall be 50% plus one of the members. All decisions taken at a duly convened meeting of the Committee at which a quorum is present shall be binding on all members of the Committee.
- 7.2. Members of the AfAS Outreach Committee are expected to attend all its meetings; however, it is acknowledged that due to work and other schedules, this may not be possible at all times. Members who cannot attend a scheduled meeting must advise the Secretariat prior to the meeting of his/her absence and reasons for such absence. The Chair of the Committee will decide on the validity of such reasons, and this will be noted in the minutes of the

meeting. Should a member not attend 2 (two) consecutive meetings without reasons that are acceptable to the Chair of the Committee, membership will be terminated, and they will be discharged of their duties. However, should a member not attend a total of 6 (six) meetings or more prior to the expiry of the Committee's term of office, such a member's membership will also be automatically terminated.

8. Annual Operating Plan/Funding

- 8.1. The AfAS Outreach Committee will be required to submit an Annual Operating Plan (AOP), which outlines planned activities of the Committee for the coming 3 (three) years, with the emphasis being on the coming year. The Chair of the Committee will engage with all members of the Committee as well as the Secretariat when drafting the AOP. An annual budget that is required to execute the plan must be included as well. However, given that AfAS has a limited budget to support all the activities of its committees, the AfAS Communications Committee should include fund-raising initiatives in support of its planned activities, in its AOP.
- 8.2. The AOP must be submitted in the required format to the Secretariat no later than the end of April of the coming financial year and thereafter submitted to the AfAS Executive Committee for review and approval at its May meeting.

9. Amendments to Terms of Reference

Any member of the AfAS Communications Committee, the AfAS Executive Committee or the Secretariat may propose amendments to these Terms of Reference. Such proposed amendments must be sent to the Secretariat in writing and discussed by the AfAS Communications Committee at its next or special meeting. Should the amendments, or any variations thereof, be acceptable to the Committee, the Chair will forward the proposed amendments to the Secretariat for subsequent approval by the AfAS Executive Committee.