



Why a new Working Group?

Radio astronomy has made huge advances over its relatively short existence, evolving into a scientific discipline at the cutting edge of modern technology, capable of imaging the universe with exquisite resolution. Today, radio astronomy is developing at a rapid rate thanks to new technologies in both electronics and computing, making possible large connected arrays of antennas and the infrastructure required to transfer, process and analyse the vast amount of data generated. Numerous facilities are producing stunning scientific results, the African VLBI Network and the Square Kilometre Array are on the horizon, and efforts are underway to convert defunct communication antennas to radio telescopes in South East Asia and South America.

Despite these advances in capabilities, those of us working in radio astronomy and science communication still face large barriers to the public (and political) understanding of what these facilities can do, and why they are scientifically important. Discussions have shown that we all face similar problems when describing to the public how such facilities work and why they matter. Common misconceptions include the notion that radio astronomers listen to the universe through headphones (e.g. Jodie Foster in Contact), that we are spying on their mobile phone conversations, or even that we are irradiating people near our telescopes and causing cancer.

Communicating Radio Astronomy

A new working group within IAU Commission C2

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this WG is to connect radio astronomers and communicators around the world to foster international collaboration and discuss the particular challenges of communicating radio astronomy, and to share successes and best practise.

The public understanding of radio astronomy is particularly important in locations where such facilities are physically located, and it is vital that those involved in such activities have a forum where they can share their experiences and obtain advice from others facing (or who have faced) similar communication and cultural challenges.

More widely, radio astronomy is an excellent example of a cross-disciplinary and cross-border endeavour probing the very fundamentals of our Universe, which can be used to enthuse young people the world over about the exciting possibilities that are available to those who study science, engineering, computing, mathematics, and other technical subjects.

The aim of this working group is to provide a forum for practitioners to share best practise and develop resources for those wishing to communicate any aspect of radio astronomy with the public. We plan to hold a small meeting of interested astronomers, engineers and communicators involved in any aspect of communicating radio astronomy with the public, and will publish a freely-available collection of resources for use by the community.



Sounds great! How do I get involved?

Anyone with a professional interest in communicating radio astronomy is welcome to join the Working Group, you do not need to be a member of the IAU. If you would like to get involved, please contact any of the people below:

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