

# The MAAF Network

## Selected Meeting Ideas

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This document provides some initial meeting ideas. Running a group involves leadership, succession planning, finance, scheduling, logistics, and other considerations that are important but not covered here. Consider requesting a group running guide from the Secular Student Alliance and/or the American Humanist Association. Also look at other organizations listed on the MAAF network page for great ideas or coaching. Below are listed several types of meetings to consider putting on the schedule. For each meeting, take 5-10 minutes to introduce the group, recognize new members, and ask for input from the group (feedback on events, new ideas, personal news).

**Service Project:** Clean a road, plant a garden, build a house, hand out food... Service projects are by far the most positive and impactful activities for a local group. It can be fun and rewarding, and charitable work does great things to eradicate negative perceptions of atheists.

**Book Club:** This involves 1-3 members who are familiar with a certain book presenting the main concepts and a few questions. The other members ask questions about the book and discuss key concepts. Note that it is important that members not feel obligated to read the book. This allows the group to learn and limits loss of participation due to busy schedules.

**Current events:** Have individuals bring in news clippings to discuss among the group. It's best to pick a topic – ethics, atheism, cosmology, medicine, etc – just focus the discussion. Also see MAAF's Atheists in Foxholes news and events calendar (under 'community' on the site).

**Speakers:** Invite a local (or national speaker). Looking at other local groups (nontheistic or otherwise) and selecting speakers known to be in the area is a good start. MAAF can also help to coordinate for speakers to visit. It can be helpful to collect funds to help pay a speakers travel costs, but that can often be waived for the military.

**Planning Meeting:** Talk about the future of the group, scheduling, and fund-raising. These aren't as 'fun' but they are important to schedule and can be the primary focus for the first meeting or two.

**New Member / Social Meeting:** Introduce new members, welcome them to the group, and talk about personal information so everyone can get to know each other. Talking about how each person came to their beliefs and how their atheism/humanism has affected their service may be of interest. This is also good for the first few meetings, but it should be done periodically as new members rotate in and out. This is also good for general fun meetings to meet at the pub and have fun.

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## Topics and Resources

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In the military context, it is advisable for groups to maintain a positive approach. Anti-religious and/or mocking videos, books, or authors, can set a bad precedence and possibly provide justification for ousting a group. Select positive topics of ethics, philosophy, and science. Discussions of religion are valid, and even satire of religion is honest discussion, but pure mockery or vitriol should be avoided. Avoid topics promoting any political candidate or campaign.

**Brochures:** MAAF offers a brochure called "Living Well Through Secular Humanism". The Freedom From Religion Foundation (ffrf.org) produces "nontracts" regarding atheist myths, freethinkers, women's rights, and religion in general.

**Humanist Study Materials:** Schedule the topics at the Kochhar Humanist Education Center (KHEC) and Continuum for Humanist Education (COHE, [cohe.humanistinstitute.org](http://cohe.humanistinstitute.org)).

**Reading Material:** MAAF book list, <http://www.militaryatheists.org/booklist.html>, a listing of about 60 books from famous authors in subjects such as ethics, science, history, and philosophy. Magazines from national organizations such as the The Humanist (AHA), Free Inquiry (CFI), Skeptic Magazine, and science magazines such as Popular Science and National Geographic.

**Blog Articles:** There are many great bloggers including Friendly Atheist, Pharyngula (science, atheism), Skepchick, and Bad Astronomy. Organizations (like AA, SCA, and AHA) have blogs and post regular articles of interest. Also check out MAAF's Atheists in Foxholes News ([blog.militaryatheists.org](http://blog.militaryatheists.org)).

**Movies:** Humanist Magazine selected 10 top films: Inherit the Wind, Harold and Maude, Chocolat, American Beauty, Life of Brian, Amadeus, Planet of the Apes, Defending your Life, Fountainhead (1949), Schindler's List. Contact is another top pick. Also consider series such as Cosmos, The Universe, and NOVA.

**Video clips:** There are literally millions of good options here, but consider the following search terms to find good videos: Symphony of Science, Ferromagnetic liquids, and Planet/star scale. Also look for Tim Minchin, "Mitchell & Webb Look," "Mr Deity," "The Thinking Atheist," TED talks, and Big Think.

**Podcasts:** Skeptoid (skepticism), Skeptic's Guide to the Universe (science news), CERN LHC (12 episodes), Purpose-Centered Life (40 episodes, atheist living), Point of Inquiry (various topics)

**Informational Websites:** The websites of various organizations have a variety of information available, as well as the websites of the podcasts and publications already listed. Also see [talkorigins.org](http://talkorigins.org) (science), [quackwatch.org](http://quackwatch.org) (medicine), [infidels.org](http://infidels.org) (debates), Informational is Beautiful (graphical statistics), [project-reason.org](http://project-reason.org) (Sam Harris), [outcampaign.org](http://outcampaign.org).

# The MAAF Network

## Major Events Calendar

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*Note that for brevity, dates of celebrations are not included here but can be found online.*

As organizations both military and humanist, with a reverence for the scientific and an interest in our history, we should take time to appropriately celebrate and memorialize significant events and dates. Planning should include regular activities, but even at the beginning of the year, group leaders and members should be aspiring to come together for at least 3-4 major activities each year. View the MAAF national calendar at <http://www.militaryatheists.org/calendar.html>

The many celebrations below should all be recognized at least to some extent, but MAAF recommend local groups hold a major event, preferably a local service project, at three times: Between the National Day of Reason and Memorial Day, between Flag Day/Army Birthday and Independence Day, and between Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. Local groups should also attend one major national convention as a group. There's no need to coordinate entirely on your own – seek partner organizations.

**Military memorials:** First and foremost, the major military dates on the calendar should be a focus for MAAF groups. These include (but are not limited to), Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day (third May Saturday), and the birthdays of each of the branches of service. Other memorials such as Pearl Harbor Day or events like the Army-Navy Football Game or Marine Corps Marathon may also be observed. Note that these events are best celebrated in cooperation with other military service organizations (like the VFW) that may be holding larger events.

**Patriotic holidays:** Because we defend the nation, we want to celebrate and show our pride. Independence Day, Flag Day, Presidents Day and Constitution Day are good examples. Local communities often come together for these events and may provide good partners for collaboration.

**Humanist celebrations:** There are varied ways to celebrate the progress of humanity and science that include: HumanLight, Solstice/Equinox events, National Day of Reason, Freethought Day, and the birthdays of Charles Darwin and Carl Sagan.

**National conventions:** Atheist, humanist, freethought, skeptical, and military organizations all hold national conventions around the country. These can all be expensive to attend, but they offer a great opportunity to meet other leaders for ideas and to build both camaraderie and excitement within the group. MAAF recommends the American Humanist Association, American Atheists, and Veterans of Foreign Wars national conventions, as well as the Amazing Meeting (Randi).

*This is by no means a comprehensive list, but time and money are short, and the year is only so long. Pick a few target events early in the year where your group can really shine.*

# The MAAF Network Charities and Service

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MAAF affiliates should take opportunities for charitable and service activities. There are always many options but below are a few recommendations from MAAF. The best option is to ask members what their favorite charity may be. Don't forget that MAAF is a charitable activity as well. Beyond those obvious options, the below resource provide for more traditional charities.

**Foundation Beyond Belief**, [foundationbeyondbelief.org](http://foundationbeyondbelief.org), provides a rotating list of charities in five different areas. FBB also provides advice about charitable activities. MAAF is part of the FBB partner program, so you can conduct fundraising activities and donate on behalf of MAAF.

**Leukemia Lymphoma Light the Night**, <http://foundationbeyondbelief.org/LLS-lightthenight>, Light the Night is an effort of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation to generate one million dollars in donations from the freethought community. At the link (FBB has the best info), find more information to register and set up donations.

**Blood Drives**, [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org), are surprisingly easy, requiring a reserved venue and the promise of 20-50 personnel. The Red Cross (or American Heart Association) will often set up the entire event so long as they have a venue and a crowd.

**Food Bank**. Local food banks provide good opportunities, at every meeting, to collect donations of canned food. Alternatively, a regular event to hand out food or otherwise help at the local food bank is another way to make a difference.

**Combined Federal Campaign**, <http://www.militaryatheists.org/maafcfclist.html>. The CFC is a collective giving program provided to all federal employees. MAAF conducts an annual review of the charities on the CFC list, and that review and list also provides potential charities.

**Wounded Warrior**, <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>, provides large-scale, national support for warriors with physical and emotional wounds from war. There are often events in the area and this is a great option to step out in the local community.

**Pat Tillman Foundation**, <http://www.patillmanfoundation.org>, was started in honor of one of the most famous foxhole atheists. The Foundation provides scholarships by operating runs, including the large run in Tempe Arizona, shadow runs across the country, and other ways to help.

**Donations and Legacy Gifts**: Take some time to explain giving options, like updating beneficiaries to include MAAF or another favorite charity, or just take up a collection.