

Outreach Opportunities – Holding a Build Session

By Randy Boadway

Randy is a member of the Southwest Michigan Association of Spacemodeling Hobbyists (SMASH). SMASH is nationally recognized for their outstanding work in outreach.

There are basically 3 types of model rocketry build sessions: 1. Community Build (bring your own rocket) 3. Community Build (Specific Kit or make it and take it), 3. Section/club based

Community Builds

Invite everyone to attend. It is a good idea to advertise that anyone 10 and under have an adult come to help them. All they need to do to participate is bring a rocket to build. List local hobby shops that carry rockets. Consider making a few recommendations of skill level 1 beginner rockets.

Provide the building supplies. If this is the first one provide funds to obtain supplies or recruit some donors to donate supplies. Also ask your experienced volunteers to bring their range box with spare parts and supplies.

Providing a safe environment for cutting with hobby knives is important. Create a cutting station and provide that appropriate cutting tools at the station(s). This will allow the use of cutting boards and mats to protect the tables and hobby knives. An adult should supervise this area to control the excitement and teach youngsters proper cutting etiquette.

Supply List:

Scissors
Masking Tape
Rulers
Wood Glue
Plastic cement
Sand Paper
News paper to protect tables
Paper towels
Pencils
Markers and stickers

Cutting Station Supply List:

Cutting boards, wood, plastic or glass
Hobby Knives with cases or holder
Hobby saw and miter box
Tube Cutter
Sand Paper

Additional supplies to have available:

Super Glue, Kicker, Debonder

Spare parts to have available:

Launch lugs

If you build the same kit less rocketry experts will be needed. One person could also manage a classroom of kids. Focus the kids on following the instructions. Do not do it for them. Encourage them to read and follow what they read. Working independently is a good thing. Push the people or groups along that are the farthest behind.

If the build is open to any kit then more experts may be needed to wander around and assist with questions.

Recommendations for introductory kit build sessions:

Quest Payloader One – no cutting, laser cut fins, slotted tube, payload section, 18mm motors

Semroc My Byrd – Laser cut fins

Balsa Machining Services School Kit – Laser cut fins

My opinion in selection rockets is to avoid plastic fins. Teach the real basics of rocketry like it was the old Estes Alpha simple and basic. Slotted tubes for fins is best. Laser cut fins are best. For kids anything requiring cutting with a knife is bad.

Community Build Sessions where a specific rocket is called out the group will need to provide the rockets. Always provide more than what is expected. Do not turn anyone away. Advertise the kit price so there is no surprise. All of the recommended kits come in bulk packs to save on cost.

Make it and take it builds are great ways to introduce model rocketry to people. In this event the attendees build a rocket and get to keep it when done. Be sure to allow the builder to color and decorate their rocket to make it a more personalized experience. Be sure to promote your group and the NAR to the new modelers.

The leader of the event needs to build his rocket in advance. This allows that person to understand the model better and have a model to show that is completed.

Club Build Sessions

Decide early on what topics you want to build as a group. Select a lead for each build session. Typically the person selected is an expert in the topic, if not they will need some time to become an expert. Always pick a topic that a number of people will be interested in. Upcoming competition events are often good choices.

The leader should be responsible for sourcing the kits or parts to build the models. Advertise the cost of the models and take preorders to get an idea of what is needed. Always provide a few extra to cover last minute modelers.

When sourcing parts depend on other modelers to help out. Often they will donate some materials to help out. For parts that are ordered be sure to allow plenty of time for shipping.

QCR has a number of great kits for build sessions. Specific designs by members are also great choices. Don't forget to check with NARTS for good plans too.

Kit Bash is another great event for a build session. In this event everyone brings a model typically the same one and they build a rocket out of the parts being creative as they want to be. Use if the directions is not recommended. Kits with more parts are often the best to use.

Rambo Kit Bash is a great variation. The modeler brings a kit of a specified value. The parts are all combined and the group takes turns picking parts to create the model of their liking.