

Worldwide contest to name exoplanets and host stars

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For the first time, in response to the public's increased interest in being part of discoveries in astronomy, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) is organizing a worldwide contest to give popular names to selected exoplanets along with their host stars. The proposed names will be submitted by astronomy clubs and non-profit organisations interested in astronomy, and votes will be cast by the public from across the world through the web platform NameExoWorlds. This platform is under

development by the IAU in association with Zooniverse. The intention is that millions of people worldwide will be able to take part in the vote. Once the votes are counted, the winning names will be officially sanctioned by the IAU, allowing them to be used freely in parallel with the existing scientific nomenclature, with due credit to the clubs or organizations that proposed them.

People have been naming celestial objects for millennia, long before any scientific system of [names](#) ever existed. Even today, almost every civilisation and culture uses common names to describe the stars and planets visible to the naked eye, as well as their apparent distribution on the sky—constellations, asterisms, etc.

When the IAU was created in 1919, professional astronomers delegated the task of giving official scientific names to newly discovered celestial objects to it. In parallel, throughout its history, the IAU has supported the contribution of the general [public](#) in naming various Solar System objects, as outlined in previous announcements (ann13009, ann13010, ann13012).

On 14 August 2013, the IAU issued a statement on the Public Naming of Planets and Planetary Satellites, which outlined a first set of rules that allowed the public to become involved in naming exoplanets.

Capitalizing on the unique expertise of its members, the IAU through its Public Naming of Planets and Planetary Satellites Working Group has now developed a project in partnership with Zooniverse—home to the internet's largest, most popular and most successful citizen science projects.

The NameExoWorlds contest aims at crowdsourcing the process by which public names will be given to a large sample of well-studied, confirmed exoplanets and their host stars, referred to as ExoWorlds. The NameExoWorlds vote is conceived as a global, cross-cultural,

educational, and above all ambitious and challenging contest, both for the IAU–Zooniverse partnership, and for the public. The main steps of the contest are the following:

1. A list of 305 well-characterized exoplanets, discovered prior to 31 December 2008, has been selected for naming by the IAU Exoplanets for the Public Working Group and is being published today on the www.NameExoWorlds.org website. These exoplanets belong to 260 exoplanetary systems comprising one to five members, in addition to their host star.
2. In parallel, an IAU Directory for World Astronomy website is being prepared (directory.iau.org). This site will open in September 2014 and astronomy clubs and non-profit organisations interested in naming these exoplanets will be invited to register. The IAU will have the capability to handle the registration of thousands of such groups.
3. In October 2014, these clubs or organizations will be asked to vote for the 20–30 exoworlds they wish to name out of the list provided by the IAU. The actual number will depend on how many groups have registered.
4. From December 2014, these clubs or organizations will be able to send in proposals for the names of members and host stars of these selected ExoWorlds, based on the rules in the IAU Exoplanet Naming Theme, together with a detailed supporting argument for their choice. Each group will be allowed to name only one exoworld. More details on this stage will be given later.
5. From March 2015, the general public will be able to vote to rank the proposed exoworld names. The IAU and Zooniverse will be ready to handle a million votes or more worldwide.
6. Starting from July 2015, the IAU, via its Public Naming of Planets and Planetary Satellites Working Group, will oversee the final stages of the contest, and will validate the winning names from the vote.

7. The results will be announced at a special public ceremony held during the IAU XXIX General Assembly in Honolulu, USA, 3–14 August 2015.

The naming process will take place on www.NameExoWorlds.org website, where we encourage volunteers to translate the content into different languages in order to offer everyone the opportunity to take part in the contest (volunteer translators may email: cjl@astro.ox.ac.uk).

The winning names will not replace the [scientific designations](#), which already exist for all [exoplanets](#) and their host stars, but they will be sanctioned by the IAU as their adopted names, and be publicized as such, along with due credit to the astronomy clubs or organisations that proposed them. These public names may then be used freely worldwide, along with, or instead of, the original scientific designation. It is expected that the winning names for the 20–30 systems will reflect the diversity of cultures on all continents.

The IAU is excited that the general public will be able to participate in this new and ambitious global challenge. Other contests may be organized after 2015. In the meantime, stay tuned for announcements about the next steps towards the first NameExoWorlds contest.

Provided by International Astronomical Union

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