MOREHEAD PLANETARIUM+ SCIENCE CENTER

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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FEDERAL GRANT, NEW EXHIBIT WILL HELP MOREHEAD PLANETARIUM SHARE NASA'S ARTEMIS MOON MISSIONS WITH ALL OF NORTH CAROLINA

Institute of Museum and Library Services award and private donations support statewide learning experiences designed with and for youth with autism, anchored by tactile models of the Moon's South Pole.

CHAPEL HILL, NC — Morehead Planetarium and Science Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has been awarded a $273,534 Museums for America grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to engage communities across North Carolina with the scientific, technological, and human aspects of NASA's Artemis missions to the Moon. Private donations will fund new tactile exhibits of the lunar surface.

The project, called *Artemis for All*, is a collaboration with Knology. Total project costs are $659,615, including $386,081 in institutional cost share. Over three years, Morehead and Knology will design, test, and evaluate a multi-faceted suite of Artemis-related learning experiences that align with the planned Artemis launches and respond to the programmatic needs of strategically selected museums and science centers across North Carolina. *Artemis for All* will also increase community engagement and educational capacity for partner institutions through increasing educational teams' ability to support learning experiences for youth with autism spectrum disorder in their local communities.

Morehead's connection to lunar exploration is not new. The center trained the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo astronauts in celestial navigation before their missions, and it has present-day ties to Artemis astronaut Christina Koch and to UNC-Chapel Hill alumna and astronaut Zena Cardman. Koch has said that childhood field trips to Morehead inspired her dream of going to space.

"Morehead's connection to space exploration began with the astronaut training program and continues today through its role in inspiring the next generation of explorers, including Artemis II astronaut Christina Koch," said Todd Boyette, Director of Morehead Planetarium and Science Center. "As humanity prepares to return to the Moon, Artemis

for All will ensure that people across North Carolina can see themselves reflected in and connected to this historic new chapter of exploration."

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Artemis for All is initially designed for two audiences: youth ages 8 to 13 on the autism spectrum and the informal science educators who will deliver the programming. Twenty young people from the target audience will serve as paid advisers through focus groups and interviews regarding program content, product design, and the exhibit environment, building on Morehead's existing partnerships and its sensory-friendly events. Educators at Morehead and at nine partner institutions will receive training in Artemis content and in practices that support learners with low support needs autism spectrum disorder. Partner institutions will have some planetarium or astronomy experience as well as experience with the target audience age range. Project planning estimates that more than 750,000 North Carolinians could ultimately benefit.

"Central to this project is the goal of forming a constellation of informal science organizations and supporting them to bring the wonder, excitement, and the science of humans returning to the Moon to their communities across North Carolina," said Dr. Elysa Corin of Knology. "Together, we will design and share meaningful learning experiences, deliberately curated to promote broad public engagement, foster civic discourse, and spark a love for space exploration and discovery."

Thanks to generous support through private donations, the center of the project is a tactile Moonscape designed and fabricated by Dark Star Studios: a large, tabletop model of the Moon's South Pole, which includes the nine proposed Artemis landing regions, created from actual lunar topographic datasets and accurate to within three meters. Visitors will be invited to gather around, touch, and explore a surface that is usually seen only through a telescope or a screen. Nine smaller landing-site models will travel to partner institutions with accompanying activities. Dark Star Studios is a Raleigh, North Carolina–based creative design studio specializing in engaging physical and digital experiences that bring science to life for learners of all ages. Through immersive museum exhibits, hands-on educational installations, and interactive digital experiences, the studio inspires curiosity, exploration, and discovery.

The exhibit and the traveling models are scheduled to open at the start of the project's second year, in late 2027. Federal funds support the evaluation, educator training, and curriculum behind *Artemis for All*. The full suite of learning materials for the project will also include a planetarium show for Morehead's fulldome theater and two mobile domes that travel the state, along with Moon- and Artemis-themed activities aligned to third-

through sixth-grade curricula. The Moonscape exhibit itself is part of Morehead's institutional cost share and is being built with generous, private support, which Morehead was proud to secure this fall.

Individuals and organizations interested in helping fund the exhibit and the models that travel to communities across the state can learn more at moreheadplanetarium.org/artemis-for-all.

This project is supported in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under award number MA-260425-OMS-26.

About Morehead Planetarium and Science Center

Morehead Planetarium and Science Center serves North Carolina and beyond by bringing together the unique resources of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to engage the public for an enhanced understanding of science. Guided by its Science for All mission, Morehead is committed to bringing high-quality STEM opportunities to children and families in all 100 North Carolina counties, and leads statewide initiatives including the North Carolina Science Festival and the Statewide Star Party.

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the nation's leading source of federal funding for museums and libraries. Its Museums for America program invests in museums of all sizes and disciplines through educational programs and exhibits, community partnerships and collections stewardship.

About Knology

Knology is a non-profit organization that creates research for impact. Through collaboration with cultural, educational, and professional organizations, we equip partners with evidence-backed insights, tools, and resources for understanding, strengthening, and communicating their impacts. Our work yields practical, actionable guidance aimed at helping organizations solve real-world challenges in real-time—whether it be improving outcomes, creating more sustainable practices, connecting with new audiences, building internal or external trust, developing new organizational capacities, or advocating for support. By bringing knowledge to action, we help partners advance their missions while addressing the broader challenges of our times. Since October 2026, Knology has been home to the Institute for Learning Innovation's (ILI) archives, ongoing projects, and researchers, and is committed to carrying on ILI's 40-year legacy in free-choice learning.

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