

Q1 Name

Mark Munkacsy

Q2 Approximate number of years as a member of the AAVSO

28

Q3 In 100 words or less, explain why you want to serve on the AAVSO Board of Directors.

The AAVSO is an extraordinary organization with an equally extraordinary membership. I'm already excited and proud to be a part of the AAVSO, and want to help the AAVSO grow into emerging technologies and opportunities that will create new paths for the "astro-curious" to become serious contributors to the science of astronomy.

The AAVSO Board, with the rest of the AAVSO leadership, is in a position to leverage the diverse skills and knowledge of our membership to adapt to new sensor technology, new AI software services, and new understandings of variable star behavior. I can help make that happen.

Q4 Briefly describe your past and current contributions to the organization.

- Since 1995 I've been an LPV observer, shifting in 2001 from visual observations to CCD/CMOS observations. I have contributed over 32,000 variable star observations.
- During 2004-2005, I was a member of the AAVSO CompDB team, building a database of comparison stars (from old, hand-drawn charts), with their modern catalog names as part of the bridge to the current VSP.
- During 2021 and 2022 I was one of the primary authors of the rewrite of the *AAVSO Guide to CCD/CMOS Photometry with Monochrome Cameras* (previously known as the *AAVSO CCD Photometry Guide*).
- During 2022 and 2023, I was a member of the AAVSO Data Quality Task Force. This group looked at ways of measuring the quality of CCD/CMOS observations in the AAVSO International Database, and created recommendations for things that can be done to monitor, measure, and improve the overall accuracy and precision of submissions to the database.

Q5 In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of the AAVSO?

- The AAVSO's reputation within the astronomical community as a source of quality, long-baseline lightcurves
- The diversity of the AAVSO membership – a diversity that spans geography, a variety of different astronomical interests, and a range of experience that provides a built-in corps of potential mentors to those with passion, but little hands-on know-how.
- A community culture that values disciplined observing and analysis while not losing sight of the importance of keeping the fun in our activity.
- The online website forum, which provides an easy way for all AAVSO observers and members to share and learn together.

Q6 If elected to the Board, how would you help the AAVSO translate those strengths into opportunities?

I'd like to see us use the existing, ongoing forum conversations as a way to collect information about our observers' challenges, level of knowledge, misconceptions, and use of existing AAVSO training resources.

And I'd very much like to participate in the upcoming introduction of new measures to improve the quality of our collected data, making sure that we keep quality, culture, reward, and constructive feedback balanced; I'm convinced that we can help our observers have more fun at the same time that they are improving their skills and submitted data quality.

Q7 In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges currently facing the AAVSO?

One of the challenges is financial: the AAVSO continues to draw from its endowment at a rate that is not sustainable long-term. Another challenge is that observer motivation has been going through a shift as CCD/CMOS photometry has displaced visual observing; what was once a very personal relationship between an observer and the stars in their eyepiece has been replaced by a need for a broader set of technical skills than was required in the past. The resulting cultural shift is a work in progress, and may complicate our attempts to grow the membership.

Q8 If elected to the Board, how would you help the AAVSO effectively meet those challenges?

The search for additional revenue sources needs to expand to a larger swath of the AAVSO. We have members who can contribute time and talent to the creation of compelling proposals to use available grants. The Board can help identify ways to find and nurture these "non-traditional" skills within the AAVSO membership.

The Board can also take a closer look at the "new observer experience." This means gathering more data about the motivations of our new observers, their frustrations (and successes!), resources they struggle with, and where and how they experience AAVSO culture, community, and communications.

Q10 Skills Background - Please check in the lower boxes every category that pertains to your background: X = experienced, (X) = some experience

Professional Astronomy – actively involved with AAVSO or Observing Campaigns	Amateur Astronomy – actively involved with AAVSO	General Management Experience – includes organization management, HR, finances, project management	Financial Management Experience – includes Profit/Loss responsibility, investment knowledge	Fundraising Experience – includes participating in and/or managing major fundraising efforts, or success in applying for grants and contracts (e.g. with NASA, NSF, others)
	X	X	(X)	(X)

Q11 What are the three most important skills/experiences that you would bring to Council?

1. My knowledge and experience with photometry: as an observer, as a photometry software developer, and as a learner within the AAVSO. Even today, I experience frustration trying to improve the quality of my photometry – that frustration is an important experience that I bring.
2. My experiences with the AAVSO Data Quality Task Force, which gave me first-hand insight into how the quality of our work affects the overall reputation of the AAVSO, and also showed the importance of our people and culture as critical parts of collecting high-quality variable star observations.
3. My career experience with new technology development and integration, both of which *must* be combined with an awareness of natural organizational culture shifts, some people's natural affinity for creativity and innovation, and *everyone's* fear of change.