

Dr. Jon Morse
NASA Headquarters
SMD-Astrophysics Division
300 E Street SW
Mail Suite 3W39
Washington, DC 20546
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Dear Jon,

The Observatory Council was delighted to see that NASA is providing more access to the Keck telescope time for the broad astronomical community via the Call for Proposals for the 2009A semester. However, we are somewhat confused and disappointed that the venue for reviewing proposals for this access is not through the NOAO TAC, which already provides community access to Keck through the NSF-funded TSIP program. It is most efficient for US observers to have one system for time on federally-funded ground-based telescopes. While NASA funded research in space has traditionally been separate from NSF ground-based research, these fields have seen increasing overlap in recent scientific work as many astronomers utilize a multi-wavelength approach to tackle the big questions. As you know, NASA satellites encompass all fields of astronomy and much of the work is coordinated with ground-based observations. Thus, it is difficult to impossible to separate the work cleanly by agency. The AAAC has advocated closer cooperation. The first successful step was the allocation of NOAO time in conjunction with satellites such as HST, Chandra and Spitzer. This avoids the double jeopardy of applying to two separate organizations for the same project. The additional Keck time is somewhat of the same problem.

While IPAC i.e. the NASA Exoplanet Science Institute has experience with proposal reviews, it will not have the connection to the ground-based observational community that NOAO does. In addition, it is both confusing and inefficient to have 2 proposal deadlines for the same telescope, instrument and science goals. The NASA deadline was Sept 8, the NOAO TSIP deadline is Sept 30. Under the current arrangement, many proposers will be submitting identical or similar proposals to both NASA and NOAO. It seems highly likely that the same excellent proposals will rise to the top of both TACs. This raises the possibility that duplicate time might be awarded to some, while other deserving proposals may receive none. And, in any case, duplicate submission and reviews create excess work for both proposers and reviewers.

Thus, in the best interests of the community, we strongly urge you to consider simplifying the procedures and enabling an overall systems approach to ground-based astronomy by having all proposals for Keck open time in future semesters go to the NOAO TAC. NASA may naturally wish to conduct an additional review to assure that projects to be awarded time from the NASA pool are consistent with overall NASA goals, but surely some mechanism can be found to coordinate such a review with that by the NOAO TAC. We, or NOAO staff members, would be happy to discuss details of how this might best be accomplished.

Perhaps the AAAC would also have suggestions of how to accomplish the coordination.

Regards,

Paula Szkody, Chair

Observatory Council

Josh Bloom, Anita Cochran, Andrea Dupree, Deidre Hunter, Hernan Quintana, William Smith, Tony Tyson, Fred Walter, Frank Winkler, Dennis Zaritsky

cc: Wendy Freedman, AAAC; Tom Barnes, NSF