

NOAO Users Committee Meeting: 2 – 3 October 2008

Meeting Charge

Revised: 23 September 2008

UC mission statement

The Users Committee provides NOAO with feedback and advice on all aspects of NOAO operations that impact users of NOAO facilities and services.

Current landscape

As a response to the NSF Senior Review, the NOAO program is evolving to achieve three fundamental goals:

1. In partnership with other private and public observatories, develop an open access US System of ground-based facilities that spans a balanced range of telescope aperture size and scientific capability. Central to this development effort is the revitalization of KPNO and CTIO.
2. Enhance that System through participation in the development of new major facilities such as LSST and GSMT.
3. Broaden participation in the NSF science enterprise by engaging individuals, institutions and geographical areas "...that do not participate in NSF research programs at rates comparable to others."¹

Predictably, this evolution is occurring under uncertain budgetary circumstances, worsened currently by the Federal election cycle. NOAO cash flow will remain fixed in absolute numbers at FY 2007 levels until sometime in 2009 and perhaps for the entire FY 2009.

Specific charges (2008)

The committee is asked to address several broad topics:

1. The Users Committee should comment on the on-going infrastructure improvement and modernization programs at KPNO and CTIO. Discuss and comment on the capabilities provided at these sites (including observing modes – classical, remote, queue) in the context of the entire System.
2. In response to the recommendations of the ReSTAR committee and in consultation with the NSF, NOAO has developed an implementation plan. This plan was recently described in a widely circulated white paper. The Users Committee should comment on this ReSTAR implementation plan, in the context of both strengthen existing NOAO facilities and the System as a whole.
3. NOAO has formed the XXX (ALTAIR) committee to discuss future directions for 6.5 – 10-m telescopes (<http://www.noao.edu/system/altair/>). Preliminary results from a recent major survey will be presented at the meeting. The committee should comment

¹ From Executive Summary, *Broadening Participation at the National Science Foundation: A Framework for Action*, August 2008.

on these results and their implications for Federal involvement in this class of facilities, especially Gemini.

4. NOAO is leading LSST design and development efforts in the areas of site and telescope systems (including optics). NOAO is also responsible for connecting the community-at-large to the LSST science enterprise and providing (or enabling) follow up capability. The committee should comment on initial efforts in these areas. Advice would be welcome about what future System science capabilities might be needed to support LSST follow up.
5. Due to financial pressures, the NOAO data management and processing systems operations and development activities (otherwise known as the Data Products Program) may have to be restructured and perhaps curtailed. The committee should comment on **current** NOAO data management and processing systems from the perspective of usability and effectiveness on improving scientific productivity of the System user community at large. The committee should also comment on **planned** operations and development activities, and make recommendations about operational and development priorities from the perspective of improving scientific productivity and participation of the System user community at large. Consideration should be given to how these activities support the NSF mandate to broaden participation beyond the core NOAO user community.
6. With the advent of the next Decadal Survey, the time is ripe for advocacy of US community-at-large and/or Federal financial involvement in one or more GSMT projects. The committee should comment current NOAO efforts in this area.
7. During the course of this meeting, a broad range of topics and activities will be presented. The committee should comment on whether or not NOAO is involved the right balance of activities to meet the current and future needs of its user community. Although comments should be cognizant of current fiscal realities, it would be helpful for the committee to make suggestions about the right balance within current fiscal constraints and priorities for future developments when additional resources become available.