

Report on the CTAC-meeting October 30 2018 at IAC in La Laguna

The 2019A common call for OPTICON TNA opened in early August 2018 and closed at 23:59 on September 2nd. The call was published here:

<http://www.astro-opticon.org/h2020/tna/call/call-2019a.html>.

45 proposals were submitted, all of them were compliant with the OPTICON rules and thus evaluated. Of these, 20/45 could be awarded time within our 250k Euro per semester budget.

The CTAC-meeting to discuss the proposals for the semester 2019A was held in the IAC, La Laguna on 30 October 2018. The current CTAC consists of Roi Alonso (IAC, La Laguna), Frank Grundahl (Aarhus), Renata Minkeviciute (Vilnius), Annelies Mortier (Cambridge), Laura Offer (Palermo), Helene Roussel (Paris) and Jochen Heidt (Heidelberg, Chair). OPTICON Project Scientist John Davies (UKATC, Edinburgh) was in attendance to advise on technical issues and record the meeting outcomes but did not participate in the scientific discussions.

Overall the meeting went very smoothly. There was one proposal for exoplanet candidate follow-up using 5 different telescopes which requested almost 50% of the financial resources available. This situation was similar to the one the panel faced last semester (large gravitational follow-up request), and caused an intensive discussion among the members until a reasonable solution was found which was acceptable for everybody and which reflected the overall feeling of the entire CTAC.

As in previous calls, the distribution of the proposal between the astrophysical topics was heavily skewed and this is also somewhat reflected in the demand per telescope (AAT, NOT and TNG being the highest as they offer instruments suitable for exoplanet and stellar research). Table 1 shows the distribution the proposals among categories and among the telescopes offered.

Topic	N_{prop}	Telescope	N_{prop}
Solar system	-/2	AAT	7
Exoplanet	8/16	NOT	11
Stars+stell. pop	6/15	TNG	8
Time domain	5/7	rest	1-4
Low-z Universe	1/2		
High-z Universe	-/3		

Table 1: Distribution of applications among categories (left) and telescopes (right). For the applications we show the number of approved vs submitted applications. Exoplanet, stars + stellar population proposal dominate. Telescope requests are dominated by the demand for high-resolution spectrographs for exoplanet and stellar research. The AAT benefits from its wide-field MOS capability. The remaining telescopes offered in the call were requested in 1-4 proposals on average. Many proposal request time at more than one telescope, each one of which is included in the statistics.

The large number of approved proposals ($20/45 = 45\%$) this time is somewhat larger than usual. On the other hand, 9/20 proposals approved requested 2 nights or less. In addition, almost all the time domain proposals requested the robotic telescopes, which are relatively inexpensive. The approved number of proposals per category follows roughly the initial request. It is nice to see that the time domain proposals (which is one of the hot topics in the H2020 programme) continue to be successful.

Proposals were submitted with PIs from 17 different countries, of these proposals from 10/17 countries were approved. As usual, the UK was most active (and very successful with 8/13 proposal been awarded time), followed by Germany with 7 applications. It is hard to find any significant trends having very small numbers of proposals from many (smaller) countries, but one thing stands out: only 1/9 proposals from the central and eastern European countries (eg. Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia) made it above the cutoff-line. This regional trend has been observed over a number of semesters and is somewhat disappointing given that special efforts have been made to engage with these communities via schools and conferences. Further efforts clearly need to be made, and one of these, a school on proposal writing is already scheduled for next year.

At the end of the meeting a round table discussion was held to review the CTAC process and to reflect on the changes introduced for this meeting. The most important items discussed were:

- The new proposal template with a revised set of astrophysical categories and sections was found to be very useful. Unfortunately, many applicants still used the old template and some ignore page limits/change fonts. This will be addressed in the new call for proposal.
- Everybody in the CTAC was happy with the new pre-grading system (in steps of 0.5 from 1.0 - 5.0) and in particular by discussing the proposal in categories and not in descending order by their pre-grades as previously. This will be kept for future meetings. Surprisingly, it did not affect the fine-tuning of the final ranking at the end of the meeting. All top ranked proposals could be implemented before running out of hours/nights at a particular telescope.
- Time domain proposals and/or long-term proposals continue to be successful in spite of having the same scientific rationale every semester. There is a risk that the reviewers will at some point become tired of repeatedly reading the same science case especially since it takes time until the first data come in and are properly analyzed. There was an initial discussion on how that could be optimized by eg. introducing a new section in the proposal template or even a separate proposal form. No consensus was found here, but this will be discussed in future meetings.
- It was also discussed on whether a certain amount of money could in the future be “reserved” for smaller communities. Overall, there was some scepticism on the success of such a strategy as it is not easy to distinguish between smaller and larger (or structurally less strong and stronger) countries and as the preparation of two different calls might be required. Alternatives could be a pre-proposal submission tool which should help to formally improve the quality of a proposal to be submitted or collaboration with experts, both of which are not straightforward to establish.

Beth Biller and Geza Kovacs who have left the CTAC have been replaced by Renata Minkeviciute and Annelies Mortier. The CTAC is now in an excellent shape, it consists of a well balanced mix of experienced and young astronomers. It is remarkable that 4/7 members are female astronomers, which is a great gender balance; and it is notable that all of them serve for a time allocation committee for their first time. With Renata Minkeviciute we were able to recruit an astronomer from Lithuania, with the hope that she transports back to her community the importance of careful observing proposal preparation and submission.

Feedback to all proposers will now be prepared and distributed by mid-November. The next call will open on February 1st and the next CTAC meeting will tentatively be held in May 2019 in Palermo.

Jochen Heidt

Heidelberg, November 4, 2018