

Report on the CTAC-meeting April 29/30 2019 at OAP in Palermo

Summary

The 2019B common call for OPTICON TNA opened in late January 2019 and closed at 23:59 on February 28. The call was published here:

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

63 proposals were submitted. After some discussion two were rejected because proposals were submitted for the same science case and requesting the same telescope through other channels. One more could not be considered because of a protected science case. Finally, another proposal asked for the wrong instrument and was rejected too. In the end, 59 proposals were evaluated and ranked.

Due to the large number of proposals and an overall increase of the telescope time requested compared to previous semesters, the oversubscription would have been almost a factor of 5.5 for the typical 250kEuro per semester budget. Upon request the budget was increased to 350k by the OPTICON management to ensure an appropriate allocation of proposals and to reduce the risk of an end of contract underspend. Initially, 8/15 telescopes were oversubscribed, most noticeably the NOT, TNG and AAT telescopes by a factor of ≥ 3 . John Davies enquired whether an increased allocation of observing nights would be possible, but unfortunately this could not be achieved for the most popular telescopes.

In the end time could be allocated for 21/63 proposals initially submitted. By chance, there was no need to cut down or reject any proposal because of the non-availability of nights/hours at any telescope. After the meeting, the NOT directorate realized that not all nights approved by the CTAC could be implemented into their schedule. After negotiations with the PIs of 5 proposals in question and with the NOT, LT and CA directors, 2 proposals could be moved to other telescopes and 3 proposals could be moved partly into the 2020A semester.

The CTAC made sure that the ratio of the approved and non-approved proposals for CEE and non-CEE countries was comparable without compromising the quality of the accepted proposals.

Details

The CTAC-meeting to discuss the proposals for the semester 2019B was held in the OAP, Palermo on 29/30 April 2019. Unfortunately, Frank Grundahl from Aarhus had to leave the CTAC for personal reasons shortly before the meeting. Since it was too late to find a substitute at short notice, the CTAC agreed to share the workload imposed by the absence of a 7th member. Thus the CTAC composition in Palermo consisted of Roi Alonso (IAC, La Laguna), 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.

The meeting was held for two full days. This gave the CTAC sufficient time for an appropriate discussion of the proposals given the very high oversubscription and the smaller than usual CTAC, and to discuss a number of issues. During the first day a round table discussion was held a) on the Eu mandated Mid Term Review (MTR) and how its

recommendations could be incorporated into the proposal evaluation; b) a discussion on about 10 proposals before their scientific evaluation because of telescope and/or policy issues and c) on some thoughts by the CTAC as input for the Telescope Directors Forum to be held at end of May 2019 and the foreseen 2020 pilot study. The remaining 1 1/3 days were used for proposal evaluation and a final discussion on the outcome of the meeting. A summary of the discussion on the MTR and TDF/2020+ application will be given at the end of the report.

As expected, the evaluation of the proposals was very difficult. Most noticeably, the average request for telescope time increased considerably, as did the number of telescopes per proposal. Requests for (fractions of) 10n or more were not unusual. In addition, there were several borderline proposals, where it was not a 100% clear whether or not they were compliant with OPTICON rules given the large number of CoIs. Table 1 illustrates the demand for each of the telescopes.

Telescope	Num _{prop}	Night _{requested}	Night _{offered}	Oversub
CAHA35	8	13	10	1.3
CAHA22	4	18	10	1.8
Rem	4	52h	500h	
AAT	9	35	10	3.5
OHP19	1	5	10	
OHP12	1	4	10	
TNG	11	31	10	3.1
ESO22:	4	15	10	1.5
LCO	5	254h	150h	1.7
NOT	20	73.5	25	2.9
LT	4	45h	50h	
INT	1	1	10	
Arist	3	25	20	1.25
CFHT	2	2.5	4	
TCS	2	2.5	14	

Table 1: Statistics on the number of proposals and nights/hours requested versus offered per telescope.

As in previous calls, the distribution of the proposals between the astrophysical topics was heavily skewed and this is also somewhat reflected in the demand per telescope (AAT, CAHA35, NOT and TNG being the highest as they offer instruments suitable for exoplanet and stellar research and/or are suitable for TDA). Table 2 shows the distribution the proposals among categories and among the telescopes offered.

The number of approved proposals ($21/63 = 33\%$) roughly reflects the oversubscription for the increased 350k budget. In the end, none of the proposals requesting 10 or more full nights were successful. It is good to see that the time domain proposals (which is one of the hot topics in the H2020 programme) continue to be very successful. The CTAC worried that the absence of one expert in stellar astronomy (Frank Grundahl) would have affected the evaluation of the stars and stellar population proposals at the expense of exoplanet proposals. A quick comparison with earlier semesters showed, however, that the outcome of this meeting was statistically not unusual. Thus the CTAC concluded that the proposals were evaluated in an unbiased way.

Topic	N _{prop}	Telescope	N _{prop}
Solar system	2/3	AAT	9
Exoplanet	6/19	CAHA35	8
Stars+stell. pop	5/17	NOT	20
Circumst. med	-/2	TNG	11
Time domain	6/13	rest	1-5
Low-z Universe	-/3		
High-z Universe	2/6		

Table 2: 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 and TDA proposals dominate. Telescope requests are dominated by the demand for high-resolution spectrographs for exoplanet, wide-field capability for stellar research and flexibility for time domain astronomy. The remaining telescopes offered in the call were requested in 1-5 proposals on average. Many proposals request time at more than one telescope, each one of which is included in the statistics.

Proposals were submitted with PIs from 15 different countries, of these proposals from 10/15 countries were approved. As usual, the UK was most active (and successful with 7/18 proposals been awarded time), followed by Germany with 10 (but only one successful) applications. In spite of efforts to specifically motivate astronomers from CEE countries to apply, with 14/63 (22%) proposals their interest was only modest. With a ratio of 5/14 for approved/rejected proposals from CEE (Poland, Slovakia, Greece and Serbia) and 16/49 for approved/rejected proposals from non-CEE countries their ratio was comparable. The CTAC would have been reluctant to "lift up" some more proposals from CEE countries above the cut-off line as they were ranked at least 10 positions below the cut-off line. This is particularly the case for proposals from Poland where only 1/7 could be approved. Many proposals were scientifically very good and would have deserved a better grade but suffered from an inadequate description of the telescope time required. There are two schools this year where proposal writing is one of the topics and this should be addressed.

Changes and recommendations for MTR, CTAC and 2020+

- A number of ideas were discussed on how to react to the MTR which recommends a higher share of telescope time for astronomers from CEE countries. For none of them a clear consensus was found, but rather than artificially giving some of them time, it must be understood why they have been less successful in the past. It may be better to introduce a significant change for 2020+ instead for just one CfP with more changes afterwards. In the end the CTAC decided to discuss this on a case by case basis. The proposals from CEE and non-CEE astronomers may be evaluated separately in the next meeting but this will be discussed in advance. There is common agreement, however, that at least an equal share should be the goal as was achieved this round. This was higher than before.

- Except for a potential separate discussion of the CEE and non-CEE proposals, no changes are foreseen for the next meeting to discuss the 2020A proposals. Grades will be given in steps of 0.5 from 1.0 - 5.0 and proposals will be discussed by category. To save time the very lowest ranked proposals based on the pre-grades may be discussed briefly still making sure the feedback is adequate.

- Although mentioned in the feedback for 2019A and again specifically mentioned in the CfP 2019B a number of PIs still used the old template. The Northstar tool does not check for this. This will be indicated in the feedback for 2019B and in the CfP 2020A again. If PI's still use old templates, the CTAC may reject their proposal.

- As the present contract ends on 31 December 2020, and the proposed pilot study may be rather different in several ways, it may not be appropriate to issue a CfP 2020B for just the few months available at some telescopes. An alternative idea is to issue a CfP 2020A until the end of the H2020 contract. If agreed by the Telescope directors and the OPTICON board John Davies will take care of this and prepare the CfP in due time. Due to the (then) expected larger number of proposals, the CTAC wishes a bit more time for the proposal reviewing (and for finding external referees) before the meeting. Thus the call should be issued with a deadline by mid-August.

- Given the uncertainty of the TNA processes in 2020+, the current CTAC is happy to take care of the 2020B time allocation procedure in its current composition with 6 members. Depending on the number of proposals and the items to discuss the next meeting will last one or two days. The location of the next meeting is TBD.

- The CTAC does not accept a statement that radio astronomy is so different that common TAC processes should not be possible. It might be possible eg to triage the funds for optical only, radio only and combined projects and form either a super-TAC, or TAC-subsets. It is hard to predict the number of proposals for 2020+, but this could be explored in a "Pilot CfP 2021A". If it is of interest, a Radionet representative is invited to attend the next CTAC meeting as an "observer".

- Before the first CfP for 2020+ is issued, it should be clarified: a) how and to which amount proposals from CEE countries will be given time; b) how to deal with projects having clear overlaps with GTO, national calls etc. and/or proposals requesting time to top-up approved national programmes to obtain extra nights on an existing programme. All of these can be done whilst remaining compliant with the rules by clever rotation of PI's and CoI's but this is not in the spirit of the TNA. This increasingly causes painful discussions in the panel meeting.

- For future CTACs the key is to match its composition to the topics likely to be proposed rather than by Agency concerns. A certain number of members from CEE countries should also be considered. This would help to feed back to their communities.

- There is a clear census in the CTAC that in the 2020+ program not only large programs but also small projects requiring a few nights telescope time should be offered.

- Several further items of probably less importance were discussed as well. To keep the report short, they were not given here but will be presented during the TDF by John Davies and Jochen Heidt.

Feedback to all proposers will now be prepared and distributed in the next days . The next call will open by mid-August and the next CTAC meeting will be held somewhere by the end of October 2019.

Jochen Heidt

Heidelberg, May 14, 2019