

Minutes of OTC telecon, Thursday January 19 2006, 19:00 UTC.

2006-01-24. Last revised 2006-01-26, DTE.

Present: Barry Clark, Darrel Emerson (chair), Rick Fisher, Brian Glendenning, Tony Kerr, John Payne, Marian Pospieszalski, Dick Sramek, Dick Thompson & John Webber.

Phil Jewell attended the first half of our meeting, to discuss the long term R&D planning for NRAO, and how best the OTC might contribute.

Minutes of last meeting For reference, the final minutes of our last meeting are at: http://www.tuc.nrao.edu/~demerson/otc/otc_2005-11-14_2.pdf .

Agenda:

1. Updating the OTC 5-year R&D Plan.

As a follow up on our last meeting, we had agreed to make a draft update of our OTC 5-year plan, which we would then discuss with Phil Jewell. We need to plan this work. The most recent OTC plan, and spreadsheets, can be found on <http://www.tuc.nrao.edu/~demerson/otc> .

2. OTC Membership Issues.

The Appendix below shows the original announcement from Fred about the creation of the OTC. In that announcement, he had specified 1-year terms. Other than replacing members who have left NRAO, we have continued with the same membership for more than 3 years. There is a lot to be said for continuity in membership, and we certainly want the observatory's most experienced and wisest members, but should we be bringing some younger engineers into the council?

Note also that Green Bank currently has no direct representation, so whatever else, we should add a new GB member.

Meeting Discussion:

1. Long Term R&D Planning for NRAO, and the OTC 5-year Plan

Phil Jewell had been invited to the meeting, to explain and discuss the current status of NRAO long term and budget planning.

Phil said that NRAO is currently under strong budget pressure, and NRAO management is looking at options. A number of strategic goals are not being met. At a recent AUI board meeting, Phil had addressed this, emphasizing that NRAO cannot afford to lose sight of these goals. The current budget situation makes this difficult, with the result that NRAO is at a dangerously low level of investment in technical development. Phil said that the OTC November 2004 5-year R&D plan was very good, and it was hoped that at least all our #1 priorities would be funded. In the OTC's future deliberations, we should look again especially at our #1 priorities, and make whatever revisions or reassessments we thought to be appropriate. Doing so now would be extremely helpful and timely.

Tony reminded us that the #1 priorities had represented the essential projects, but that we had listed projects within 3 priority levels. He asked Phil if we should maintain these 3 levels, or would it be preferable to consolidate into #1 and #2 priority categories? Phil responded that we could consolidate this way if we wished, but that we should keep the basic hierarchy of priorities.

Timescale: There is an AUI Board Meeting on 15 February, but this will probably just be an advisory meeting, with no firm decisions being taken. NRAO is waiting for the results of the Senior Review, but would need recommendations within 1 or 2 months. Phil said it would be most helpful to receive the OTC revision within 4 to 6 weeks, so that there could be some more iteration. It would be preferable to have our input sooner, rather than something more polished but which arrived later.

On the issue of seeking approval of the NRAO Scientists; Phil said that the OTC was an advisory body, and not obliged to solicit directly approval from the Scientists – although hopefully the OTC is already representative of scientific preferences.

Marian asked if we should be giving more emphasis to projects with immediate relevance to NRAO's own telescopes. Phil agreed that in our last document we had dealt more with core projects than specific telescope instrumentation. John Webber suggested that we should perhaps point out in our revised text which topics are directly relevant to NRAO telescopes. Phil agreed this would be helpful.

Phil asked for clarification in our cost table: it was not clear whether 12 FTEs listed would be new hires, or were already part of the NRAO workforce. These were not intended to be new staff, but John W. agreed we can be more specific in our revised document.

Phil agreed to convey the message from OTC that Technology Development is one of NRAO's strategic goals.

Dick T. suggested that the some estimates of times to first results and applicability to existing or planned instruments should be added to the project descriptions in the plan. This would be useful to management in deciding what can be supported in the current tight-budget situation.

OTC action: we will work on revising our budget document, via email. As a start to this, Tony will circulate to the OTC the task assignments to OTC members that we had used in preparation of the existing document. We will try to iterate so far as possible via email, but probably with another teleconference in about 4 weeks.

[Shortly after the meeting, Tony sent this message to OTC members:
The R&D Plan task assignments from Oct 2004 are at
<http://www.cv.nrao.edu/~akerr/R&DplanAsignments.pdf>]

2. OTC Membership

Darrel reminded the meeting that Fred's original announcement in November 2002 of the OTC (see the Appendix below) had specified 1-year terms. Most OTC members have been serving now for more than 3 years. What should we recommend to Fred about future OTC membership policy?

At this point there were several volunteers who declared themselves to be happy to rotate off the OTC, but which Darrel refused to acknowledge.

It is certainly important to welcome fresh blood into the group, but at the same time experience and wisdom is an important qualification for the OTC; some continuity in the membership is also important.

Brian suggested that perhaps a 5-year membership term would be more appropriate. The role of the OTC was also discussed; does it have executive powers, or is it purely advisory? Darrel responded that in his understanding that the OTC had been created primarily to advise the Director, rather than having any executive powers in its own right. John W. commented that about 15 years ago there had been a committee responsible for allocation of R.E. budgets, which had much more power than the OTC has today. Today's poor level of funding is one factor that has affected this. Another intended role of the OTC is to foster communication and collaboration between the sites on technical issues and projects; we have not been as successful in this role as we might have been.

Darrel volunteered to draft a recommendation to the Director on the future membership policy for the OTC. This would be discussed within the OTC by email.

Immediate membership additions: it was agreed the OTC should recommend to Fred that Roger Norrod be invited to join the OTC, as a representative from Green Bank. It was

also agreed that Walter Brisken in Socorro be invited to join, as a first step to bringing younger blood into the group.

3. Action Items

1. Tony Kerr would start the ball rolling by circulating to the OTC our earlier assignments, used in the creation of our November 2004 R&D Planning document. [Already done.] We will then collectively work on updating the document, coordinating by email, with the goal of having a draft update within one month.
2. Darrel will draft a document to be presented Fred, with recommendations on future membership policy for the OTC.
3. Darrel will recommend to Fred that Roger Norrod and Walter Brisken be invited as new OTC members.

DTE, 2006-01-24.

APPENDIX

This is the original email announcement from Fred Lo, in November 2002, creating the OTC.

----- Original 2002 Message -----

Subject: [allemloy] NRAO Observatory Technical Council (OTC)

Date: Thu, 14 Nov 2002 13:53:57 -0500

From: Billie Rodriguez <brodrigu@nrao.edu>

To: allemloy <allemloy@nrao.edu>

I am pleased to announce the creation of an Observatory Technical Council. This council will advise the NRAO Director on technical issues that confront the Observatory, and will provide Observatory-wide perspective and coordination in all technical areas, including future planning and R&D, current operations and problems, and projects such as the EVLA and ALMA.

The members of this council have been asked to serve initially for a one-year term. The council is to be chaired by Darrel Emerson, with members L. D'Addario, B. Clark, R. Fisher, B. Glendenning, A. Kerr, P. Napier, J. Payne, R. Sramek, A. R. Thompson and J. Webber. The working of the Council will be reviewed in a year's time, with the opportunity then of rotating the membership of the Council among other NRAO staff members. The Council may also from time to time invite experts from outside the NRAO to give advice on specific issues.

The intent is that the Council be a pro-active body, not a passive one waiting to be consulted. The Council is to commence its work immediately.

Fred K. Y. Lo
November 14, 2002