

The Observatory Technical Council (OTC): Recent Activities.

April 23 2004.

Meetings:

The OTC now has regular teleconferences, about once per month, with correspondence between members, mainly via email, in between teleconferences.

Membership: The current membership (April 2004) is:

Darrel Emerson (chair), Barry Clark, Larry D'Addario, Rick Fisher, Brian Glendenning, Tony Kerr, Peter Napier, John Payne, Dick Sramek, Dick Thompson and John Webber.

Former OTC member Lee King has retired from NRAO, but will shortly be replaced to continue to bring Mechanical Engineering expertise to the group. The group also consults with outside experts when considered helpful; recent examples include Sandy Weinreb and Hein Hvatum.

Minutes: Minutes and other material from the OTC's deliberations and recommendations will become available at <http://www.tuc.nrao.edu/~demerson/otc.html> .

Charge: The NRAO Director has reiterated the Charge to the OTC as follows:

"I think the most critical issue here is how to prioritize and position NRAO R+D activities with a view to the future. You need to keep up with the discussions that Rick Fisher has been having with the CDL, the future instrumentation plans for the GBT, the ALMA R+D areas (e.g. now that the Japanese may not be able to provide band10 by 2012, this will open up an opportunity for other groups to demonstrate alternate band10 sources), SKA developments,...

Issues such as how to compete for external funding and a plan to establish the next generation in engineering R+D need to be addressed. e.g. how to support young people like Groppi and Brinken. How to recruit more people like them? How to reorganize NRAO/CDL approaches to include training of the next generation? How is the NRAO going to maintain a leadership position in the important areas of radio astronomy R+D

Re the OTC charges, in the absence of an Observatory Technical Leader, the OTC has to play a more proactive role. Given the prior OTC effort that resulted in a comprehensive "wish list" that went into the AUI proposal, now it is important to formulate an actual plan for the future, looking ahead 5 years and 10 years, which will require a prioritization of importance and urgency, so that that we can actually move forward under a more limited budget scenario."

Recent Action List: The OTC is preparing recommendations to the Director on the following, and other, topics:

- The OTC is looking at a reprioritization of the R&D items that were listed in the recent AUI proposal to NSF.
- It is looking into alternative funding options for specific projects, which might become available, for example, through greater university collaboration.
- The OTC has been concerned at the "NRAO Environment" for research engineering, and is working on recommendations to be made to the Director that might improve this, to foster continued, original engineering search that will be of benefit to Radio Astronomy, and maintain the NRAO's reputation in this area.