Instructions for the Proposal Review Panel

Guidelines:

The key function of the proposal review panel is to review and prioritize proposals based on their scientific merit and their advancement of scientific knowledge. The science program made up from reviews of a well-functioning panel ideally reflects the scientific community’s judgment of what investigations are important, timely, and influential. As such, the prime criterion for the review is the scientific content, balanced by the amount of time requested, and technical feasibility. This includes an assessment of risk – a well-reasoned, novel, but unconventional and potentially risky approach may be reviewed favorably if the potential payoff is outstanding and if it makes excellent use of the facility, but its feasibility must be discussed clearly in the proposal. Also, reviewers may consider the possibility that the science questions could be addressed better with different observations than those proposed, or if suitable data exists in public data archives. And, finally, panel members may penalize proposals that violate the formatting restrictions given in the guidelines at their discretion, if the violation provides an unfair advantage (such as significant additional text to present the science case).

We will follow the grading scheme used at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, using a scale from 0.1 (excellent) to 9.9 (poor). Please submit your grades for each proposal by Wednesday, December 2, 5:00 pm, per e-mail to Dominik. Your individual grades will be confidential. The grades of each reviewer will be re-normalized in the process, but please make an effort to use the range of the grading scale (if you give similar grades to many proposals, your grades may have less of an impact in the ranking). Also, to be clear, the outcome of the ranking process will not be a direct reflection of your grade for the course – so please keep this apart from your consideration.

The review panel will be provided with averaged grades (informed by the confidential individual grades from each reviewer) for each proposal to guide the review process (e.g., the panel may choose to discuss proposals in ranking order). These averaged grades can be modified by the panel during the review meeting if required. Based on the finalized grades, the panel will make a recommendation for allocating observing time within a contingency provided at the time of the meeting.

At the beginning of the panel meeting, the committee will elect a panel chair. The chair will be responsible for keeping the meeting on time, and to make sure that each proposal is given sufficient time for discussion. The chair will also be responsible for keeping track of conflicts of interest. The most common form of a conflict, and the one that applies here for each proposal, is if a panel member is PI or co-I of a proposal. In many panels, another form of conflict occurs if a panel member is at the same institution or department as the PI or a co-I on a given proposal – but for obvious reasons, this rule does not apply to this panel. Other possible reasons for conflicts are family/collaborator relations, or current/former student/advisor relationships – or anything else that would lead a reviewer to believe that they may not be able to render a fair and impartial judgment on the scientific merit of a proposal. If a panel member is conflicted, the
member is expected to leave the room and stay out of hearing distance. But please don’t stray too far, because you will be called back in when the discussion moves to the next proposal. Please do not assign a grade to proposals on which you have a conflict.

Each panel member will be assigned one primary and one secondary proposal. Panel members will lead the discussion on their primary proposal, providing a short summary of the content, followed by a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses during the panel meeting. The secondary reviewer can then make additions to the discussion, before the discussion is opened up to the full panel. The secondary reviewer is also responsible for taking notes during the discussion. Based on these notes, the primary and secondary reviewer will write a brief (100-200 word) critique for the proposal that represents a consensus review based on the panel discussion. If different reviewers come to different conclusions, please try to resolve this in the panel discussions to reach a consensus, but also give room to the range of (valid) opinions in the critique. Thus, please have an active discussion – if a proposal receives a low grade but only positive points in the critique, this will not be very helpful to the PI. Make sure to give a clear indication of what led to the ranking. It may be useful to have notes in the same style prepared in time for the discussion panel meeting to make the discussion and write-up more time efficient.

The critique should have the following sections:

- title/PI information
- time requested
- final panel grade
- brief summary
- strengths
- weaknesses
- recommended time allocation

Please take a constructive approach to the critiques and keep a positive tone. The critique may also contain a “confidential” section for notes that you would like to pass on to Dominik but not distribute to the PI. This section could contain some information on factors that you felt did not fit into the above categories but that had an impact on the panel decision. We expect that this section will be used rarely. Please submit your finalized critiques by Monday, December 7, 12:00 pm.