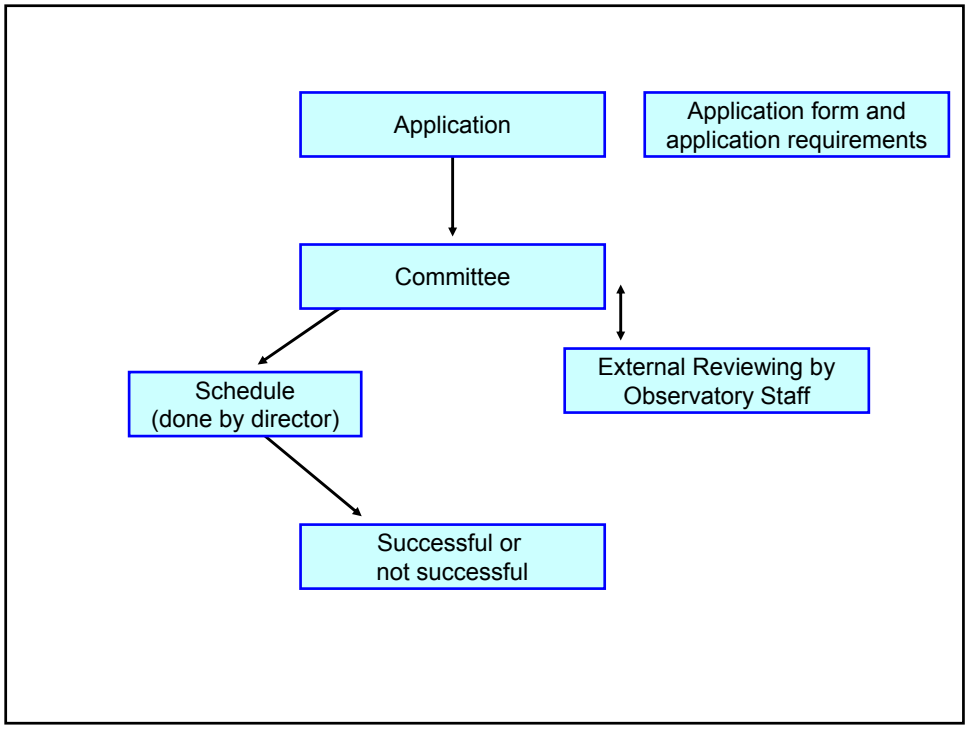

How to apply for observing time?


Application
Application form and application requirements
Committee
External Reviewing by Observatory Staff
Schedule (done by director)
Successful or not successful

General rules for applications

- Be aware that your readers are busy people. The committee will receive 60-80 proposals and they can't spend hours on each proposal. Their job is to select the most promising observing projects.
- **It is your task and in your own interest to get the information across as effectively and convincingly as at all possible.**

General rules for applications

- The title of the application is very important
- Make sure you catch the interest of the reader in the first 1-3 lines!
- Try to set an interesting scene already in the first sentence, and make it short. The committee will have 60-80 proposals to read, and you want them to maintain interest in yours until the end and not drowse off halfway on p. 1 because you have not yet said anything of interest *to them*.
- Remember, they are likely not specialists in your field and they will not see the broad interest of your proposal, unless you explain in terms they will understand what it will do to advance the general field of cosmology, galaxy formation, enrichment of the ISM, stellar evolution, planet formation, or whatever. Get this up front, then demonstrate below that you do know the field and have thought about the details.

General rules for applications

- Use references right: Don't waste your limited space with extensive literature lists, but refer to a few key, up-to-date papers that set the stage (recent reviews are great), include some of your own papers as natural to demonstrate that you have the relevant experience (but not too many)
- Then point out clearly how you propose to advance relative to the studies you cite. But just use the references to show that you are on top of the field and its literature; do not assume that the referees know them already or – even less – will read them when they review your application. But a committee member might make a spot check or two, and you will want her to agree with your choice.

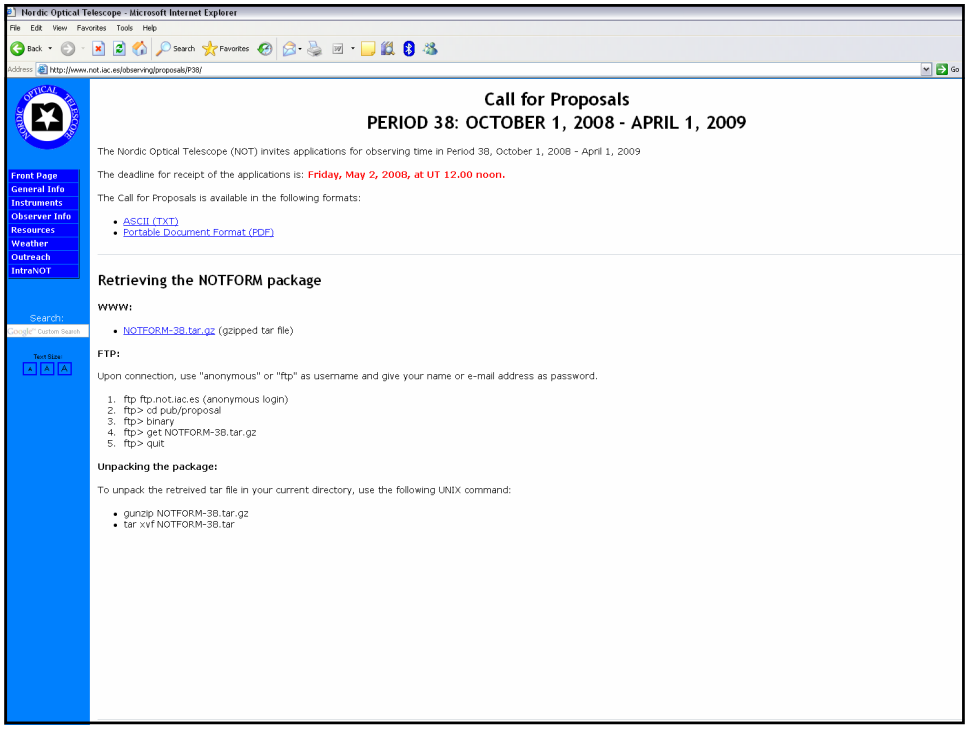
Observing Proposals

- Scientific content – Scientific background
- Scientific Impact – Unique idea?
  Advancing our understanding of the field in question?
- Telescope / Instrument
- Number of Observing nights
- Observing Requirements
- Previous experience (student program)

Proposal text

- Evaluation Committee: “OPC”
  - Evaluation meeting: Grading proposals
  - experts in many different fields
  - different opinions
  - many proposals to read!

Simple, clear and focused



A GUIDE FOR SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS (by Jan Erik Solheim)

All observing time applications use the Latex proposal form that was introduced in 2003.

Four of the six available pages deal with standard information, like who you and your targets are, what instrument you want to use, etc.

The last two pages are reserved for your project description. *These two are the most important pages of the whole proposal!*

Always remember that there is not enough observing time for all acceptable projects. OPC members know this and make great efforts to understand the arguments of each application, but they cannot be specialists in every field.

You must convince them that your proposal is a better use of NOT time than (most of) the others; just being OK is not good enough. The more effectively you argue your case, the better for you! But don't exaggerate, for OPC members are active users of the telescope and know its strong and weak points already.

*Describe first the general scientific context and main goals of the proposal **clearly** in terms that are understandable for someone outside your own field.*

*Then argue **equally clearly** how your proposed project will contribute **significantly** to advancing the general subject (e.g. stellar evolution theory rather than just some random star).*

*Also take care to explain **why you need NOT** rather than some other telescope, and why you need dark time if you ask for it. Give key references, so the OPC sees that you know the field.*

Finally, describe how the data reduction and analysis will be done, so your results will reach the literature in a reasonable time.

After proposal submission, OPC members have 3-4 weeks to review all the proposals and mail their preliminary ranking (1=best, 5=worst) to the chairperson, who rescales them to a uniform system and computes an average for each proposal.

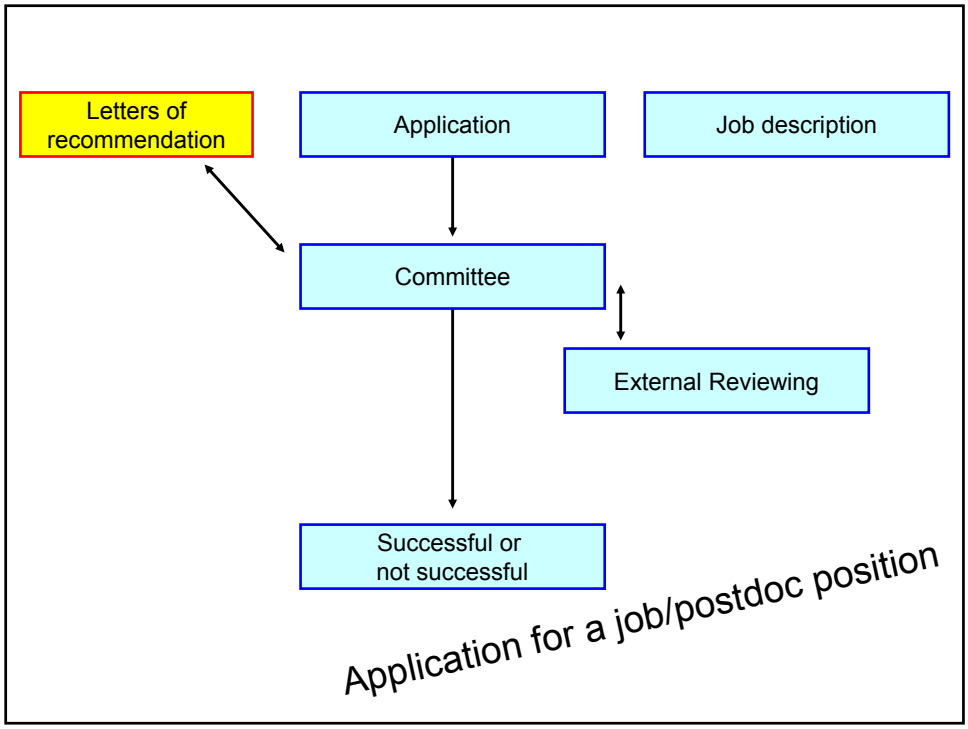
The chairperson also appoints a *Primary Reviewer* for each proposal, who checks any unclear points in the literature or with the proposer and introduces the proposal at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the NOT Astronomer-in-Charge provides a report on any technical issues in the proposals.

The OPC meeting is a key part of the process and usually takes 2 days. Because members read the proposals from different viewpoints, the discussion focuses on understanding the reasons for any initial differences of opinion, and members often modify their initial rating as a result of the discussion.

Typical questions are:
• Why is this project of *general* astrophysical interest?
• Will it make a *real* step forward?
• Does it use the special strengths of NOT (UV sensitivity, fast photometry, ...), or could it be done better elsewhere?
• Are convincing arguments given for the size of sample and amount of observing time requested?
• Is dark time *really* needed?
• How many years will it take to complete the project, and is there a way to define when it *is* fi nished?
• Does the P.I. have a credible publication record?
• Have results from previous observing runs at NOT been published (or was the weather just bad!)?

After the discussion, new average ratings are computed and the proposals re-sorted. The NOT Director records the ratings and any comments made on each proposal, so the precise wording is agreed on the spot. After the meeting, the Director schedules projects from the top of the list and as far down as time allows, and forwards any comments or advice from the OPC when informing each P.I. of the approval or rejection of the proposal.



For job applications, make sure to give the impression that this is the job you are dying to get, and that you could make a special contribution to the group.

Check out their web sites to see what people do, note whom you would like to work with or whom you would like to take an interest in you, refer favourably to some of their recent papers, and explain how you would plan to add new and interesting facets to these projects.

Of course you then need to make clear that you have the required background for the job, but it will be assumed that applicants generally do, so get them excited about you first; then they will check your credentials with a favourable eye rather than a sceptical one.