# Observing program checkout

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May 30, 2002

As more observers are scheduled on the GBT, our effort to prepare for and support the observers will increase. Up to now we have organized this effort in a loose fashion. Although the support we've provided has been very successful, the expected increased flux of observers probably requires we formalize how we handle preparing for observers.

Phil has made this support effort a priority since it not only will better guarantee successful observing but it will shake out bugs in the system and improve system reliability and robustness. He has already assigned us proposals that are to be scheduled by the end of summer.

The following is a straw man plan that I'm expecting we will want to comment on and improve. A checklist seemed like a good way of organizing the plan.

### Read the proposal...

Read the proposal soon after it is assigned to you for technical issues like the use of unsupported systems or modes.

[ ] Create a list of the desired receiver(s), backends, bandwidths, frequency resolution, ... and determine whether the desired combination of hardware is possible. Make special note of any hardware or hardware mode that has not yet been designated as 'supported'. Consider whether a different set of hardware would make better sense.

[ ] Determine the observing modes. Do you think an alternate mode might be better? Has the desired hardware and observing modes been used in combination before?

[ ] Recheck their calculation of proposed observing time. Some types of observing might require additional time if, for example, their desired hardware or observing mode isn't available but another comparable mode is available but requires more telescope time.

[ ] Inform Phil and Carl if you think the proposal has possible technical flaws or if the required hardware, observing modes, software won't be available in a reasonable time.

[ ] If the proposal requests an unsupported observing or hardware mode, or a new data analysis tool, you should inform Phil, John, Richard, Carl, and me as soon as possible. Hold off any work on the proposal until we have had a chance to set priorities, probably after discussing the proposal at the next commissioning or Aips++ meeting.

## Create a test plan...

Create a plan describing what tests will be needed to prepare for the observation.

[ ] What are the new pieces of hardware, software, observing modes, etc. that are not yet 'officially' supported.

[ ] What are the tests needed to have all aspects of the proposal 'officially' supported. Initial tests might be of subsystems but the final test should be a set of observations using exactly the observer's requested hardware and observing modes.

[ ] Provide me with a list of the tests and estimates of the time needed to perform them. I will then place them in the commissioning schedule.

## Contact the PI...

Contact the PI informing him or her that you will be their support person.

[ ] Ask if they have reconsidered how they want to observe, especially with regards to desired hardware, observing modes, ...

[ ] Ask if they have any questions about the telescope, observing modes, hardware, travel, logistics, ....

[ ] You may suggest alternatives to their plans if you think their observing would benefit. In most cases the observer will be eager to hear a 'pros' ideas. However, we should remember in such conversations that the observer is always in control of the observation. Be tactful, don't push.

[ ] Inform the observer of the tests you will be making to prepare for their observing. If you think it appropriate, ask if they want to be involved in or see some of the results.

[ ] Tell them that their proposal will be scheduled after we have ascertained the tests have been successful.

[ ] Your conversation might require a change in your test plans or in the scheduling of the proposal. Notify Carl or me of such changes.

## Perform the tests...

[ ] Perform the tests and provide weekly updates on their progress. Keep the observer informed as well if it seems appropriate.

[ ] After the tests have been successful, warn Carl that he should consider scheduling the proposal. Keep Carl informed of your travel plans so that he can try to schedule your supported proposals when you are in town. You should tell me if, during the observers stay, you will need backup from another commissioner.

[ ] If warranted, write up a summary of the results of the test.

## Re-contact the observer...

[ ] Carl or Becky should inform you of the observer's expected arrival date.

[ ] Send a note to first-time observers telling them how and when they can find you after they arrive in Green Bank.

[ ] Provide information of where they can find the "User's Manual"

## Host the observer...

We each have our own style of interacting with observers.  Here are some of my suggestions:

[ ] After the observers arrive, either Becky, Sherry, Shirley, ... will show them what office, desk they can use .  But, we should be prepared to provide them with the same kind of logistical support.

[ ] Re-verify with the observer their plans for observing.

[ ] Educate the observer about the system.  Only describe what they will need to know for their observations, to handle typical problems, and changes in configuration.

[ ] Help the observer with setting up of their observation for their first session.  We should expect the observer will one day be able to set up subsequent sessions without much support.  Although we might be doing a good portion of the setup work, the observer must always feel that he or she is in control.  Even if a problem arises, always ask before taking over -- "Do you mind if I try to...."

[ ] Watch how the observers use the system and make note of anything they seem to have problems with or stumble over.  Letting them stumble is many times better than lending a hand.

[ ] The operators will be our first line of "defense" when problems arise.  However, we should not expect an operator to spend more than 10 minutes on a problem before calling in someone, which, in many cases, will be one of us.  Thus, keep the operator loosely informed of your plans during the time one of your observers is on the telescope.  The remaining commissioners should expect to back you up if you cannot be reached.

[ ] Make enough visits to the control room to give the observers the feeling you are always available.  You should expect the operator to keep you informed of notable events.

[ ] Strongly suggest the observers should fill in a comment sheet BEFORE they leave.  It is not our job to rebuke criticisms in comment sheets.  Talk to Phil about anything serious before the observer has had a chance to write his or her comments.

[ ] Brief us afterwards on the success of the observing, the problems the observers had, and your recommendations for improvements.

[ ] Pat yourself on the back.