

NOIRLab Policies for the Allocation of Observing Time

Observing time for programs at the NSF's NOIRLab is allocated via peer review twice a year. Observing time is available on the Gemini North and South Telescopes, at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American and Kitt Peak National Observatories. Community-access time on private telescopes has also been available through the NSF TSIP Program.

Tools for applying for telescope time can be obtained at:

<https://time-allocation.noirlab.edu/#/>

Types of Observing Proposals

Investigators may submit either **Standard** or **Survey** proposals for telescope time on facilities available through NOIRLab.

Standard Proposals: These are traditional proposals for observing time allocated on a semester basis. Standard proposals generally request modest amounts of time, although requests for long runs are also considered. Long term status may be requested as part of a Standard proposal.

Survey Proposals: NOIR Lab makes a substantial amount of time available on all facilities to which it provides access for surveys. Surveys are not merely large-scale projects or projects that aim to study complete samples. A survey is a significant observational program which

- addresses novel, well-focused scientific goals;
- enables scientific programs requiring large, statistically complete, and homogeneous data;
- provides a basis for planning more detailed follow-up studies;
- enables extensive archival research; and
- represents a significant enhancement over existing surveys.

Successful programs are expected to be completed in 3 years or less. Data must be processed with a well-tested and well-documented pipeline, must be archived in a convenient format, and must be made publicly available no longer than one year after the first images are pipeline processed.

Deadlines for the Submission of Telescope Proposals

Proposals for telescope time at NOIRLab facilities are accepted semi-annually on **the last day in March** for the observing period August - January and on **the last day of September** for the observing period February-July. Proposals are accepted until midnight MST on the due dates.

Who Can Apply for Telescope Time?

Applications for telescope time at NOIRLab facilities are welcome from all astronomers and students.

Applications from astronomers and students who work at non-U.S. institutions must indicate why the project cannot be done using other facilities available to the investigators and why U.S. national facilities are needed.

Criteria for the Evaluation of Telescope Proposals

Telescope time at NOIRLab facilities will be awarded on the basis of scientific merit.

The criteria for evaluating scientific merit of proposals for time on NOIRLab facilities are:

- The relevance and importance of the proposal within the area of specialization.
- The relevance and importance of the proposal in the larger context of astronomical research.
- The suitability of the experimental design to achieve the scientific goals (including sample size, required S/N, approach to deal with difficult data reduction problems, etc.).
- The significance of the proposed observations for the completion of the project.
- The likelihood that the researchers will complete the project and publish their results and the adequacy of the resources available to them in order to do this.
- The broader impacts of the proposed research, for example, in education and public awareness of science.

In addition, the value of the proposed research to the educational and career development of the investigators may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

For Survey Proposals, additional criteria related to the broader goals of survey programs are applied, including how the data could be used after the survey is complete and how much of an educational component may be involved.

For CTIO proposals, preference may be given to proposals which can only be carried out in the southern hemisphere.

Proposals from Graduate Students

Travel and on-site expenses of graduate students at U.S. institutions observing as part of a Ph.D thesis program at Gemini Observatory, KPNO, CTIO, or at private observatories through community-access programs, will be paid by NOIR Lab. To qualify, the proposal must be designated as a thesis at the time the proposal is submitted, and the proposal must be accompanied by a [Thesis Student Information Form](#). This web-based form should be completed by the student's faculty advisor and must be submitted within two business days after the proposal deadline in order to be included for review by the TAC. Proposals submitted without an accompanying completed Thesis Student Information Form will not be considered as Thesis proposals by the TAC. Late submissions will not be considered for funding support.

If a proposal is not a Thesis Proposal, but a graduate student is the principal investigator or is to be primarily responsible for the observing, the student's faculty advisor must complete the [Thesis Student Information Form](#) stating that the student has the requisite experience and competence to carry out the observations.

Thesis-student travel reimbursement **must** be coordinated with the respective observatories for KPNO and CTIO related travel, with NSSC for Gemini travel, and with Mia Hartman for travel related to community-access time at private observatories (e.g. Keck, MMT, Magellan, Palomar). Reimbursement will require submitting a signed NOIR Lab [Travel Expense Form](#) with original receipts for airline tickets and other appropriate information (e.g. printouts from the Web).

Reimbursement requests should be submitted within 30 days of the completion of the approved travel. The student (or organization) should receive reimbursement within three to four weeks.

Proposals for Long Term Status

NOIR Lab will accept proposals for scientific programs that extend beyond a single semester. Long-term status may be granted to a proposal for which the principal science goal of the proposal cannot be achieved without the full allocation of time. An investigator who wishes to request long-term status should include a summary of the request (e.g., "six nights per semester for four semesters") in the appropriate section of the proposal form.

If long-term status is granted, a progress report must be submitted each subsequent semester to inform the TAC that appropriate progress is being made. Progress reports should briefly summarize the scientific justification, provide a detailed discussion of progress to date, restate the number of observing runs still needed to complete the project, and give details needed for scheduling the proposal in the next semester.

Although the granting of long-term status by the TAC does carry with it a commitment for observing time in future semesters, NOIR Lab reserves the right to terminate long-term status on the advice of the TAC if insufficient information concerning the progress of the project has been supplied by the Principal Investigator or in the event of telescope closures.

CTIO Long Term Requests

All investigators applying for long-term status for programs at CTIO must consult with the appropriate [instrument scientist\(s\)](#) regarding long term requests well before the proposal deadline, and before submitting the proposal.

Proposals for Community Access Time

NOIR Lab accepts proposals from the astronomical community for time at private observatories. These have included the 10-m telescopes of the [W.M. Keck Observatory](#), the 6.5-m [MMT](#), and [Magellan](#) telescopes, the [Hale](#) 200" telescope at Palomar Observatory, and the [Hobby-Eberly Telescope](#) at McDonald Observatory. These nights are available as a consequence of NSF funding for facility class instruments through the Facility Instrumentation and [TSIP](#) programs, and the [ReSTAR](#) program. Proposals are reviewed by the NOIR Lab TAC, and recommendations for scheduling will be forwarded to the respective observatories.

Proposals from all investigators, including those with access through other channels, will be accepted and reviewed without prejudice. In the case of proposals for MMT time recommended through the NOIR Lab review process that are substantially similar in experimental design and scientific goals to projects already underway at SAO or UAO, priority will be given to the staffs at the host institutions. This policy is subject to joint review by the NOIR Lab, SAO, and UAO directors.

The NOIR Lab TAC process assigns time on many telescopes that are also scheduled by other TACs; thus PIs can sometimes propose for the same resource for the same project through independent routes. The NOAO policy is not to schedule time through its TAC for a proposal by a PI/team that has already been granted time by a different TAC on the same telescope/instrument during the same

observing season. Hence, to ensure that the same proposal is not multiply scheduled, the Director will, when possible, review the NOAO TAC recommendations along with the results of other TACs and work with the proposal PIs as necessary to resolve possible conflicts.

Data obtained under this program may be placed in the NOIR Lab's data archives under the same ground rules as data obtained at NOIR Lab's own telescopes.

Proposals to Observe Targets of Opportunity

NOIR Lab encourages proposals for observations of targets of opportunity on its telescopes. Target of Opportunity (TOO) proposals may be of different types. If the targets occur unpredictably but frequently (e.g., novae, gamma ray bursts), investigators should prepare a standard proposal to be reviewed by the TAC. If the scientific merit of the proposal is high, CTIO or KPNO will agree to make available a limited amount of telescope time to the investigator should an appropriate event occur during the semester. For additional details, please see the [TOO Policies for CTIO and KPNO](#) web page.

Proposers for TOO observations with the Gemini telescopes should refer to the [Gemini Quick-Response Process](#) web page.

When events which are genuinely rare and of major astronomical significance (e.g., a supernova in a local group galaxy) occur, interested investigators should immediately contact the appropriate site Director by fax or email. Special arrangements may be made by the Director to obtain critical observations. For CTIO send such requests to ctio@noao.edu, and for KPNO send requests to kpno@noao.edu. Such requests for Gemini observations should be sent to the Gemini Director and the Associate Director for the appropriate Gemini Telescope.

Finally, investigators often submit short requests for data of particular objects which exhibit phenomena of interest (e.g., a Be star in outburst). A notification system is available to alert scheduled observers to unusual events for which small amounts of data may be useful. Such data may be obtained at the discretion of the scheduled observer.

Data Rights Policies and Proprietary Periods

The duration of the proprietary period is normally 18 months from the time the data is collected at the telescopes. In certain infrequent cases, the NOIR Lab Director may designate a shorter proprietary period. Investigators may also decide

to voluntarily shorten or waive the proprietary period. Requests to extend the proprietary period must be approved by the NOIR Lab Director. Additional details can be found on our [Data Rights](#) page.

Guidelines for KPNO and CTIO Telescope Usage

Due to ongoing budgetary limitations, proposals for time on KPNO and CTIO telescopes will be subject to the following restrictions.

KPNO

- KPNO facility instruments will be scheduled for minimum blocks of 2 weeks on all telescopes.
- The Mayall 4-m telescope will typically be scheduled for runs of no less than 4 nights.
- Proposals for shorter run lengths will be considered based on their science merits; KPNO will endeavor to schedule the highly ranked proposals.

CTIO

- CTIO instruments will be scheduled for minimum blocks of 6 days. Runs have not been restricted. However, runs of less than 6 nights with some instruments may not be schedulable.

Comments and/or suggestions, may be directed to proposal-help@noirlab.edu