

Canadian Astronomical Society Société Canadienne d'Astronomie

Meeting of the Board of Directors via videoconference

Minutes for Dec. 15, 2021, 11:00-13:00 ET

Present:

Board Members:

Rob Thacker (Acting President)
Erik Rosolowsky (Acting Vice President)
Judith Irwin (Secretary)
Lewis Knee (Treasurer)
Laura Parker (Director)
Nicole St-Louis (Director)
Étienne Artigau (Director)
Ivana Damjanov (Director)

1. Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted by consensus.

2. Minutes from Nov. 10 Board meeting

Moved by Rob and seconded by Ivana, to accept the minutes of the previous Board meeting.
Passed.

3. President's Report

The SKA cooperation agreement has been announced. This is an interim agreement that takes our involvement to 2023. Enormous thanks to everyone involved in bringing this to pass, both inside and outside of CASCA. Special thanks to Kristine Spekkens for her SKA efforts.

The need for a long-term commitment is still there, and the coalition is formulating a plan to meet with government officials so that this issue can be expedited.

Moved by Rob and seconded by Laura to temporarily move to an in-camera session. Passed.

Moved by Rob and seconded by Erik to return to a normal open session. Passed.

4. Vice President's Report, Including Committee Reports

The complete VP's report will be posted on the CASCA website soon. A few highlights are mentioned here.

— The CASCA/ACURA TMT Advisory Committee (CATAC): Policy discussions are ongoing in Hawaii and CATAC is watching these developments closely.

— Computation and Data Committee (CDC): The development of NDRIO is proceeding with an expected transition of services from Compute Canada to the newly named Digital Research Alliance of Canada in April. It remains to be seen how much of an improvement will result from this change.

— Equity and Inclusivity Committee (EIC): The EIC has requested clarification of their role in implementing LRP recommendations. The Board should revisit the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the EIC to see how improvements can be made. In particular, the revised TORs should revise their role vis-a-vis LCRIC (the Long Range Plan Community Recommendations Implementation Committee). The Board would like to see LCRIC reach out to the EIC on matters for which their advice could be beneficial. The EIC reviewed the list of speakers for the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) regarding the list of speakers and noted that the SOC had appropriately considered the diversity and inclusivity of their speaker list. The Board noted that any session that has 'Indigenous' in the title should have representation by Indigenous astronomer(s). Erik sent the draft committee guideline document to the EIC. They did not have specific issues with it, but Kristine Spekkens will talk to Erik further about some of her ideas.

— Education and Public Outreach (EPO): Erik would like suggestions from the EPO and others about how to collect information about EPO events run by the membership. One option that was discussed was to do a single annual reporting request, potentially at the time of the AGM. The EPO continues to work on their social media policy and activities.

— Ground-Based Astronomy Committee (GAC): Canadian astronomers have been doing well in supporting several different astronomical projects through CFI support in different stages (CCATp/FYST, CHORD, Rubin participation, MSE, and CHORD). CanTAC (the Canadian Time Allocation Committee) has brought in dual anonymous peer review (DAPR). Erik noted that a study of DAPR in the ALMA proposal process eliminated nearly all demographic biases in proposal review. The Canadian community is now completely divested of the JCMT and no money from Canadian Universities is flowing to this observatory. The only ongoing activity involves individual Canadian scientists who may be involved in legacy surveys, enabled by NRC in-kind contributions of running the JCMT archive. Congratulations to NRC and DRAO for successfully participating in getting approved for a development project to build ALMA's replacement correlator.

— Graduate Students Committee (GSC): Graduate students are involved in many activities that appear to be doing well.

— Postdoc Committee: This committee is preparing to carry out an employment survey and has responded positively to Board suggestions on survey process. The Board recognized that a standard operating procedure for surveys of the membership was needed. They would like the Board to consider endorsing a document on best practices for postdoc recruitment.

— Joint Committee on Space Astronomy (JCSA): No report was received from the JCSA, in spite of email reminders.

– Awards Committee: No report was received though the Board recognizes that no significant activity would have occurred recently.

5. Secretary's Report

The complete Secretary's Report will be posted on the CASCA website soon. A few highlights are mentioned here.

Our membership is quite stable with approximately the same number of members as we had at this time last year. An improvement is that the number of people who are two years in arrears has declined from 78 last year to 23 this year. People are counted as being one year in arrears if they have not yet paid for the 2021-22 year. Some of these people are likely to pay if sent a reminder which will be done soon. Total number of people including those who are one year in arrears is 561. There are no undergraduate members yet, although this was introduced as a new category at the last AGM. It is likely that some will join before the next AGM.

The CASCA exploder list (using 'sendinblue') contains 647 names which is far above the total number of CASCA members. Some individuals are listed twice because they wanted a home email address included during the pandemic. However, it is clear that there are people are receiving CASCA emails who probably shouldn't be. Therefore the list needs to be pruned. There have also been some issues with sendinblue automatically placing people on the 'blacklist' if something went wrong with their local computer during an email campaign. As of today, all people to whom this occurred have been restored to the regular list and should be receiving CASCA emails again. The Secretary has asked the Webmaster to contact sendinblue and see if this situation can be avoided in the future.

6. Treasurer's Report

The complete Treasurer's Report will be posted on the CASCA website soon. A few highlights are mentioned here.

Currently, CASCA's finances are very stable. The cash-in-hand is roughly where it was last year at this time. The membership drive went relatively smoothly with 90% of the members paying dues through PayPal. Donations were also up, largely because of a generous donation from one member. Our investments have made a strong rebound after a dip early in the pandemic.

Our administrator, Jessica Marsano, was offered and accepted a new 2-year contract. Lewis has agreed to continue on as Treasurer for another 3 year term.

The last AGM resulted in a surplus which is being returned to CASCA coffers. The Board notes that a small percentage of this surplus can be kept by the organizers and Lewis will be ensuring that the organizers are aware of this.

There was a query about the possibility of greener investments. Lewis has been looking into green investments, which was also an LRP recommendation. It is a slow process because any shift needs to be done with care so as not to jeopardize our current investments. Another issue is that so-called green funds, on closer scrutiny, are not as green as they originally look.

7. Fees – CEGEP discussion

A query has been made to the Board about the possibility of reducing fees for CASCA members who are employed at CEGEPs. Professors at CEGEPs can do astronomical research but not all have the easy ability to do so, and obtaining NSERC funds is difficult.

There was an extensive discussion about this issue. The argument for, is to help out our members as best we can. The arguments against, however, are that there may be many other members at various institutions who do not have ready access to financial support for fee payments to professional societies, either through grants, professional expenses, or otherwise. We have no way of determining who might be in need and who might not. Trying to tie the fee structure to need is also an administrative nightmare. In the end, the decision was taken not to adjust CASCA fees specifically for CEGEP professors.

8. Women's caucus discussion

Laura was approached by Chris Wilson about the possibility of having a "women's caucus", which would be a group who could communicate with each other about issues of common interest to female astronomers. The Board discussed whether or not such a caucus could or should formally endorse such a group. After some discussion, it was felt that a women's caucus should really proceed as an informal group with the Board's blessing, and does not need to have formal recognition.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Adjourn

Moved by Lewis and seconded by Erik to adjourn. Passed.