



Astronomical League

Observing Program Division

White Paper

New Observing Program Mentoring Process

This document is designed to help the Observing Program Directors mentor those who propose new Observing Programs for League consideration. Each case is unique, but the general process and concepts are standard.

Any Observing Program Director can mentor submitters and coach proposal submissions. Ultimately, the proposal will be reviewed by the team of Observing Program Directors and approved by the AL Council at the annual meeting at the AL-Con.

All observing Program proposals must go through this process before being submitted to the Council.

When a proposal is submitted:

1. Reply to the submitted immediately to let them know you have received it.
2. Email the other Observing Program Directors to let them know it exists and someone wants to work on that Observing Program.
3. If you know that someone else is already working on the Observing Program, let the other Observing Program Directors know via an email.

Our driving principles state that a new Observing Program must either:

- Introduce the members to a new or different type of celestial object.
- Increase a member's knowledge about a type of object.
- Increase a member's skills in making observations.
- Contribute to astronomical knowledge.

It should also:

- Minimally duplicate objects in existing Observing Programs.
- Be achievable by our membership.
- Not incur significant costs to the membership.

Considering these points, send another email to the submitter:

4. This is the point where you need to encourage, or if necessary, gently discourage the submission.

- If it meets these criteria, then we want to encourage the submitter. This document will continue to take you through the process in this case.
 - Sometimes though, proposals do not fit into the Astronomical League's Observing Program Division's direction. In this case consider these points:
 - Tell the submitter the criteria that were an issue.
 - Let them know that "not meeting the criteria" will put them in a serious disadvantage when it is presented to the Council.
 - If the proposal can be modified to fit, then it should be changed and resubmitted.
 - Also note: Although the Directors coach the submitters and do review and submit our recommendations to the Council, the Directors do not actually approve nor disallow proposed Observing Programs. If a submitter is committed to their proposal and really insist on submitting it to the Council for consideration, the Directors will help them get to that point in the process.
5. Explain to the submitter, in an email or on the telephone, the steps in the process and the deadline for submission at the next Council Meeting. We normally shoot for about 2 to 3 months before the Council meeting at the AL-Con.
6. Explain to the submitter the pieces that are required to be completed before the proposal can be submitted to Council. An Observing Program Director will represent the proposal at the Council Meeting.
- If the submitted expresses a desire to do the presentation at the Council meeting, they may do that, but it will be short because Council meetings are much shorter than they used to be.
 - A Director will work with them on the components that must be submitted. These are the required pieces, and will be discussed in more detail:
 - Proposal Submission Form.
 - Web page contents. We do not worry about form, but rather content.
 - Object list(s).
 - Pin design.
 - Certificate Design.
7. Individual Pieces in Detail:
- The first pieces to complete are the Object List and the Web Page.
 - The Object List:
 - Goal is to have 100 objects required. This does vary as needed.
 - Goal is for this to require a year to complete for an evening astronomer.
 - Goal is to require a modest size telescope.
 - Object list should contain:
 - Name and Designation
 - Right Ascension
 - Declination
 - Magnitude

- Size (if relevant)
 - Constellation
 - Other information if appropriate
- Ideally this should be a list of objects that the submitter has viewed. If not, then an evaluation needs to be done on how accessible the objects on the list are.
- The Object List should be in Excel format.
- The Web Page should include:
 - The same type of information that is shown on the existing Observing Program web pages (for example: Carbon Star Observing Program).
 - Formatting is not critical.
 - Data for the grids is required, but a Director will construct the grids for the web page.
- The Proposal Submission Form:
 - Most of the fields re self-explanatory and should not pose a problem for the submitter. These are details as needed:
 - Name of Proposed Observing Program – not that this may not be the name on the Observing Program if it is approved.
 - Name, Address, Email, Telephone, and Astronomy Club should be easy.
 - Is this an extension of an existing Observing Program. This is a yellow flag. Extensions cannot be simply more objects. There must be an enhancement to either skills or knowledge. The name of the Existing Observing Program should be listed.
 - Observation Types, Minimum Aperture should be easy, but we will provide guidance as needed on the aperture.
 - Will... These three questions are straightforward, but the Directors will provide guidance as needed.
 - Multiple Levels are encouraged when the entire list seems to be too difficult (for example the Messier Observing Program). The standard naming convention for levels are:
 - Basic (preferred), Partial (okay), Bronze (acceptable)
 - Intermediate (when needed)
 - Advanced (preferred if needed), Silver (acceptable)
 - Complete (preferred), Gold (acceptable)
 - The expectation is that Observing Programs will have only one pin and for that pin to be awarded upon completion of the Complete or Gold Level.
 - Coordinator – We want the submitter to join our Division as a Coordinator. Some submitters are unable to do this role, and some are not interested in the role. In these cases, if the

proposal is approved, a Director will serve as Coordinator until one can be identified.

- Manual – The League is always interested in new manuals. This can be done together with the proposal or separately. New manuals must be reviewed to determine if the League considers them to be valuable.
- Costs, these are the numbers typically used for an Observing Program Proposal:
 - Pins \$ 400.00
 - Certificates \$ 0.00
 - Postage \$ 50.00
 - Supplies \$ 25.00
 - Manual (Talk to Aaron C.)
 - Future Years \$ 50.00
- Who can review submissions? The preference is that all three options be checked.
- Details for submission:
 - All should be checked except for those noted below.
 - Sketch is a good idea but is up to the submitter. A Director will provide guidance.
 - Size of Instrument and Magnification are a good idea, but their inclusion it is up to the submitter. A Director will provide guidance.
- The final three questions: The submitter should know the answers. A Director will provide guidance.
- The Pin – These are our recommended standards for pin design:
 - Pin construction:
 - If full color or photographic quality is needed, the pin will have to have an epoxy dome.
 - If only a few colors are required, then cloisonne is preferred.
 - Pin Shape: round is preferred, rectangular is okay, unusual shapes can be done if appropriate (Binocular programs).
 - Pin Size: Round – 1-inch in diameter, Rectangular – 1-inch by 1-1/4-inch.
 - Image or diagram on pin – should be relevant to the program.
 - Wording on pin:
 - Should include: Astronomical League.
 - Should include: the name of the Observing Program.
- The Certificate:
 - Design for the certificate should be professional.
 - Certificates should be 8-1/2 inch by 11-inch.

- Wording should be appropriate to the Observing Program and level. It should be like other existing programs. A Director will provide guidance.
 - Design is up to the Coordinator and is only limited to their creativity.
 - They should be in color put easily printed on a color printer.
8. Once all components are completed, they are ready to start the approval process. These are the steps:
- Package should be sent to the team of Observing Program Directors with a Proposal Evaluation Form. All Directors, including the Mentor should complete the form and return the form to the Mentor.
 - The Mentor then summarizes the submissions and prepares a recommendation for Council.
 - This recommendation along with the components is then sent to Council. This must be at least a month before the AL-Con.
 - An Observing Program Director will represent the proposals to the Council at the Council meeting at the AL-Con.
 - The Council will choose one of these paths:
 - They can approve the new Observing Program as proposed.
 - They can approve the new Observing Program with specific instructions to the Observing Program Director on how it needs to be changed.
 - They can defer the final decision to any upcoming Council Meeting and will tell the Observing Program Director what changes must be made to achieve approval.
 - They can decline to adopt the new Observing Program. They will tell the Observing Program Director the concerns.
 - The Observing Program Director will update the other Directors on the outcome of the meeting.
 - The Mentor will provide feedback to the submitter.
 - The Observing Program Directors will update the website. Announce the new Observing Program to the membership and implement the new Observing Program.



Aaron Clevenson, Observing Program Director