

IAU Commission Reform: Guidelines for the Call for Proposals

*Deadlines: Letters of Intent, 15 October 2014; Full Proposals, 31 January 2015
(Feedback from Divisions: 15 December 2014)*

1. **Motivation**

- 1.1. The [IAU General Assembly held in Beijing](#) in August 2012 voted overwhelmingly in favour of a Resolution presented by the Executive Committee ([Resolution B4](#)), according to which a new Divisional structure was to be put in place. This phase has now been implemented successfully with an electronic sign-up for the new Divisions creating a large base for Division membership. The text of the same Resolution also requested "*the new Divisions, guided by the Executive Committee, to work together to produce a revised structure for Commissions...in accordance with the Statutes and Bye-Laws of the Union*".
- 1.2. Commissions are the backbone of the IAU. They can be viewed as high-visibility "think tanks" playing an important role; for example:
 - 1.2.1. They foster discussions and information forums on topics of specific current, and potentially long-lasting interest within the field of one or more Divisions, connecting astronomers across the world;
 - 1.2.2. They promote progress in their field and provide services and expertise to the community e.g. by way of scientific reports, both inside and outside of the IAU;
 - 1.2.3. They are responsible, along with Divisions, for creating and managing Working Groups with particular short-term or long-term deliverables;
 - 1.2.4. They can also be the natural evolution of Working Groups in a rapidly growing area;
 - 1.2.5. They provide opportunities for more IAU members to gain experience in leadership, both within the IAU and within the community;
 - 1.2.6. They are well-positioned to stimulate and support proposals for IAU Symposia and other meetings.
- 1.3. To carry out the request of [Resolution B4](#), the Division Presidents, in coordination with the [Executive Committee](#), conducted discussions and consultations to develop a plan of Commission Reform in the spirit of promoting scientific evolution and opening up the IAU – the same arguments that motivated reform of the Divisions.
- 1.4. The core of this plan is to propose a complete overhaul of the Commission structure via a bottom-up process involving the whole community. This implies establishing, from a zero base, a new set of Commissions, and giving all IAU members the ability to join these new Commissions if they are interested in contributing to the proposed activities.

- 1.5. This plan starts by a Call for Proposals for Commissions, and ends with the Executive Committee simultaneously terminating all current Commissions and establishing the new ones during the Honolulu 2015 General Assembly.
- 1.6. Therefore, existing Commissions will need to respond to the Call and join the call alongside newly proposed Commissions. For the approval process they shall be considered as new Commissions, on par with the newly proposed Commissions.
- 1.7. The background for Commission Reform and its main stages has been publicized on May 15, 2014 in the IAU web pages:
<http://www.iau.org/news/announcements/detail/ann14008/>.

The main milestone deadlines until the next General Assembly can be found on the IAU home page: <http://www.iau.org/administration/events/>

Here we focus on the first stage, the Call for Proposals and guidelines on how to propose Commissions and to complete the on-line web form [URL].

2. *Framework for Proposing Commissions*

- 2.1. Commissions will serve IAU members by focussing on a science or science and technology area smaller than a Division but larger than that of a Working Group. They should not be restricted to a particular small group, and, once established, it will be easy for members to join and leave them.
- 2.2. The new Commissions will be created for a minimum of six years. All Commissions will be reviewed every three years, in advance of a General Assembly, under the purview of the Executive Committee, and renewed or terminated by the Executive Committee held in conjunction with that General Assembly. A review of greater depth will be conducted after three triennia (i.e., nine years after their creation).
- 2.3. Cross-disciplinary/cross-Division Commissions are encouraged and will be accommodated within the IAU structure.

3. *Relations with Divisions and Organizing Committees*

- 3.1. Commissions will fall into one of three categories in their relationship to Divisions:
 - 3.1.1. *"Regular Commissions"*: hosted by a single Division,
 - 3.1.2. *"Inter-Division Commissions"*: hosted by a Primary Division but simply affiliated to others, and
 - 3.1.3. *"Cross-Division Commissions"*: fully cross-disciplinary, to the extent of being hosted by more than one Division on equal footing.

- 3.2. The separation between categories (3.1.2) and (3.1.3) is closely related to level of involvement within Division Steering Committees (DSC; item 3.4).
- 3.3. To allow head room for further new Commissions within the medium term, for the 2014 Call for Proposals the Proposal Recommendation Committee (see item 5.1) is expected to recommend to the Executive Committee a maximum of six Commissions from categories (3.1.1) and (3.1.2) above for any single Division, although it reserves the right to accept a higher number. The number from category (3.1.3) is uncapped.
- 3.4. Commissions are ex-officio represented in the DSC(s) of the Division(s) hosting the Commission, according to the following rules:
 - 3.4.1. In the case of a "Regular Commission", hosted by a single Division, the Commission is represented by its President;
 - 3.4.2. In the case of an Inter-Division Commission, the Commission is represented at the DSC of the Primary Division (but not at the others), by its President;
 - 3.4.3. In the case of a Cross-Division Commission, the Commission will have different ex-officio representatives on the DSCs of each host Division, as decided by the Organizing Committee of the Commission (see item 3.5; e.g., the President in one Division, the Vice-President in another, etc.). A condition of acceptance the Cross-Division status is that the Proposal Recommendation Committee (item 5.1) agrees that such multiple DSC representation is justified.
- 3.5. A Commission Organizing Committee (OC) is required to hold an election every three years (with the Commission Vice-President (CVP) normally becoming CP and some committee members rotating off). Consecutive-term membership of the OC is limited to two terms (six years). The total number of OC members is 4-8, depending on the size of the Commission (Bye-Laws Sec. VI.22a).
 - 3.5.1. For the Commissions proposed in 2014, a first estimate of the size of the Commissions, hence of the potential OC membership, will be given by an indicative poll, taken before the deadline for the submission of Full Proposals (see below item 6.2). The "founding" OC members (i.e. proposers of the Commissions, 1 Chair + up to 3 co-proposers) will not be subject to election, but, after approval of the Commission, elections will be held for a number of complementary, at-large members. Their number must be given in the proposal and agreed by the Proposal Recommendation Committee.
 - 3.5.2. When appointing at-large candidates for election, Organizing Committees must consider an appropriate career-stage balance in addition to geographical/gender balance.

4. Implications on Working Groups

- 4.1. Working Groups come in two categories: "Division Working Groups" (created directly by Divisions), and "Commission Working Groups" (created by Commissions with the approval of Divisions, see below, Sect. 4.3).
- 4.2. Therefore, Division Working Groups, being affiliated directly to Divisions, are not part of the present Commission Reform process. For them, the procedure of confirming or terminating Working Groups at each General assembly will take place at Honolulu according to the normal procedure.
- 4.3. More precisely, according to the Bye-Laws (Sect. VI.24), " With the approval of the Division, a Commission may establish Working Groups to study well-defined scientific issues and report to the Commission. *Unless specifically re-appointed by the same procedure, such Working Groups cease to exist at the next following General Assembly.*" This procedure concerns all Working Groups, whether they are Division Working Groups or Commission Working Groups, independently of their date of creation, and does not involve the Executive Committee.
- 4.4. Therefore, following Bye-Law VI.24, Commission Working Groups will be automatically terminated at the Honolulu General Assembly, together with the Commissions that created them. In addition, the Working Rules (Sect. X.44) stipulate that the Organizing Committee [of a Commission] must make a recommendation before the General Assembly concerning the future of the Commission, and in particular: *If a continuation is proposed, a plan for the activities of the next triennium should be presented, including those of any Working Groups which the Commission proposes to maintain during that period.* In other words, the Proposal for Commissions may include plans for maintaining, or changing the existing Working Groups. If a Commission is approved, then the creation of these Working Groups will be "pre-approved" and can take place as soon as this Commission is established, i.e., immediately after the General Assembly.
- 4.5. However, the implementation of special Working Groups mentioned in the Proposal (like long-term, "functional" groups), while "pre-approved" in principle, may require more detailed discussions with the relevant Division(s) after the General Assembly.
- 4.6. More generally, it may be recalled that the process for the creation of Working Groups, mentioned in Sect. 4.3 above, can take place at any time at the initiative of Commissions. Therefore, a newly created Commission can decide (after the General Assembly) to create Working Groups that were not included in the Proposal, but in this case their creation will have to follow the normal procedure, i.e., be subject to the approval of the relevant Division(s).
- 4.7. The above sections are meant to emphasize that reflecting on the future of

existing Commission Working Groups must be an integral part of the Commission reform process. It is therefore of the utmost importance that Commissions conduct internal discussions with their Working Groups very early in the preparation of Proposals.

- 4.8. These discussions can be conducted very openly, since there are many possibilities of evolution for Commission Working Groups. For instance, if a Commission proposes to be re-created, its Proposal can include some, or all (or none) of its present Working Groups. Or if it chooses to evolve into a different Commission, since its current Working Groups will be automatically terminated, the Proposal may include plans for the creation of new Working Groups, which may be identical to, or different from, the existing ones. Or the Working Groups themselves may decide to approach a different Commission or a proposed new Commission, based for instance on the posted Letters of Intent. In all cases, the relevant Working Groups will have to be formally created after the General Assembly.
- 4.9. Similarly, Inter-Commission Working Groups should conduct discussions with their relevant parent Commissions to decide on their future.
- 4.10. Experienced Working Groups may want to evolve on their own and opt to propose becoming new Commissions (and possibly propose to create new Working Groups).

5. *Commission Approval Process*

- 5.1. Based on the Full Proposals, new Commissions will be initially ranked by the Steering Committees of the Division(s) they have expressed the wish to join. The separate Division Steering Committee recommendations will then be reviewed by a panel (the Proposal Recommendation Committee) consisting of the Division Presidents and of the IAU Vice-Presidents, chaired by the IAU President-elect. This panel will make a final set of recommendations for approval to the Executive Committee by 31 March 2015.
- 5.2. The criteria for approval will be based on scientific excellence, innovative ideas, broad geographical distribution of astronomers active in this area, quality of proposed activities and other services to the community and/or to society, timeliness of topic, and fulfilment of roles such as those outlined in Sect. 1.2.

6. *Proposal submission process: Letters of Intent vs. Full Proposals*

- 6.1. Proposal submission will be in two phases: Letters of Intent (deadline 15 October 2014), followed by Full Proposals (deadline 31 January 2015). The Letters of Intent are mandatory to submit Full Proposals.

- 6.2. As mentioned above, discussions between proposers and Divisions are encouraged at all times. More formally, if appropriate the Divisions will send back to the proposers comments on their Letters of Intent, no later than 15 December 2014, to help in the preparation of the Full Proposals
- 6.3. Up to a week before the Full Proposal deadline, IAU members will have the opportunity to express their preference for proposed Commissions by an indicative electronic poll organized by the IAU Secretariat. The rationale for this two-phase process is to help optimise the set of proposed Commissions by providing opportunities to identify and correct any significant omissions or overlaps, either coming from the proposers themselves, or on the advice of the Division Presidents (see item 6.2 above), or of the Executive Committee. They are also intended to provide Commission Working Groups with an overview of the proposed Commissions. The Letters of Intent will be posted on the [IAU website](#), and the outcomes of the indicative poll will be made available to IAU members prior to the Full Proposal deadline.
- 6.4. The forms for [Letters of Intent](#) and for the Full Proposals are identical, except that the information contained in the Letters of Intent are understood as indicative and not binding (a fixed Registration number will be given upon submission of a Letter of Intent, but, e.g., names of proposers, title, relation with Divisions, etc. can change), and the scientific justification can be a preliminary summary of the full justification.