

May 4, 2017

Re: Observations of the meeting of PAC41

The NSCL PAC41 met May 3-4 to discuss 32 proposals and 5 Letters of Intent. I was able to observe most of the proceedings, but had to leave the room for four of the proposals due to conflicts of interest and therefore cannot comment on them. The total beamtime request included ~6,000 hours of CCF beam, about 2-3 times the available time, and an additional 271 hours of stable ReA3 beam.

Members of PAC41 were as follows: Dan Bardayan (Notre Dame), Mike Carpenter (Argonne), Joe Natowitz (TAMU), Erich Ormand (Livermore), Berta Rubio (IFIC-Valencia), Guy Savard (Argonne), Hendrik Schatz (NSCL/MSU), and Phil Woods (Edinburgh). The PAC members spanned a large range of expertise and PAC experience. Also in attendance were myself (FRIBUOEC delegate), Jill Berryman (NSCL Manager for User Relations), and Brad Sherrill (NSCL Director); Edmundo Garcia-Solis of NSF observed for certain periods via videoconference.

Just before the PAC meeting, the comments from the technical reviews and summaries from the assigned specialist were distributed to the PAC membership for final review before the in-person discussions. At the start of the meeting, Brad gave a brief overview of the facility and the PAC process, emphasizing that the scientific merit was the focus for the day's discussions and ranking, with program policy factors (such as whether a proposal would form the basis of a PhD project) only coming into play to help make secondary adjustments.

During the PAC meeting, the proposals were arranged into sessions roughly organized by topic, with the LoIs at the end. Each proposal was introduced by Jill and briefly summarized by the assigned specialist. The backup specialist then also made comments. This would lead to discussion on the proposal's scientific merit, after which Jill would request a ranking (1-5) from each PAC member in turn, alternating who begins (unless the PAC member was recused). These scores were compiled and averaged. LoIs were discussed but not ranked. When necessary, Brad would offer clarifications on prior proposals, facility-supported devices, and the PAC process.

The second half-day of PAC meeting involved a final discussion of the averaged rankings, particularly around the cutoff as several proposals had equal or close scientific rankings and several enabled the possibility of new experimental campaigns, and drafting and vetting of the responses to proposal spokespersons.

It is my observation that, overall, the PAC process is fair and that proposals are considered mostly on the scientific merit. Secondary considerations were only taken into account as tie-breakers for proposals of equal scientific rank.

Based on observation of a particular discussion during the PAC meeting and some follow-up discussion after the sessions ended, the following suggestions are offered. For the benefit of the large number of future FRIB users, many of whom may be "outsiders" from the

usual NSCL users, I suggest that certain key policies and procedures be codified and made widely available, including:

- how PAC members and specialists are chosen or assigned,
- how long a PAC member's term is,
- expectations for PAC members, including who can initiate contact with a spokesperson,
- expectations for proposal spokespersons, including publication of one or more example successful proposals, LISE tutorials, and a proposal writing “workshop” which could be taped and made available to watch online,
- appropriate facility/device/expert contacts for questions in proposal preparation, along with information on who to contact if a spokesperson doesn't get a timely response,
- practical differences between proposals and Letters of Intent,
- whether there is an appeal process for rejected proposals,
- historical information regarding proposal rankings, such as average scores or score distributions,
- how any conflicts of interest are addressed,

etc. Taking these steps should hopefully improve the opportunity for success for researchers seeking to perform an experiment at FRIB for the first time, as well as benefiting existing users. It is suggested that these changes, as well as any changes to the proposal submission process in preparation for FRIB, be implemented with the help of the FRIBUOEC.

Sincerely,



Kelly A Chipps