Minutes ASTRONET Board meeting

12 March 2025, 9.00-12.00, via zoom

Present: Martin Giard (chair, CNRS), Hugues Sana (FWO), Garrelt Mellema (VR), Begoña Garcia (MICIU), Nanda Rea (MICIU), Antoine Mérand (ESO), Saskia Matheussen (NWO), Salvatore Sciortino (INAF), Chris Woolford (STFC), Sven Wedemeyer (EAS), Paul Callanan (ASI), Grazina Tautvaisiene (TFAI), Tomasz Bulik (PTA), Carlos Peña Garay (APPEC)

Decisions

1. The ASTRONET Board appoints Saskia Matheussen (NWO) as Deputy Chair.
2. NWO will not invoice the ASTRONET contributions until the new ASTRONET MoU is in place.
3. NWO will provide 0,1 fte programme manager for the ASTRONET secretariat at the cost of ca. k€ 10 per year, with the option to extend to 0,2 fte at a later stage if the Board decides that more support is needed.

Actions

1. Members to check if ASTRONET can sign the ALLEA Statement – asap
2. Members to take the ASTRONET MoU to their organisation for (comments and) approval
3. Observers to explore whether they can become ASTRONET member
4. Saskia Matheussen to arrange a meeting at EAS and circulate the date asap.
5. Saskia Matheussen to circulate details of the EROAD/Ukraine meeting in June, and to represent ASTRONET at this event.

Minutes

Martin Giard opens the meeting, followed by a round of introductions.

Before starting the meeting the chair reflects on the current geopolitical situation and stresses the importance of ASTRONET in the current global landscape. ASTRONET discusses its positioning and potential actions, and decides to explore whether ASTRONET can sign the ALLEA Statement on Threats to Academic Freedom and International Research Collaboration in the United States.

The agenda is adopted.

Co-chair discussion and election

The chair suggests to appoint a co-chair. In the MoU the role of a Deputy chair is described and the members agree that filling this position is important to strengthen the ASTRONET organisation. The ASTRONET Board unanimously approves the nomination of Saskia Matheussen as Deputy Chair.

Budget

- NWO has not issued invoices for the ASTRONET contributions in 2024: certain members are unable to pay their contribution until a new MoU is in place. The Board members agree that NWO should not invoice the 2025 contributions until the MoU has been renewed.
- NWO has explored the possibility to provide support for the ASTRONET secretariat. NWO can provide a programme manager at the expense of the ASTRONET budget. The costs will be based on the actual salary of the person selected, and will amount to ca. k€ 10 per year for 0,1 fte. The board supports the proposal to appoint a programme manager at NWO, starting with 0,1 fte with the option to extend to 0,2 fte.

Status of the ASTRONET MoU

Martin Giard has asked legal advice at CNRS and has put forward a draft version for the ASTRONET MoU. Changes compared to the original MoU are discussed, and the next step is that all members start their internal process for approval. The new MoU is also an opportunity to bring in more members from the observer group.

Working Groups activities

The different working groups provide an update.

WG1 : Link with APPEC and elaboration of common strategies (Martin Giard)

- APPEC has a new chair, Carlos Peña Garay, who is present as invitee to the ASTRONET Board. The main task of APPEC currently is to prepare the next decadal plan, 2027-2036. Carlos agrees that there are many commonalities and confirms the importance of coordination between the two networks.
- Martin Giard will attend the next APPEC meeting on 4/5 June in Prague, and will call the first meeting of the Working Group prior to this meeting.

WG2 : Future strategies for science with small telescopes : a concerted European exercise (Paul Callanan)

- WG2 still needs to have its first meeting. Paul Callanan shares the presentation (attached) that he has prepared for the first WG meeting, including a number of science cases for what small telescopes could contribute to the landscape in 2035 when new infrastructures have become online. The discussion includes (ideas for) new large arrays such as the Time Domain Telescope, the Digital Telescope, opt/ir interferometers, …
- The WG will be looking for suggestions for people to join. Grazina Tautvaisiene, who is also involved in Europlanet, volunteers to join the WG.

WG3 : Building strategies to materialize the roadmap (Martin Giard)

- The WG has not formally started yet, but there has been an initial discussion between Martin Giard and the IAC director, Valentín Martínez Pillet, about the EST where a critical decision will have to be made soon.
- Antoine Mérand provides an update on ESO's Expanding Horizons. There will be a session at EAS organised by Jarle Brinchmann to explain the process. Both Paul Callanan and Nanda Rea are part of the committee to steer the process.

WG4 : Connections and joint policies with the EC and with key stakeholders (Saskia Matheussen)

The WG met on 3 March 2025 and discussed:

- To organise a meeting/exchange between ASTRONET and **EAS** to discuss the mutual relationships and potential joint activities. EAS will present a new vision document in Cork. EAS is planning to organise two events at the EU parliament, one on space weather, and one on research infrastructure. This might be an opportunity where ASTRONET and EAS can work together.
- ASTRONET's role towards the **EC**. Through channels of ASTRONET partners we can coordinate input to our national representatives / ministries that provide input to the Horizon Europe Work Programmes. Monitor opportunities in Horizon Europe and take action if needed.
- Relation with networks such as **ORP**, **Europlanet** and **AHEAD** is an open question. To be further explored.
- How does ESO's **Expanding Horizons** exercise relate to the ASTRONET Roadmap? ASTRONET to follow developments.
- Relation with **research infrastructures**: these include ESO, ESA, SKAO (involved in ASTRONET) and other research infrastructures. Do we need to take specific action to explore where ASTRONET could facilitate the development of joint policies? The role of data and AI might be an example, in a changing landscape that requires different strategies, including those on expertise/type of manpower required.

WG5 : Sustainability and societal issues (Hugues Sana)

- To be discussed at the next ASTRONET Board meeting. Membership has been unclear, the WG aims for a first meeting in April.

Next meeting at EAS 2025 (Cork)

- Saskia Matheussen is exploring the possibility to set up a joint meeting with EAS and/or a talk at the EAS symposium. A booth can be always be arranged for more visibility, but might not be very effective.

Any other business

Saskia Matheussen has been contacted by EROAD, the European Regional Office of Astronomy for Development, to represent ASTRONET in a meeting on post-war Recovery in Ukraine through Astronomy. This meeting will be held in Leiden on 10-11 June. The ASTRONET Board supports representation at this event. Saskia Matheussen will circulate the details to the ASTRONET Board, who is invited to distributed to relevant contacts in their country that might be interested in participating or contributing to this event.

End the meeting

Attachments

1. Presentation WG2 – small telescopes CHECK