

ASTROTROP Ad Hoc Steering Committee  
Draft Minutes of a Meeting on 18/9/13, 1030 am, Royal Observatory Edinburgh.

1. The meeting began at 1040. Present were: Peter Allan, Alan Grainger (Co-Chair), Andy Lawrence (Co-Chair), Jim Lynch, Yadvinder Malhi (by Skype), Mark Mulligan (by Skype), Keith Noddle, Juan Suarez, Kevin Tansey, Jill Thompson and Iain Woodhouse.

Apologies were received from Neil Harris, Shaun Quegan and William Milliken.

2. ROE staff kindly provided Skype facilities for Yadvinder Malhi and Mark Mulligan to participate.

3. Technical and Project Background:

a. AL welcomed the committee to ROE and AG showed how ASTROTROP fitted within the objectives of the STFC CLASP Programme.

b. AL described the evolution of AstroGrid between 2001 and 2010, with the help of £14m of funding from PPARC, STFC and the EC.

c. KN explained how AstroGrid works.

d. AG gave an overview of ASTROTROP's goals, justification, structure and plan, and then introduced the draft agenda for the Conference.

4. Reports:

a. AL explained that the Postdoc for the project was Dave Morris, a software engineer who was already on the staff of the ROE.

b. AL explained that he, AG and KN were the Co-PIs, Nathalie Dupin would provide financial management and administrative support for the project, and that KN would be holder of the project plan. The main funds for the project and reimbursement of expenses were held at ROE.

c. KN gave an overview of the website design ([www.astrotrop.org](http://www.astrotrop.org)), and colleagues were impressed by how this was proceeding. He mentioned the need for the website to both represent the public face of the project and allow partners to communicate with each other out of the public view. There was a discussion about the relative merits of e-mails, forums and wiki, and although no formal decision was taken the general preference appeared to be for editable wiki pages. JT said that a wiki page would be ideal for partners to suggest new partners and/or conference participants.

d. AG talked about the need to publicize the project and the conference, with the latter providing an important forum to draw new partners and stakeholders. It was agreed to consider various avenues to design a logo for the project, including a "Design a Logo" competition. Photographs were taken by KN to use for future publicity purposes.

It was agreed to use the forthcoming conference as the "main news story" and AG will draft a press release. The press release will be timed to coincide with the availability of the website for use in conference registration (AG and KN to coordinate). Members suggested that the press release could be communicated to newspapers, STFC In Brief, THE, Nature, NERC, Scottish Parliament, British Ecological Society, International Ecological Congress, New Scientist etc., together

with other channels which members have suggested subsequently. AG, AL and KN would also liaise with press officers at University of Edinburgh, University of Leeds and STFC on the wording of the press release.

e. AL provided a fascinating live demonstration of Astrogrid, which was very helpful to other members of the committee. He also showed the kind of web-based conference registration arrangements that were already in use at ROE and the University of Edinburgh and which ASTROTROP could use too. Members of the committee were impressed by this too.

## 5. Conference Arrangements:

a. Programme. The committee went through the provisional conference programme item by item with AG explaining the reasons for each item. AG opened by explaining that the rationale for the mixture of plenary and small group sessions was to fit within timing and meeting room constraints.

i. Day 1, 1310. Introduction to ASTROTROP. It was suggested that this presentation should emphasize that ASTROTROP will not be reinventing the wheel but will be doing different things from other initiatives, e.g. NERC Virtual Observatory, Global Forest Watch, Global Biodiversity Information Facility, GEO Global Forest Observations initiative and CEDA. AG said that he was planning to do this and was already liaising directly with these initiatives anyway. NERC Virtual Observatory team members have already been invited to the conference.

ii. Day 1, demonstrator group sessions, 1500-1710. It was agreed that, in addition to the presentation of draft science plans to form the basis for discussion in the breakout groups on Day 2, these sessions could also include contributions from remote sensing scientists, as appropriate, e.g. on the estimation of carbon stocks using satellite data to complement ground measurements, and contributions from experts in each field on the types of approaches and standards which they typically use for databases. KN said that the latter would be very important for scoping the Astrogrid adaptation. He was concerned that this crucial information might not be made available without the presence of technical support staff as well as leading scientists. Other members mentioned that the sophistication of databases for terrestrial resources was still in an "embryonic" state compared with that used in astronomy, but AG agreed to check on this further. YM kindly agreed to coordinate discussions about the Area-Carbon science plan.

AG said he realized that he had failed to include a session on Day 1 in which astronomers could provide ideas about how their routine methods could inform planetary measurements. Given the likelihood of key ecosystem processes, hydrological services and gaseous fluxes partners being unable to attend the conference, discussions of these topics would be shorter than planned for here, so there should be space in the programme for such a session. It was felt that this was a good idea and AL agreed to consider who should lead this session.

iii. Day 1, 1730, project organization. AG explained his reasoning for including the session which could look at the detailed logistics of the project not included in the Project Proposal. It was agreed to have a Q&A session too.

iv. Day 2, 0955-1200, breakout groups. AG explained that the two main goals of these groups were to refine the science plans for demonstrator groups and to help in scoping Astrogrid software adaptation, building on discussions on Day 1. AG suggested that the first session could deal with two attribute overlays while the second session could deal with three attribute overlays. It was also suggested that another goal should be to address the kind of search queries that were likely to be used by tropical forest researchers and which needed to be incorporated in Astrogrid software adaptation. Various ideas were proposed for changing members of the groups between the two morning sessions. It was suggested that this might be logistically difficult but that volunteers could, if they wanted, join other groups in the second session to report on discussions in their first session group.

v. Day 2, 1330-1400, Stakeholder Panel. AG explained that the rationale for placing a stakeholder panel at this point in the programme, rather than on Day 1, was that the panel could reflect on what it had heard in previous presentations and link these to stakeholder needs. There was general agreement that this seemed a good idea.

vi. Day 2, 1500. AG suggested that while some participants were meeting in the Incubator Groups and Interface Groups sessions, other participants would welcome the opportunity for an extended and informal networking session. If the conference so decided, an additional plenary session could also be included.

It was suggested that, in addition to general discussions to identify how astronomers and global change scientists could learn from each other, Interface Groups could also compare their different database standards.

vii. Day 2, 1540, project planning session. AG suggested that this would be a suitable point to discuss how the project plan needed to be modified to incorporate the outcomes of discussions at the conference. There was general agreement with this.

b. Parallel sessions for astronomers. AG asked whether astronomers would like to have their own parallel sessions on the morning of Day 2, while the demonstrator group breakout sessions were held. However, AL said that it would be in keeping with the philosophy of ASTROTROP for them to take part in the demonstrator group sessions too.

c. Guest speakers: University and STFC. AL agreed to invite a University official to deliver a welcome address, starting with the Principal. It was agreed to invite Kevin Smith to deliver an STFC welcome address.

d. Expected numbers of participants. AG said that the number of participants was still unclear. Although we had budgeted for 40 funded participants, it was possible that the total number could be between 100 and 200, as there were 85 partners, other people would wish to join the project had not been identified hitherto, and other researchers and stakeholders would wish to attend as well.

e. Meeting rooms. AG reported that he and AL had already booked university meeting rooms for the conference, on the assumption of 100-200 participants. The division of the conference programme between plenary and

small groups sessions in the first draft programme had been changed to take account of partners' preference for a half a day plus one day conference, and the greater availability of large lecture theatres on the afternoon of Day 1. Members of the committee felt that the proposed programme would be effective, in spite of the need to fit within these constraints. AG said that we were still missing two breakout rooms in James Stuart Hall on the afternoon of Day 2, and were waiting on Edinburgh First to confirm these. AG said that he had been told that no charge would be made for regular meeting rooms booked by AL. AL said he would confirm this.

f. Refreshments and Dinner. It was agreed to have complimentary tea/coffee for participants, provided by Edinburgh First. However, although it would be good for the Conference Dinner to take place in the same restaurant, it would be paid for by participants themselves. Two options were discussed: to pay for this on registration or to pay at the restaurant itself.

g. Hotel accommodation. Participants will be asked to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements and be reimbursed up to a maximum for each of these that would be set by the three Co-PIs.

h. Possible internal (campus) travel arrangements. The need to assist participants in moving from one part of the campus to another was discussed. Signposting might be needed for the morning of Day 2, but the critical need for assistance would be in moving to St Cecilia's Hall after lunch on Day 2.

i. Registration and coordination personnel. This item was not discussed but the cost of registration will be reduced by the use of a web-based system, and funding for extra help during the conference especially is covered in the Project Budget. The ROE administrator could help to make the necessary plans for this.

j/k. Financial arrangements and invitation letters. These two items were discussed together because of the need to ensure that the project stayed within budget. Although the budget for the conference only assumed 40 participants, this was based on two nights stay in a hotel, a two-day conference, and a mean travel cost for all participants. It was agreed to send formal invitation letters to partners asap, offering reimbursement of hotel accommodation costs up to a maximum daily rate and standard class rail fare, with air travel costs to be proposed to the organizers for confirmation. There would be a short turnaround time for replying to the invitation, so that other participants could be invited and benefit from financial assistance.

l. Registration arrangements. Participants will be invited to register on the project website. There was a discussion about whether to limit the number of participants, e.g. to active researchers, companies and stakeholders, but this was generally felt to be unnecessary. However, a refundable £10 registration fee deposit was agreed to encourage registrants to turn up on the day.

m. Publicity. The discussion of this item took place under 4d above.

6. Project Organization

a/b Sessions 1 & 2. These items were discussed under 5.a.iii above.

c. Election of Steering Committee. The committee discussed whether to hold elections for the steering committee during the conference. However, it was felt that this would make the conference and project too formal. The committee agreed to retain its existing membership, with the proviso that all the different groups participating in the project should be represented and anybody who wished to serve on the committee would have the chance to do so.

d. Nominations and elections of Demonstrator Group Coordinators. AG said that he had already invited people to nominate themselves to coordinate the demonstrator groups. Since no one had responded so far, he would invite volunteers personally asap.

e. Identification of Incubator Groups and Coordinators. KT and MM are specified in the Case for Support as the overall coordinators of these groups. Coordinators of individual groups could be chosen during conference sessions.

f. Identification of Interface Groups and Coordinators. AL and KN are the overall coordinators of Interface Groups, and the existence of such groups and their individual coordinators would be identified at the conference. Edinburgh and Leeds had already formed the nuclei of their Interface Groups, and AG will invite members of TROPGLOBE at other universities to make the first approach in forming further groups.

g. Coordination and funding of ad hoc meetings. AG said that funds were available, on request for ad hoc meetings of the partners. It was possible, for example, that owing to heavy commitments of two leading gaseous fluxes partners, there would need to be an ad hoc meeting of the gaseous fluxes incubator group.

h. Expanding the partnership. AG reported that he had already received suggestions for other tropical forest researchers who would like to join the project. Members of the committee added to this list. It was agreed that initial partners will be given preference for financial support to come to the conference.

i. Data standards. It was agreed that it is important to agree on data standards to ensure interoperability of data sources

j. Networking with other networks. Although this project is intended to test the feasibility of a facility for UK tropical forest researchers, there is also an international dimension, because many of these researchers are nodes in wider international networks, listed in Table 3 in our Case for Support. There is also the possibility to make further international links with the Research Data Alliance and the International Council for Science World Data System.

7. Online access to area datasets for ASTROTROP members (MM, KT, AG). Initially, partners would be directed by the project website to the appropriate Kings College, University of Maryland, and University of Leicester websites to download area information layers. Later on it might be possible to download area information directly from the project website.

8. Scoping, Evaluating and Refining AstroGrid/Euro-VO Mark 2. This item had already been discussed earlier on the agenda.

9. Launching stakeholder and knowledge exchange consultations. AG said that he would visit a number of stakeholders in their offices, both before and after the conference. Andy Shaw and Genevieve Patenaude, who are specialists in knowledge exchange, would also be involved in this part of the project.

10. UoE expenses claim forms for Steering Committee members. AL handed out expenses claim forms to members, remarking that visitors to the university were still required to fill out paper forms.

11. Any other business. There were two items of any other business But these were not recorded (help please!)

12. Vote of thanks. AG forgot to thank AL, KN and the ROE for their hospitality in the meeting, and the participants for coming. However, he did so later as members shared a taxi to the centre of Edinburgh, and also by email.

The meeting was closed at 1600.