

Bylaws of the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors

Approved by vote of the Board of Visitors at the Austin meeting on March 7, 2026.

PREAMBLE

The University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors (“BOV”) is an organization created and operated as an adjunct of the University of Texas at Austin and the McDonald Observatory. It is not a separate legal entity. The Bylaws shall reflect the policies and directives of the Board of Regents of the University, of the President of The University of Texas at Austin, of the Director of the McDonald Observatory and of the Chair of the Department of Astronomy. The Bylaws shall contain provisions governing the organization and activities of the Board of Visitors that are consistent with the policies and directives of those authorities and are adopted from time to time in accordance with the provision of the Bylaws governing amendments by vote of the members of the Board.

MISSION

The McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors exist to advance the mission of The University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy.

ARTICLE I

Name

The name approved for this organization by vote of the University of Texas Board of Regents on October 14, 1983, is the “McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors.”

ARTICLE II

Nature and Purpose

- Section 1. *Nature.* The McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors is a board authorized by the Board of Regents of The University of Texas to advise and assist the Director of McDonald Observatory and the Chair of the Department of Astronomy.
- Section 2. *Purpose.* The purpose of the Board of Visitors is to further the research and educational objectives of — and strengthen the historical symbiosis between — the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy by all available means, with emphasis upon promoting the welfare of astronomy, public relations, and financial assistance through encouraging gifts, donations, and bequests.

ARTICLE III

Membership

- Section 1. *Qualifications and Expectations.* The membership of the Board of Visitors shall be comprised of people especially interested in the accomplishment of the objectives and goals of McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy.

A membership can include one individual or, in the case of a married/partnered couple, two people.

Members are expected to make a good-faith effort to attend at least one in-person meeting per year. Members should actively support the programs of McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy through their engagement, their advocacy, and an annual financial contribution to the Board of Visitors Fund.

Section 2. *Annual Membership Contributions and Recognition Levels.* Active members are expected to make an annual contribution to the Board of Visitors Fund. These annual contributions support McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy equally.

A member remains in good standing when they make their contribution before the end of the membership year. The membership year is based on UT Austin's fiscal year; it begins on September 1 and ends on August 31.

General members are recognized at three levels based on their annual contribution. The recognition levels are: Full, Sustaining, and Leadership. The dollar amounts defining the recognition levels are proposed by the executive committee and approved by a vote of the General membership at one of the two annual meetings. If approved, the new expected contribution amounts will take effect on September 1 of the new membership year.

Expected contribution amounts and corresponding recognition levels shall be clearly stated on the Board of Visitors website and on contribution reminder correspondence (direct mail and/or email).

Exceptions:

The Associate-level membership is no longer offered to new members. Current Associate members are "grandfathered" into the membership at an annual contribution of \$750.00.

Ex-Officio, Public Official, and Honorary members are not expected to make an annual financial contribution to remain in good standing.

Section 3. *Special Membership Categories.*

Ex-Officio Members. The Director of McDonald Observatory and the Chair of the Department of Astronomy shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Visitors.

Public Official Members. The Board of Visitors welcomes the participation of public officials who may join as Public-Official Members of the Board of Visitors. They must resign or re-join the BOV as general members if they cease to hold public office.

Honorary Members. Honorary membership is no longer offered to new members. Current honorary members are "grandfathered in" for life, or until they choose to resign.

Junior Membership. Junior membership exists to engage young, philanthropically motivated, early-career professionals in the success of McDonald Observatory and Texas Astronomy.

A current BOV member may sponsor a nominee to become a Junior member if they sincerely believe the member will be a valuable future BOV member. The nominee may

be one person or, in the case of a married or partnered couple, two people. To qualify for sponsorship as a Junior member, the potential nominee must be under 40 years old. In the case of a couple, the older partner or spouse in the couple must be under 40 years old.

Prospective members under 40 are not required to join at the Junior level before becoming General members. If a person has the capacity to meet the expectations of General BOV membership, they can be nominated directly to General membership.

Like General members, Junior members are expected to make an annual financial contribution to the Board of Visitors Fund and to make a good-faith effort to attend at least one in-person meeting per year. The minimum dollar amount required to remain in good standing as a Junior Member shall be proposed by the executive committee and approved by a vote of the General membership at one of the two annual meetings. If approved, the new expected contribution amounts will take effect on September 1 of the new membership year and shall be clearly stated on the Board of Visitors website and on contribution reminder correspondence (direct mail and/or email).

Upon completing five years of service on the Junior Board, or upon turning 40, a Junior member will graduate to the Board of Visitors General membership at the beginning of the new membership year on September 1. They do not need to be re-nominated and re-elected to membership when moving directly from Junior to General membership.

Upon graduation, if a Junior member is unable or unwilling to take on the expectations of General membership as outlined in Article III, Section 1, then they will be removed from the Board of Visitors membership roster. Such removal will conclude their relationship with the Board of Visitors.

Junior membership is capped at 25 members.

Section 4. *Membership Limits.* The Board of Visitors' General membership is comprised of members recognized at Leadership, Sustaining, Full, and Associate levels. The General Membership is capped at 250 members.

Honorary, Junior, Public Official, and Ex-Officio members are not included in the 250-member count. Exceptions to these limitations may be enacted by the Chair of the Board of Visitors upon recommendation by the Nominating Committee and voted upon by the BOV at one of the two yearly meetings.

Section 5. *Nomination and Election to Membership.* Those nominated to General, Junior, or Public Official membership shall be approved by the Nominating Committee and the Executive Committee before being submitted for election by the Board of Visitors. Election of members in the categories listed in this section shall be by vote of the membership at one of the two annual meetings.

Section 6. *Voting.* Each General member (recognized at the Leadership, Sustaining, Full, or Associate level) shall have one vote on all matters coming before the Board. Memberships including two individuals (as in the case of a married or partnered couple) count as a single member and shall have one vote. Honorary, Junior, Public Official, and Ex-Officio members do not have a vote in any matter before the BOV.

Section 7. *Committee Service.* General members in good standing at the Leadership, Sustaining,

Full, or Associate level shall be eligible to serve on Board of Visitors committees and task forces. The Chair of the Board of Visitors will appoint the chairs and members of committees and task forces as needed.

Section 8. *Resignation.* Any member may resign at any time by letter or e-mail to the Chair of the Board of Visitors or the Director of the McDonald Observatory or the Chair of the Department of Astronomy addressed to any of them at:

Attn: Board of Visitors
2515 Speedway Stop C-1402
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX 78712-1206

or by email at: director@astro.as.utexas.edu or chair@astro.as.utexas.edu

Members may be asked to resign based on joint recommendations by the Board Chair, Director, and Department Chair. Common reasons for this recommendation include non-engagement or ongoing non-payment of their annual membership contribution. Should members wish to re-join after resignation, they will need to repeat the nomination, approval, and election process to the BOV.

ARTICLE IV

Meetings

Section 1. *Purpose.* The information presented at BOV meetings enables each member to be well informed about accomplishments, issues, and priorities of the McDonald Observatory and the Department of Astronomy. It is also an opportunity to take part in running the business of the BOV, setting its agenda and priorities for the coming year.

Section 2. *Frequency and Place.* Meetings of the BOV shall occur at least two times each year at times selected by the Director of McDonald Observatory and Chair of the Department of Astronomy. The first meeting shall occur usually in February, and take place in Austin, TX; the second meeting shall be held usually in July and take place at McDonald Observatory in West Texas.

Section 3. *Notice.* Notices of meetings shall be issued to the membership as early as possible, and in any event, at least fourteen days preceding the date of the proposed meeting. Special meetings may be called by the Chair, or the Director and Department Chair acting in concert, through telephone notice or e-mail at least three days in advance.

Section 4. *Meeting Registration.* Funding for the two meetings is provided by the Board of Visitors Fund. The cost of producing the meeting is offset by registration fees paid by attending members and their guests. These registration fees ensure that the Board of Visitors Fund, benefits the Department and the Observatory as much as possible. Honorary, Public Official, and Ex-Officio members are invited to attend the meetings, along with a single guest, at no charge.

Section 5. *Quorum.* Since this is an advisory board, those members who are present at the time and place of any meeting duly called in accordance with the requirement for giving notice as set out in Section 3 above shall constitute a quorum. The vote of the majority of those present shall constitute the decision and action of the Board of Visitors.

ARTICLE V

Officers and Committees

Section 1. *Officers.* The officers of the BOV shall consist of a Chair, a Vice Chair, and an immediate Past-Chair

Section 2. *Executive Committee.* The Executive Committee shall advise and assist the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy in all matters as may be requested by the Director and Department Chair including between meetings of the Board of Visitors.

The Executive Committee is composed of:

- Chair of the Board of Visitors
- Vice-Chair of the Board of Visitors
- Immediate Past-Chair of the Board of Visitors
- Secretary of the Board of Visitors
- Chair of the Nominating Committee
- Four additional members of the Board of Visitors

The Director, Department Chair, and chairs of the Board of Visitors committees shall be ex-officio members of the Executive Committee.

One Junior member may be asked to sit on the Board of Visitors Executive Committee as a representative but shall not have the authority to vote on any matter before the Executive Committee.

In addition, the Director and the Department Chair may designate a McDonald Observatory or Department of Astronomy staff member to facilitate and assist with Board business and attend committee meetings.

Section 2. *Executive Committee Roles and Duties.*

- *Chair (officer):* It shall be the duty of the Chair to plan and organize the affairs and meetings of the Board of Visitors in cooperation with the Director and the Department Chair, so that maximum accomplishment may be achieved, and so that periodic reports and recommendations may be made to the Board of Visitors; they shall preside at all meetings of the Board of Visitors.
- *Vice Chair (officer):* The Vice Chair shall perform the duties of the Chair in case of absence or disability. The Vice Chair will assume the role of Chair upon completion of their two-year term of office.
- *Immediate Past Chair (officer):* The Immediate Past Chair shall provide institutional knowledge and support the Chair and Vice Chair in their roles.
- *Secretary:* The Secretary may be called on to assist in notifying members of meetings, keeping minutes, or consulting with members about board business, their standing, and/or meeting attendance.
- *Additional Duties:* At the recommendation of the Chair, Department Chair, and Director, additional duties focusing on topics such as government relations, philanthropy, and membership may be assigned to other committee members.

The Executive Committee will not conduct elections of Executive Committee members except to fill vacancies for the unexpired term of the office.

Section 4. *Nominating Committee.* The Nominating Committee shall consist of a Chair and four other members.

It shall be the duty of the Nominating Committee to:

- Solicit and collect recommendations from current Board of Visitors members (sponsors) of prospective new nominees.
- Meet with (by phone or in person) new nominees to ensure the nominee understands the mission and expectations of Board of Visitors membership.
- Review new nominees and, to the best of their ability, determine if a nominee should be recommended to the executive committee for approval before being presented to the BOV for consideration and election to the General membership.
- At the end of a two-year committee term, the Nominating Committee, with the advice and consent of the Director and Department Chair and the Chair of the Board of Visitors, will present a slate of members for committee service to the Executive Committee. Once approved by the Executive Committee, the slate must be approved by vote at the annual meeting in July at McDonald Observatory. If approved, the new Executive and Nominating committee members will begin their two-year term on September 1.

Section 5. *Ad Hoc Committees.* Ad hoc committees and task forces may be formed by the Executive Committee and populated by appointment of the Board Chair.

Section 6. *Committee Membership Terms, Leadership Succession, and Elections.* The term of office for members of both the Executive and Nominating Committees is two years. The officers of the Board (Chair, Vice Chair, and Immediate Past Chair) shall serve in the same position for no more than one term.

Upon the completion of the two-year term, the Vice Chair will automatically assume the role of Chair, the Chair will assume the role of Immediate Past Chair, and the Immediate Past Chair will return to the General body of BOV membership. Non-officer committee members may be elected to an unlimited number of terms.

Members of the Nominating Committee shall serve one two-year term and may be reelected or reappointed for one additional successive term. Members shall serve until their successors are appointed and ratified, unless earlier removed or replaced.

Officer and committee member terms of service are contingent upon their membership in the Board of Visitors being current and in good standing.

ARTICLE VI

Amendments

These Bylaws may be amended in part or in whole from time to time upon recommendations made by the Executive Committee at a duly called meeting of the Board of Visitors. Amendments are adopted when approved by a majority vote of those present.

ARTICLE VII

Parliamentary Procedure

In the absence of any provision to the contrary in these Bylaws, all business meetings of the Board of Visitors, of the Executive Committee, and of the Standing and Ad hoc Committees shall be governed by the parliamentary rules and usages contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, revised.

ARTICLE VIII

Definitions

“Board of Visitors” means the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors.

“BOV” is an abbreviation meaning the Board of Visitors.

“BOV Chair” or “Board Chair” means the Chair of the McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors.

“Regents” or “Board of Regents” means the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System serving at the time.

“Department Chair” means the Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Department of Astronomy.

“Department” or “Department of Astronomy” means The University of Texas at Austin Department of Astronomy.

“Director” means Director of The University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory.

“McDonald Observatory” or “Observatory” means The University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory at Mount Locke and Mount Fowlkes.

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