Milestone 9.4: Review of application, review and selection process for TNA to ATMO-ACCESS facilities

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1 Introduction

This document is prepared in the context of the ATMO-ACCESS project (Solutions for Sustainable Access to Atmospheric Research Facilities), which represents the organized contribution of distributed atmospheric research facilities for developing a pilot for a new model of Integrating Activities.
It describes major reviews, updates, and changes in the access process established in MS 40 after testing in the initial phase.

The key changes refer to:

- The use of the PASS
- Review of the TNA process
- Update of the access-related forms and documents

2 Access management platform

The transition to the use of a web tool to facilitate the management of the access process for all the actors involved (users, providers, TNA managers, reviewers, etc.) is the main change made to the ATMO-ACCESS TNA system. It entailed other modifications, which are described in the sections that follow.

The 1st TNA call launched in October 2021 was managed in a traditional way, with emails and documents exchanges between the users, the TNA team receiving the requests, the TNA providers, and the review experts. The TNA management was then optimized in view of the 2nd TNA Call with the use of the ACTRIS PASS – Platform for managing user access to ACTRIS ServiceS (https://passactris.smapply.io). The PASS is implemented in ACTRIS by the Service and Access Management Unit (SAMU) and was made available to ATMO-ACCESS starting from April 2022 (MS 42).

The SAMU/WP9 TNA Team took care of adapting PASS settings with features specially designed to meet the particular TNA management needs of ATMO-ACCESS, allowing the separate management of ATMO-ACCESS TNA calls and, at the same time, the use of the platform in ACTRIS, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.
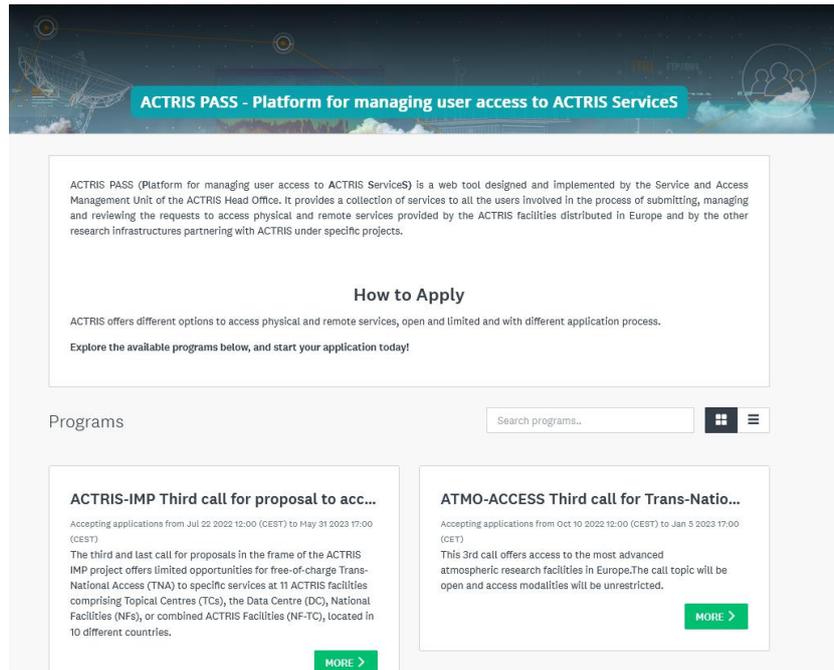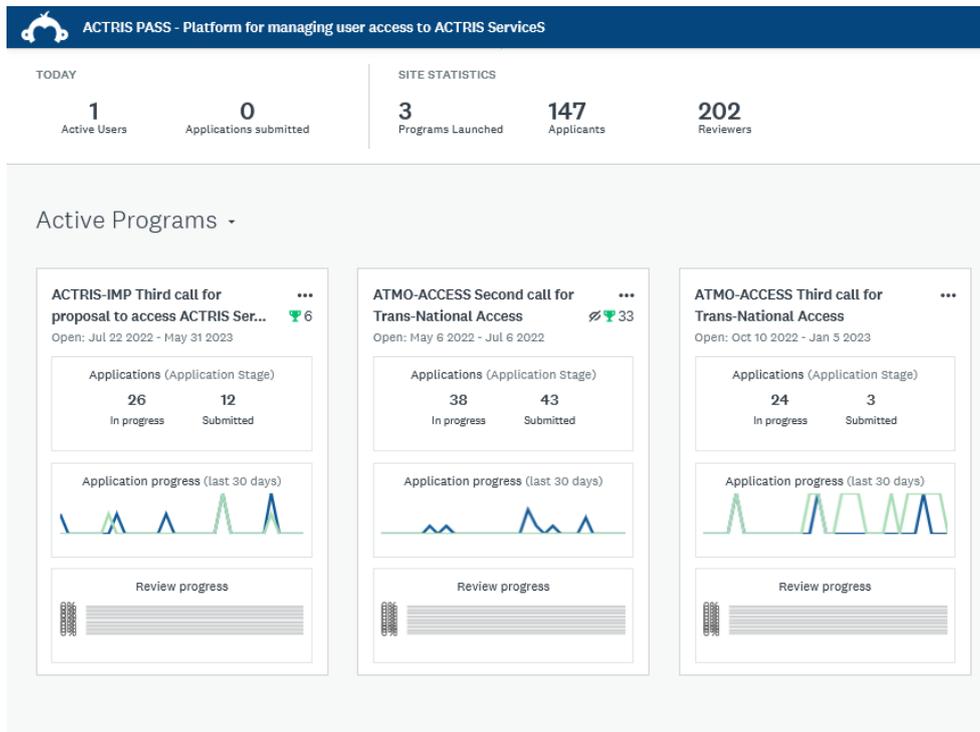
Figure 1 - PASS Platform homepage

Figure 2 - PASS Platform, Admin Portal

PASS facilitates, standardizes and automatizes as much as possible the management of TNA provision with the control of each step of the access process:

- Application submission
- Requests management with requests transferred to:
    - WP9 TNA Team for the pre-screening for eligibility
    - Identified Facilities' personnel for the pre-screening for technical feasibility check
    - Identified experts for peer-review, technical review
- Communication to all relevant actors of the results of the selection
- Monitoring/reporting

3 Review of the ATMO-ACCESS TNA process

Based on the experience of the tests carried out with the 1st TNA call and following the introduction of PASS, the access process was revised to add improvements and make the most out of all the PASS features.

The main adjustments, described in the following sections, concern:

a) the evaluation and selection phase
b) the overall workflow

3.1 Evaluation and Selection

A major change in the evaluation process is the introduction of a brand-new access mode, the **training need-driven access**, proposed to better reflect the specificities of access within ATMO-ACCESS and allow for a fairer review of TNA proposals related to training-only services. That is also in view of preparing for the TNA call dedicated to training in collaboration with WP4, whose support is sought (and will be even more so in the coming months) to adapt further criteria and forms to training services.

For the new access mode, a dedicated set of evaluation criteria was studied, added to the existing ones and described in a new release of the ATMO-ACCESS General TNA Evaluation Guidelines, and finally tested. An excerpt of the different review criteria is provided in Section 3.1.2.

Other important changes were the introduction of a pre-defined timeline for the process (Section 3.1.1), and an additional, final step for the selection of TNAs after the recommendations from the Rapporteurs (Section 3.1.3).

At the moment, TNA Selection is established as a 4-step process including

1. Eligibility check, by SAMU
2. Feasibility check, by TNA providers
3. Independent merit review, by:

- ad-hoc panel of **maximum of three external experts**, identified based on their knowledge in the scientific or technical field that is the subject of the application to be reviewed.
- One **Rapporteur**, chosen within the ad-hoc panel, to draw up a summary report of the individual assessments and formulate recommendations for the selection.
- TNA **Proposals list**, prepared by the TNA Team based the recommendations of the reviewers

4. Final decisions on the selection of the TNA proposals, by a selection committee made up of the Project Coordination, Strategic TNA Access Board, and WP9/SAMU.

3.1.1 Process Timeline

Starting from the 2nd TNA call, the WP9 TNA Team agreed with the project coordination to introduce and test a rigid timeline for the management of the applications, as opposed to the flexible management used in the 1st TNA call, when applications were processed upon arrival, according to the urgency of the request and the planned access periods.

With a fixed timeline, applications are processed after the call's closure and following precise deadlines for completing the different selection steps. That consent that:

- Providers can evaluate the feasibility of proposals for their Facility by comparing the various applications and can attempt an initial planning/calendar in the early stages.

- Similar proposals (topic, Facility, etc.) can be grouped and assigned to the same reviewers for real comparative assessment.

- All users receive the communication of outcomes at the same time. Based on the recommendations from the Rapporteur, the TNA Team prepared a shortlist of recommended applications. The final list of accepted TNAs was decided in the joint Coordination/STBV/SAMU meeting held in Mid-September.

Table 1 below presents the general timing agreed upon for the various stages of the selection process.

Table 1 - General timeline for TNA selection

TNA Call management	Term
Call opening	M0
Deadline for applications	M2-3
Deadline for the Feasibility check	1 week after the call's deadline

Review period	Start: 2 weeks after the call's deadline End: 5 weeks after the call's deadline
Final selection (joint Coordination / STVB / WP9 meeting)	5-6 weeks after the call's deadline
Communication to the users	6 weeks after the call's deadline
Access Period[1]	M6 – M18

During the call period, the WP9 TNA Team performs the eligibility assessment and sends the eligible applications to providers in two times: 1 week before the call's deadline, and then a couple of days after the call closure for the feasibility check of the last applications received in the final days.

Providers have 2 weeks for the feasibility, but just one for the applications received in the last days of the call. Feasible applications are then sent to identified reviewers, who have 3 weeks for the independent evaluations and the recommendations of the Rapporteur.

Based on the recommendations from the Rapporteurs, the WP9 Team/SAMU prepares a shortlist of recommended applications. The final list will be decided in a joint meeting Coordination/STBV/SAMU.

The evaluation and selection of the TNA requests shall end within the pre-defined timeline, provided that all actors involved in the process (providers, reviewers, WP9 staff, selection committee) make all efforts to stick to it. It is possible to adjust the timeline to accommodate particular and special circumstances, for instance pre-scheduled events like campaigns, training schools, etc.

However, apart from the exceptional cases:

– Where providers do not carry out the feasibility check on time, the application will be considered not of interest to the provider and consequently rejected.
– Where suitable reviewers are unavailable or fail to produce the assessments in the assigned term, the review is taken care of by an internal panel with the support of the project coordination and STVB..

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[1] The end of the access period may be flexible in specific cases (and on request), to accommodate unforeseen circumstances for already accepted proposal.

3.1.2 Review criteria

Following the introduction of the training need-driven access mode, a new group of review criteria was added to those initially indicated in MS 40 and detailed in V1 of the ATMO-ACCESS General TNA evaluation guidelines.

At the moment, the evaluation criteria in use for the assessment of the TNAs according to the main characteristic of the requested access consider:

- **Excellence-driven access**: when the access to services shall depend on the scientific excellence, originality, quality and novelty of an application. The peer-review of excellence-driven TNA projects considers the evaluation criteria in the following three groups:
  - *Scientific and technical value* (0-15 points for the quality of research, impact on science, dissemination plans)
  - *Novelty and originality* (0-15 points for the X-disciplinarity, novel or unconventional access approaches, potential for seeding links with industry and innovation
  - *Quality of the applicant* (0-20 points for the scientific qualification / track-record of the user group, gender balance, collaboration and access to new Users, involvement of students / young scientists).
- **Technical need-driven access**: when access to services is required to meet technical needs to ensure instrument quality (maintenance, calibration, QA), high performance measurements, and operator training. The assessment of technical need-driven TNA requests considers evaluation criteria in the following two groups:
  - *Technical and scientific relevance* (0-25 points for the relevance of the instrument, frequency of the technical need, training for the staff using the instrument, interest to the scientific community, dissemination plan: availability and use of data)
  - *Quality of the applicant* (0-15 points for the references and experience of the user group, gender balance, collaboration and access to new Users).
- **Innovation and Market-driven access**: when the request to access services comes from private sector users. In this case, the innovation potential of TNA proposals, possible technological developments as well as market developments and impacts on the economy are principally considered. The assessment of market-driven TNA requests considers the following groups of evaluation criteria:
  - Scientific and technical value (0-10 points for the scientific and technical quality, dissemination and exploitation plans)
  - Innovation and market potential (0-20 points for the likelihood of developing a new successful technology/product, anticipated benefits of the proposed work in comparison to current commercial and emerging technologies, market potential, novel or unconventional access approaches)

- Quality of the applicant (0-15 points for the references, capabilities and experience of the user group/company, gender balance, collaboration and access to new Users)
- **Training need-driven access**: when access to services is required to meet the researchers/operator training needs. The peer-review of training need-driven TNA applications considers the evaluation criteria in the following two groups:
  - Scientific/learning objectives and motivation (0-15 points for the relevance of the scientific and training objectives, relevance of the training for the user current/future position, relevance of the training for the belonging organization, multiplier effect of the training)
  - Quality of the applicant (0-25 points for the academic achievement, gender balance, collaboration and access to new Users, involvement of students / young scientists, potential for seeding links with industry and innovation).

Once the individual assessments are completed, average scores are calculated and a Rapporteur chosen among the experts in the ad-hoc panels summarizes the individual evaluations and formulates recommendations to the selection committee.

Applications are marked according to the following ranking:

Table 2 -ATMO-ACCESS TNA Ranking criteria

Ranking			Points	Possible outcome
A	**Excellent**	A+	>46	accepted
		A	44.x-46	
		A-	42.x-44	
B	**Good**	B+	40.x-42	
		B	38.x-40	
		B-	36.x-38	
C	**Average**	C+	34.x-36	accepted or rejected, for discussion
		C	32.x-34	
		C-	30.x-32	
D	**Poor**	D	<30	rejected
E	**Rejected or not eligible**		(or for revision)	

3.1.3 Final selection

The last step added in the TNA evaluation process is the final decision on the selection of the TNA proposals, taken by a selection committee made up of the Project Coordination, Strategic TNA Access Board, and WP9/SAMU.

The selection committee carefully considers the proposed projects, the scores, the experts' assessments and the Rapporteur's recommendations, checking in particular consistency across the evaluations and with the overall project objectives.

In particular, considerations on the added value of the TNA for the project's objectives are at the basis of the final decisions, evaluating the use of the TNA opportunities for:

- testing innovative modes of access
- piloting use of facilities for novel purposes
- combinations of remote and physical access
- combinations of training and scientific delivery / innovation
- cross-disciplinary access from beyond atmospheric science
- simultaneous or sequential access to multiple facilities
- simultaneous access by users from multiple sectors

Based on these considerations, the selection committee also resolves possible cases where evaluators were unable to agree.

3.2 Access process workflow

Figure 3 below presents the reviewed ATMO-ACCESS TNA workflow following the main changes in the evaluation and selection process.

The process involves, with different roles depending on the specific task:

a) the ATMO-ACCESS Work Package 9 TNA Team
b) the ATMO-ACCESS Work Package 7
c) the ATMO-ACCESS Work Package 2
d) the ATMO-ACCESS TNA providers
e) the user proposing TNA
f) the ATMO-ACCESS Access Evaluation Panel (AEP)
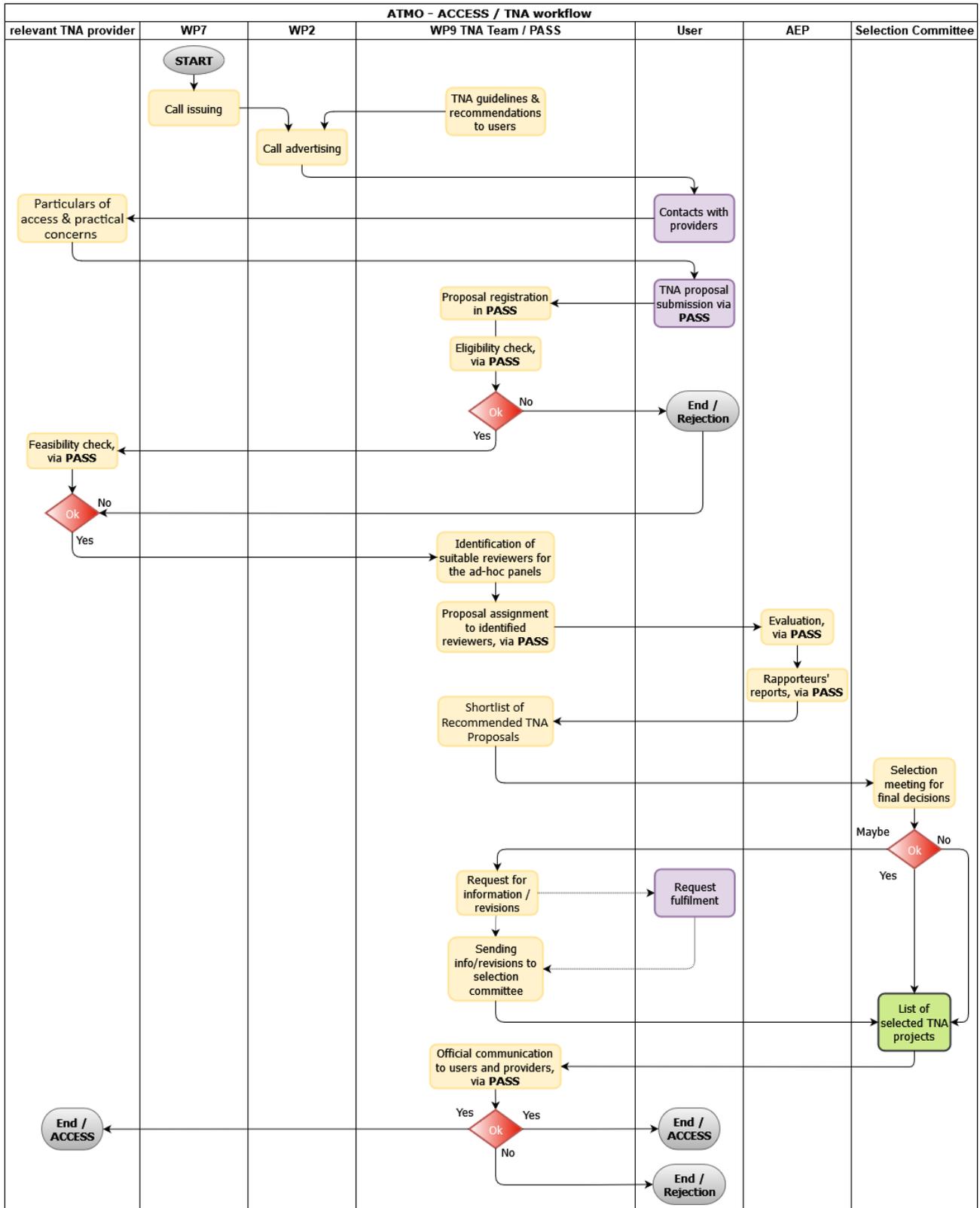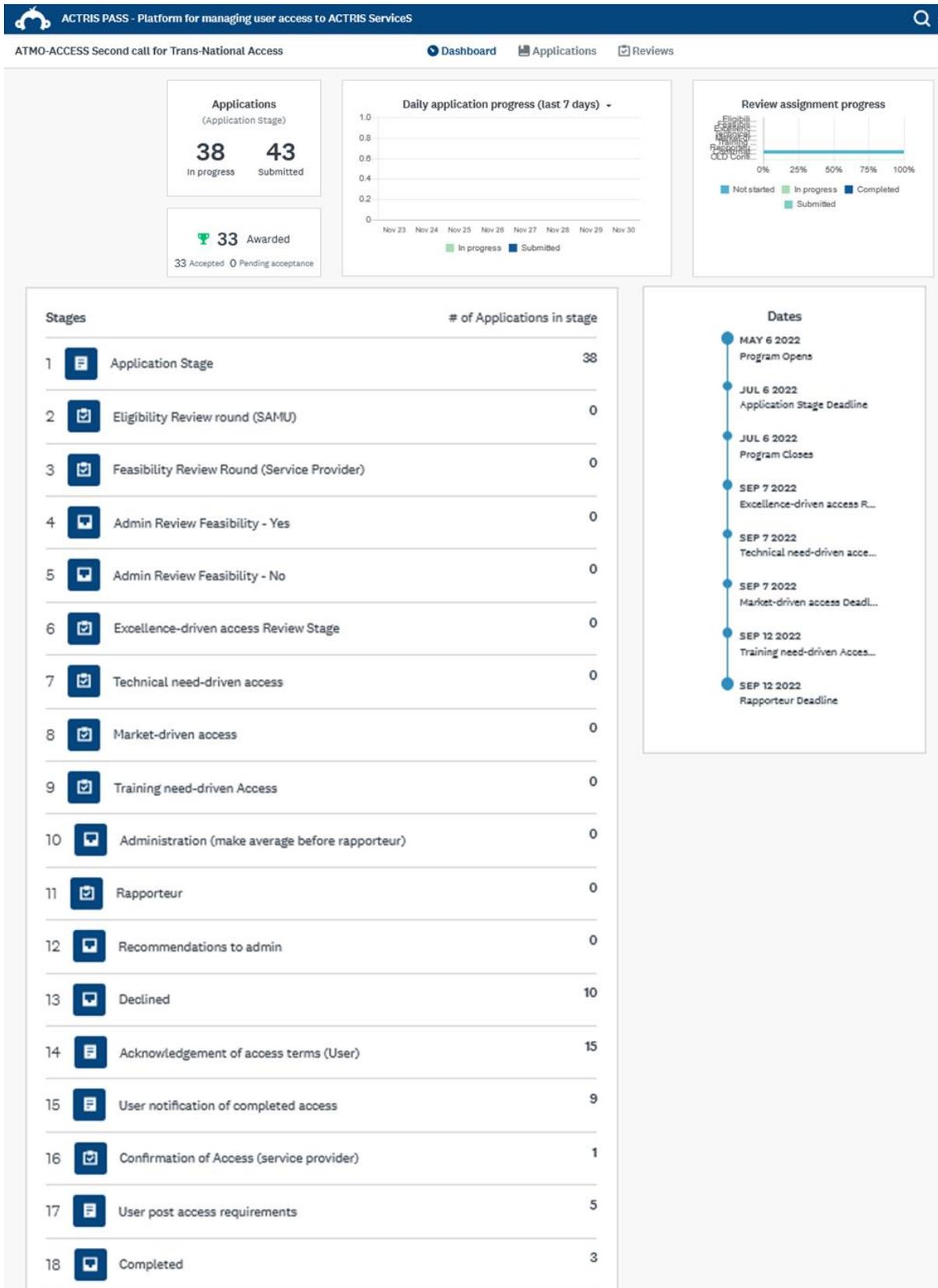g) the selection committee (Project Coordination, Strategic TNA Access Board, and WP9/SAMU).

Figure 3. *ATMO-ACCESS Revised TransNational Access management workflow*

Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable. below presents how the different steps are converted and reflected in the PASS TNA management program.

Figure 4 - *ATMO-ACCESS TNA management workflow in PASS*

4 Access-related template documents

The following is the revised list of access-related forms and documents currently used, via the PASS, in the TNA management within ATMO-ACCESS. The list is non-exhaustive, not definitive with documents and forms periodically revised, when needed, to follow developments in the TNA programme, the TNA management system, the TNA calls. The additions and revisions to the previous list provided in MS40/9.1 are in bold. All documents were shared with TNA providers and the project Scientific Steering Committee (SCC) to receive their input, contributions, and feedback before the final release, ensuring broad sharing.

I. ATMO-ACCESS TNA Application form for customary technical services
II. ATMO-ACCESS TNA Application form for other scientific/technical services
III. **ATMO-ACCESS TNA Application form for training services**
IV. Guidelines for ATMO-ACCESS TNA applicants
V. Terms of Reference for ATMO-ACCESS AEP
VI. ATMO-ACCESS- TNA Evaluation Guidelines, **v.2**
VII. **Individual Evaluation Form/Report:**
- **For excellence-driven access**
- **For technical need-driven access**
- **For market-driven access**
- **For training need-driven access**
VIII. Rapporteur's summary evaluation form:
- **For excellence-driven access**
- **For technical need-driven access**
- **For market-driven access**
- **For training need-driven access**
IX. TNA Proposals ranking list template
X. Templates for standard communications to users, facilities and experts
XI. ATMO-ACCESS TNA User Acknowledgement Statement
XII. ATMO ACCESS Confirmation of Access
XIII. ATMO-ACCESS TNA Scientific activity report
XIV. **ATMO-ACCESS TNA Certificate for technical service provision**
XV. ATMO-ACCESS User feedback questionnaire
XVI. ....

5 Reference documents

1. ATMO-ACCESS Grant Agreement (ID: 101008004).

2. European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures: Principles and guidelines for access and related services. Publications Office of the European Union, 2015. ISBN: 978-92-79-45600-8, doi: 10.2777/524573, KI-04-15-085-EN-N. https://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/pdf/2016_charterforaccessto-ris.pdf

3. ATMO-ACCESS Milestone 9.1: Description of application, review and selection process for TNA to ATMO-ACCESS facilities