



US-ELTP Career Profile

Mabel Wong

Thirty Meter Telescope Chief of Staff



Don't let fear limit the possibilities in life."

Mabel Wong proves that working for a world-class telescope does not necessarily mean you must have a background in astronomy or physics. Mabel's career achievements stem not only from embracing every opportunity that came her way but also from creating her own avenues of success. As a young high school student in Malaysia, Mabel sought the experience of living in a different country. Sending older children away for education is a common custom for families in Southeast Asia. Mabel was able to travel to Australia to finish high school and attend college at Monash University in Melbourne. She moved to the United States with a job working for Caltech's Card Office, which quickly led to her becoming the Technology Manager for Caltech Dining Services. While there, Mabel gained experience in data analysis and management. With a steadfast work ethic, Mabel balanced her full-time position with getting her Master of Business Administration.

Mabel's MBA and Caltech work experience made her a good fit for the Financial Analyst position at the Thirty

Meter Telescope. When Mabel and her husband were faced with the decision to return to Malaysia to be with her family and help run the family business, they took the opportunity, knowing they could always move back to the United States. After 12 years in Malaysia, Mabel and her husband decided to move back to the United States to provide valuable education opportunities for their young children. Mabel contacted her former supervisor at the Thirty Meter Telescope; she had made a lasting impression in her previous role and was appointed to the new position of Chief of Staff.

What does the role as the Chief of Staff for the Thirty Meter Telescope involve?

As the Chief of Staff, I support both the Project Manager and the Business Manager. The Project Manager has a more technical role, leading the design and development of the telescope. The Business Manager is in charge of all the business and administrative aspects of the project, including finance, accounting and taxes, budgeting, contracts and procurement, cost estimating, project controls, IT, and human resources. Many of my daily tasks revolve around them. Beyond strategy and management planning, I support both the Project Manager's and Business Manager's board-related communications and meetings. Solving problems at a high level is built into every aspect of my role, along with managing project properties, insurance, and logistics for hardware.

Fun Facts



I speak five languages: English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Fuzhou, and Malay.



I enjoy painting, which was a hobby I started when the pandemic began.



I love baking cookies, muffins, etc. I recently learned how to make artisanal sourdough breads.

What do you enjoy most about your career?

I love every part of my career. I love helping prepare for the various board and working group meetings, which can be time-consuming for the Project Manager and Business Manager. I find this work very rewarding, and I like figuring out how to communicate the right information at the right time so that everyone understands the issues from every angle. I enjoy the challenge of packaging the information in a digestible way.

What were some challenges or opportunities you faced?

I have learned to take a step back while facing major life decisions. For example, when we had to decide whether

or not to move back to Malaysia, we took the time to consider the pros and cons, along with what we wanted for our future kids. Moving back to Malaysia would allow them to grow up around their grandparents and experience the culture I grew up with. We adjusted to life in Malaysia until we were faced again with a major decision of whether we wanted to stay in Malaysia or move back to the United States. At this time our kids were getting older and we wanted them to have the best education, so we decided to move back to the States. Through these life-changing decisions, we always thought, "What is the worst that could happen?" Don't let fear limit the possibilities in life. Take a risk; you can always make a U-turn if you don't like it.

Mabel's Pathway to the Thirty Meter Telescope's Chief of Staff

