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Workshop for Virtual Research Communities: progress, achievements and plans

Thursday, 29 March 2012 14:00 (5 minutes)

Description of the Work

Whilst EGI seeks to establish representation from the whole spectrum of communities it is appreciated that these communities will not be equal in size and scope. Historically, the VRCs emerged from the so-called Heavy User Communities (HUCs) established during the EGEE projects era. These groups are therefore now represented as VRCs by EGI: High Energy Physics (WLCG), Life Sciences (LSGC), Astronomy and Astrophysics, Earth Sciences, Computational Chemistry and Fusion. These have to date been augmented by new groups representing Structural Biology (WeNMR), Hydrometeorology (HMRC), Humanities and Digital Cultural Heritage. As more customisable applications, tools and services are made available so we expect to connect with more focused communities. This is effectively a manifestation of the long tail effect. Partnerships with VRCs are formally recognised through the co-signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between EGI.eu and another organisation that agrees to support the main representative of the VRC.

International scientific communities can draw many benefits from a strong partnership with EGI. EGI offers grid-ready applications, training resources, workshops and forums, help and support, as well as involvement in an open development process. In turn, VRCs provide EGI with their technical and service requirements, which are then fed into the overall development of the infrastructure as a true user-driven resource.

The workshop will comprise three elements. Firstly, there will be an overview of the VRC model, what it is, how it works, what its benefits are and a progress report on the new requirements that have emerged so far from this process. Secondly, there will be a series of reports from the current representatives of the UCB. Thirdly, there will be a discussion focused on the future needs of the VRCs in order to remain sustainable and open invitation to others to propose suggestions for new communities with which EGI should be linked.

Conclusions

The Virtual Research Communities (VRCs) remain an important part of the EGI constitution. All users are free to submit details of new requirements, however having a User Community Board comprising representatives from across the disciplines reviewing these in addition to EGI staff helps ensure that the evolution of the infrastructure is inclusive and incorporates the needs of the whole community as far as that ambition is realisable.

Impact

The impact of this session will fall into two areas. Firstly, it will capture and promote the achievements of the EGI user communities and secondly it will seek to review and refine the future plans for the VRCs. Whilst the monthly UCB meetings have been successful and productive there is a clear need to embrace more communities within this process that reflect the diversity and creativity of research groups exploiting the benefits

of distributed computing infrastructure both now and in the future. This will require more customisable services so that new, smaller and more specialised communities can adopt and adapt services swiftly and with the minimum of support for their own users. Another change might be that meetings become more like forums where ideas are aired and discussions opened up.

As the ESFRI roadmap projects start to become more established and functional as research teams, EGI will be looking to incorporate them into this model in order to capture key elements of their users' requirements for conducting grid-based research.

Currently the EGI blog carries posts reporting in detail on the monthly meetings. The forum sessions are an extended version of that with all users as well as resource providers and developers invited to contribute to the proceedings.

URL

http://www.egi.eu/user-support/vrc_gateways/

Overview (For the conference guide)

This session will follow the model of previous EGI forums and invite representatives from the Virtual Research Communities (VRC) associated with EGI to present their activities, achievements and goals. VRCs are made up of like-minded researchers sharing a common research discipline or research approach. EGI seeks to establish contact and maintain communication with these groups by recognising a VRC as a light-weight organisational structure with effective contact points through which communication can be managed. VRCs do not exist to control or lead research in a given area, but rather to provide a voice for a community that can speak for the needs of that community and relay back to that community messages from EGI. Representatives from VRCs participate regularly in the User Community Board (UCB) which meets monthly, typically, to discuss issues and opportunities as well as review new requirements emerging from across the communities.

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