



The e-IRG White Paper 2013 public consultation

Comments summary [June 2013]

This document contains complementary material to the e-IRG White Paper, published in July 2013 at the e-IRG website (<http://www.e-irg.eu/publications/white-papers.html>).

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e-IRG
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GÉANT Response to Draft e-IRG White Paper

12 June 2013

GÉANT is an enduring European e-Infrastructure whose NREN partners, recognising its importance for European research and education and its success, therefore wish to build constructively on what has been achieved to date, to meet the evolving networking and communications needs of the research and education community.

e-Infrastructure Commons 2020

The European NREN partners in GÉANT recognise the desirability of interoperability of e-Infrastructures and also welcome cooperation between e-Infrastructure providers which achieves efficiencies and improves the interface to users, including potentially developing new services for users.

Regarding the three proposed core functions of each e-Infrastructure, it is not necessary to be prescriptive as to how an e-Infrastructure organises itself internally. It is sufficient merely for each e-Infrastructure to act at each of the three proposed levels.

It is important to involve users both in technical research and development and in the identification and prioritization of new services to be offered but the structure and approach to doing so should be decided by each e-Infrastructure. Although there is a considerable overlap between the user communities of different types of e-Infrastructures as far as big international user organisations are concerned, the NRENs in addition have a much wider user community at the national level, and the service offerings of the NREN community have to take this into account by involving users both at the national and the international level.

User involvement in developing e-Infrastructures' long-term strategies is important. Their needs should be the primary target of the strategy developed by the e-Infrastructure service provider(s).

In general, coordination of actors is preferable to harmonisation or direction. GÉANT is a good example of achieving "unity in diversity" – in which a common objective (pan-European research networking) is achieved without imposing uniformity on the very varied NREN partners. Imposition of unnecessary harmonisation should be avoided.

Closer collaboration should be developed between user communities and e-Infrastructure service providers but room must also be left for e-Infrastructures researchers to perform "blue skies" research which is not in response to specific identified user needs.

e-Infrastructure collaboration at the level of community building and strategy building would be beneficial for forming a single vision and avoiding duplication of effort. Regulatory and public policy activity, where e-

Infrastructures have many common concerns, is one area where umbrella activity would be beneficial. However the e-IRG White paper seems somewhat unclear about the strategy setting, mentioning first the e-IRG itself as the “single e-Infrastructure umbrella forum for strategy setting in Europe” on page 7, then later on page 8 pointing to “International organisations of eRIs need to join forces .both eRIs and user communities should establish a clear separation between responsibilities and tasks for strategy setting and operations”. Hence it seems that the e-IRG, the joined forces of the eRIs and the users are all envisaged to have strategy setting roles, and this is not quite consistent with the notion of a single umbrella forum for strategy setting. To the NREN community it seems more realistic to have strategy setting bodies where users and e-infrastructure organisations meet with a common interest, and at the moment this body is not the e-IRG but the relevant fora connected to the big existing e-infrastructures. The NREN community would of course welcome a closer collaboration between users and all types of e-infrastructures and could point to TERENA as a possible coordinator in this respect.

e-Infrastructures in Support of Open Science

Requirements and methods relating to data management, provision and access are evolving and future needs are not yet clearly identified. It is therefore advisable to keep an open, flexible approach, providing generic and widely interoperable e-Infrastructure platforms.

The developing and evolving nature of data management highlights the need for close collaboration with research networks, to encourage mutual learning and knowledge sharing.

Data Policy Recommendations for Large-Scale Research Projects

The data policy recommendations for large-scale research projects contained in the White Paper, and based on the e-IRG 2012 Blue Paper, sound broadly sensible.

Legal Barriers to Commercial Use of e-Infrastructures

As observed above, joint working on regulatory issues as they apply to e-Infrastructure would be beneficial.

Matti Heikurinen, FedSM project, CH

Dear Secretariat - and everyone involved with the e-IRG White Paper,

We read through the consultation copy with great interest and noted that it both presents an interesting, tempting vision and addresses important issues in reaching it.

The e-IRG White Paper was discussed in some depth within the FedSM project, and we hope that the short text below that summarises our thoughts could - in some small way - contribute to your efforts to produce the final version of the White Paper!

Best regards,

Matti Heikkurinen

On behalf of the FedSM project consortium e-IRG White Paper public consultation, comments from the FedSM project 7th June 2013:

In the steps towards e-Infrastructure commons it would be beneficial to promote common (to users and service providers) vocabulary and conceptual framework that describes the non-functional requirements related to the e-IRs such as reliability and service recovery practices, management practices and their maturity, and other issues related to e-Infrastructure service management.

In addition to improving the understanding between the users and service providers, this approach would also support achieving single contact point for the various e-Infrastructure services, make it easier to use joint purchasing power while at the same time minimising the likelihood of emergence of monopoly-like situations. The common framework would also support sufficient formalisation of the governance and mandates of actors mentioned on page 15 as well as (most likely) clarifying the role Cloud Computing could and should play in the e-RI domain.

This common model could be based on the work of initiatives such as FedSM and the FitSM standard being developed that makes it easier to apply the traditional IT service management principles in environments such as e-Infrastructures.

[References: http://gslm.eu/files/gSLM_Roadmap_Federated_Service_Management_v1.5.pdf and <http://www.fedsm.eu/downloads>]

Andrew Smith, ELIXIR, UK



ELIXIR response to e-IRG White Paper 2013

ELIXIR serves a global community of millions of life science researchers and plays a fundamental role in supporting the other ESFRI biomedical Research Infrastructures, including through coordinating the BioMedBridges cluster project. ELIXIR is also an open research data e-infrastructure, with vast compute, network and tools requirements. It therefore collaborates closely with, and indeed relies upon the services provided by many of the existing e-Infrastructures, such as EGI and GEANT.

The White Paper proposes a single umbrella forum for strategy setting in Europe. A high-level independent body would no doubt be able to add value in many areas such as legal, ethical and licensing issues. These are issues facing almost every infrastructure and knowledge management project and having an authoritative source for advice, policy and practical guidance would be a major step forward for European research; it is a key area for cross domain services. It is also a co-ordination aspect that would cut across and serve equally e-Infrastructures and user communities in all domains.

However, it would be important for any such forum to retain a streamlined structure that allowed for the swift development and implementation of policies. In what is a rapidly-moving field, a consensus-based forum may prove too slow to react to emerging technological needs. This issue in particular should be given careful consideration during future discussions on the format, membership or mandate of such an umbrella forum.

When looking to develop collective responses to improve the European e-Infrastructure landscape, it is important that policy-makers focus on addressing the issues that are faced and shared by communities collectively. These tend to concern legal, ethical and governance issues as well as the wider policy agenda, more so than the technological solutions, which have a tendency to be more domain specific and for obvious reasons driven by the relevant user communities.

On the issue of software and opportunities for collaboration, most usable services known to ELIXIR are bound, often inextricably, to domain-specific data. There may be more scope for first identifying cross-domain functionality, which, for example, could include text mining, irrespective of any specific software implementation. One positive first step could be cataloguing services/software as this could allow experts from different domains to share best practice and stimulate the sharing and repurposing of software. A key aspect is software metadata and there is scope here to collaborate on a common, domain-neutral controlled vocabulary and exchange format. Other areas to explore might be cataloguing software used within domains which could be repurposed for other fields, and the sharing (federation) of content.

Raising the "career value" of software and datasets is another area where there could be real value in a high-level cross-discipline approach being taken. There needs to be an efficient way of uniquely identifying software so it can be consistently referred to from scientific publications and registries. This would be a natural policy field for the e-IRG to further push as improvements in software ID would

help to professionalise the academic software sector and make positive improvements in addressing the career opportunities of developers.

ELIXIR endorses the statement in the White Paper of the need to support innovation and the potential that e-Infrastructures have for stimulating innovation through collaboration with industry, including suppliers. ELIXIR is currently developing a formal industry engagement programme, and this will include harnessing key industry suppliers, as well as industry users, in the provision of strategic oversight in the development of ELIXIR services. The European Commission can play a key role in further stimulating the innovation potential of e-Infrastructures through its use of Horizon 2020 funding. The e-IRG could compliment this activity by sharing best practice on the subject.

On the recommendation that Member States need to continue to make sufficient investments in e-Infrastructures, ELIXIR fully supports this. Similarly, ELIXIR would advocate this being supported and strengthened by appropriate activities led by the European Commission in Horizon 2020. In particular, there exists great potential for using Horizon 2020 funds to support the development and use of transnational access to e-Infrastructures. Such activities would represent real EU-added value and in turn help leverage additional national investments from Member States.

As a distributed e-Infrastructure providing bioinformatics services to the globe on an Open Access basis, ELIXIR endorses the value that the White Paper places on Open Science. In terms of Open Access to publications, it is clear that much progress has been made over recent years, both by national governments and funding bodies, and through European Commission policies. Going forward, it is important to ensure that EU programmes and policies are used effectively so that even more can be achieved. In the field of life sciences, for example, Europe PubMed Central now contains 26 million abstracts, and 2.6 million full text articles that are free to read (Green Access); of those, 600,000 are free to read and re-use (Gold). Any future actions led by the European Commission on Open Access should harness and build on such resources that already exist and have critical mass.

At this present time, Member States and the European Commission have less formalised strategies and policies in place when it comes to Open Access to Data, although this is rightly beginning to change. For example, more and more Member States and funding bodies now have their own clearly defined policies on data management plans and also provide appropriate provisions to support this. In the context of Horizon 2020, through the pilot action on Data Management Plans, the European Commission has the opportunity to effect positive change in the same way as the Open Access Pilot on publications in FP7. There is a natural hierarchy of Data Management Plans and practices where a cross domain body will provide fundamental principles and policies that is implemented through domain specific practices.

It is important to recognise that domain-specific e-Infrastructures play an immensely valuable role, acting as a resource for the national and European-funded programme, collecting, annotating and making available life sciences data funded through these programmes. ELIXIR has much expertise to offer, especially in the issue of ethics and privacy. Whilst pan-European initiatives such as EUDAT can add real value, there also needs to be a prominent role for the domain-specific e-Infrastructures as they have the closest links to both their users and those supplying the data.

ELIXIR endorses the White Paper recommendations on data policy for Large-Scale Research Projects. ELIXIR is the ESFRI biomedical Research Infrastructure most concerned with data, and is the co-ordinator of the BioMedBridges cluster project, which builds data bridges between ELIXIR and the other ESFRI biomedical infrastructures. ELIXIR and BioMedBridges are already engaging the new, 'third-generation' ESFRI Research Infrastructures, and links are also being built across disciplines, for example, between ELIXIR and LifeWatch and between BioMedBridges and the other domain-specific cluster projects. Such collaborations can bring real value and ELIXIR supports the e-IRG statement on this.

One key issue for ELIXIR is the sheer scale of data being generated by the community as a result of high throughput sequencing technologies. Added to this, life sciences data are by their nature complex and heterogeneous, perhaps more so than data being generated by many other communities and so policy responses need to be built upon the exact needs and requirements of domains. In the life sciences there is a very rapid technical development in data storage formats and standard in response to the increasing data volumes and scientific developments in fields such as

genomic sequencing, it is paramount to ensure that there is a strong interplay between policy, practices and developing technology.

The White Paper correctly recognises the need for addressing the issue of standards development. This is currently being addressed by the BioMedBridges cluster project, where developing common standards and ontologies between different communities within the biological medical sciences are critical. Likewise, recognising the importance of ethical concerns, particularly in the era of personalised medicine, is also crucial and it is correct that the White Paper recognises the importance of this issue.

The White Paper correctly recognises the integral relationship between big data and computing. In order for e-Infrastructure providers to continue to develop reliable services and at the same time respond to the data deluge, there needs to be an HPC landscape within Europe that is fit for purpose. One of the key issues for ELIXIR in the context of HPC is the issue of Data I/O. It is imperative that any policy recommendations developed by the e-IRG on this issue recognise the needs of all user communities and that for bioinformatics.

An important area that was not addressed in depth in this White Paper is the *people* aspect of e-Infrastructures; we believe that it is of key importance that e-Infrastructures invest, develop and support a strong cadre of experts that can bridge the gap between rapidly developing ICT technology and e-Infrastructure on the one side and equally fast moving scientific opportunities on the other side. Application experts with a strong background and rooting in the scientific domains are the key to use case driven development and enabling services.

ELIXIR welcomes the opportunity to feed into this process and remains open to provide additional input as and when required.

ELIXIR
June 2013

Carlos Merida-Campos, Barcelona Supercomputing Center, ES

To Whom it may concern,

My name is Carlos Mérida, I am working for the PRACE project as work package leader on the tasks related to organizational aspects. After reading carefully the document I have some comments that I am sending you in this email for your consideration.

1- The document states that a common issue to address is: “Investigating whether researchers and international research projects are harmed by a Digital (e-RI) Divide”. My comment is that, in the way it is written, it looks like e-IRG is proposing solutions without knowing yet if there is a problem, this somehow undermines the credibility of the whole project. My suggestion is to rephrase it to reflect that this has already been investigated/sensed but a continuous monitoring is necessary.

2- In the Cloud Computing section says: “However, if we look at the cloud as a large range of services it becomes more and more clear that all existing e-infrastructures services could be offered in the cloud model”

This is not so clear for the case of HPC, and nowadays not everyone is converted to this view. For being in the safe side and not harming any sensibility, I suggest to change it to: “However, if we look at the cloud as a large range of services it becomes more and more clear that many of existing e-infrastructures services could be offered in the cloud model”

3- On the section: Legal barriers to the commercial use of e-infrastructures, at PRACE we have analysed this issue with the assistance of a legal firm, and I am providing some further insight here from their conclusions for you to consider including it:

The best case scenario for a RI for taxation purposes is to be taxed for direct income tax purposes being subject to the legal entities tax (just if they are not exercising profitable transactions). This favourable regime allows them to be taxed on investment income and real property income only, which is more favourable than the corporate income tax regime. The law provides that a non-profit organisation can remain subject to the legal entities tax regime, even if it realizes certain transactions which are intrinsically profitable. There are mainly two safe-harbour rules: (i) the explicit exemption for specific non-profit organisations (irrespective of whether or not they exercise profitable transactions); and (ii) the authorized operations of a profitable nature.

Regarding (i), Infrastructures and hosting countries have to negotiate this special conditions.

Regarding (ii), Authorized operations of a profitable nature are (a) isolated or exceptional operations, (b) operations of investment of resources, and (c) operations that encompass merely ancillary industrial or commercial transactions or operations that do not require the implementation of industrial or commercial methods.

However, the activities may nevertheless still be permitted without triggering the corporate income tax, if the infrastructure can demonstrate that no industrial or commercial methods

have been used in the organisation of the intended activities. In other words, the organisation may not use methods that are typically used by commercial enterprises to promote or organise their profitable operations. In practice, for non-profit organisations, this would mean, for instance, that the intended activities are mainly addressed to the members (without hermetically closing out third party participants), that the publicity for the offered activities is mainly or exclusively addressed to the members (or directly interested parties, e.g., members of member organisations), that the profit margin is lower than what normal commercial entities would charge (or that there is no profit margin at all), that there is no distortion of competition with commercial actors offering the same/similar services, ... This will require an analysis of all the facts and circumstances.

VAT is another barrier for commercial usage: Ideally an RI should be non-taxable person for VAT purposes. But if the RI would be rendering services for reward to the industry for commercial purposes, it will be rendering regular taxable service and, thus, become a VAT taxpayer. The upside would be that the RI would be able to deduct VAT on invoices received in relation to this taxable service. The downside, however, would be that this may potentially taint other transactions that are currently considered outside the scope of VAT.

Regarding Competition, it should be noted that, as the European Commission states in its horizontal cooperation guidelines in the field of competition law, the further away R&D is from the market, the less likely it is that any competition law issue arises (§129): “Most R&D agreements do not fall under Article 101(1). First, this can be said for many agreements relating to co-operation in R&D at a rather early stage, far removed from the exploitation of possible results.”(Communication from the Commission — Guidelines on the applicability of Article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to horizontal co-operation agreements OJ C 11, 14.1.2011, p. 1–72) It is therefore crucial that the RI offers commercial services in line with competition law principles. The most relevant principle to observe would be: When charging a fee, not offering the service at a price that is below cost.

Hope it helps,

Best Regards,

Carlos.

Dr. Carlos Merida-Campos
BSC - BARCELONA SUPERCOMPUTING CENTER
Centro Nacional de Supercomputación

Keith Russell, Knowledge Exchange Coordinator

Dear Leif,

I understand that you are actively engaged in e-IRG. We had a look at the new e-IRG white paper and read this with great interest. We are quite interested in the e-IRG work and see relations with KE work. Some of the partners came up with a few suggestions which might be useful for future conversations on KE and e-IRG and these might also be useful for the white paper:

- Delivering a complete e-Infrastructure for research requires a very wide basis of collaboration. It is worthwhile considering adopting a wide approach and encouraging a broad participation, recognising the potential benefits that will arise by involving a large range of players and initiatives and their potential roles.
- In light of this very broad spread providing a complete e-Infrastructure for research, quite innovative approaches will be required to address the demands in these times of financial challenge.
- We think it is a very valuable point to explore a mixed economy for the infrastructure. To translate this into practice, again, a very wide basis of collaboration must be encouraged.
- We agree that there should be room to accommodate demand for commercially provided e-Infrastructure. It will be important to further explore what this will mean in practice. One point to keep in mind here is that, historically, academia has provided significant leadership in innovation in e-Infrastructure.

I hope these comments are useful, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,
Keith
Keith Russell

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Fiorenzo Scaroni, e-IRG delegate, CH

Dear Jan,

I hope that I'm not too late for few comments on the WP.

One aspect, which could be introduced in the WP2013 edition is a better consideration of the long tail for the different services of the e-Infrastructure. With long tail I mean the bulk of scientists and researchers who don't need ESFRI-Infrastructure, but summed up constitute a big mass, with normal but huge needs. With the advent of virtualized services, this bulk could be considered like one or more big projects.

I proposed this aspect for the next e-IRG-Workshop, but we could begin to sensibilize for this problem already now.

The second comment regards the introduction of the chapter on big (ESFRI) projects. The introduction focuses almost only on big data, and big data is treated in another chapter. We shouldn't forget, that big projects need the whole e-Infrastructure services and today the most important problem to solve is the federated Identity middleware.

Beste Grüsse

Fiorenzo

Evelijn Jeunink, Legal adviser SURFnet, NL

Is,

with great interest we have read the draft e-IRG White Paper 2013. Hereby we send you our input and comments.

SURFnet is pleased with the e-IRG White Paper that addresses in an accurate way the necessary steps and obstacles that need to be taken to come to a general-purpose European e-Infrastructure. We even feel that there is enough basis to sharpen the proposed approach and the recommendations in the White paper and be as concrete as possible.

The chapter 'Legal Barriers to Commercial Use of e-Infrastructures' is a very useful part. The right topics are chosen to elaborate upon. We do feel that the title should be adjusted. The key issue is not the commercial use but the use by commercial parties which we prefer to call private parties. In line with this commercial research should be called private research.

We suggest that the first paragraph of the Legal Barriers chapter should more clearly underline the relationship with the rest of the document, in particular with the chapter on e-Infrastructure Commons. It should be made more clear that the use of the e-Infrastructure by private/commercial parties remains within the research mission of the existing infrastructure. A reference should be made to the need of facilitating the use by private parties in research in the light of Horizon 2020 goals. We also suggest to add a sentence that in a number of countries private use within boundaries is common practice.

The section on State Aid seems excellent. One could indicate that in some countries (and by the e-IRG in earlier policy documents) a distinction is made between innovation costs and operating costs. This is helpful when justifying the state contribution but also to keep a clear business-economic perspective.

We would like to make the following topic part of the paragraph about Procurement law. Procurement law offer a possibility for public contracting parties to fall outside the scope of the regulation when certain conditions are fulfilled. Public parties within the field of research and education may use this exception to procure e-infrastructure services developed and offered by NREN's.

Not to fall within the scope of the procurement regulation for public research and education parties procuring e-infrastructure from NREN's is often crucial. If they where obliged to start a public tender NREN's are not able to respond because this could lead to a distorting of the market.

The exclusion of the procurement regulation presumes a close and exclusive relation between public parties i.c. the organizations within the research- and education community and the NREN. The main part of the activities of the NREN should be carried out for the research- and education community. The proposal for the new Public Procurement Directive speaks of at least 90% of the activities. This leaves very little room for activities - like sharing the e-infrastructure - for private parties

Kind regards,

Evelijn Jeunink
Legal adviser SURFnet

Stuart Bell, Weather Sciences IT, UK

Hi

Bob Day asked me (in my capacity as member of UK Govt BIS Ministry E-Infrastructure Leadership Council) to comment on your paper

My comments - already sent to Bob

One problem with this is that it gives all the appearance of working in a vacuum. Making recommendations on an annual basis with no clear indication that previous recommendations were acted upon. I see from the website a link to previous recommendations dating back to 2003. What happened to them? I would suggest that any annual appraisal should start with review of successes and failures. Is anyone listening to and acting upon the recommendations?

It would also be helpful to have the summary section which is sufficiently meaty to stand alone without reading through the full 42 pages. Capturing the essence of the more important recommendations in a more coherent way and if you accept the above point, capturing the successes.

I also have a problem with invented jargon - e-infrastructure common is not a term I have come across.

Regards,

Stuart

Anna Wetterbom, Swedish Research Council, SE

Regarding the e-IRG white paper 2013

In general, we find the white paper to be a well composed document, covering essentially all important aspects. We are specifically pleased to read that e-IRG advocates a diversity of e-infrastructures; where diverse and heterogeneous needs of scientists in different disciplines can be met and the interaction between disciplines and e-infrastructures will be provided by standardized interfaces. As opposed to a situation where a single solution is imposed on all scientific disciplines.

The human layer of e-infrastructures

There is one major area of e-infrastructures that is almost completely missing in the white paper and that is the human layer of e-infrastructures. The white paper gives the impression that future e-infrastructures (e.g. compute resources, databases) will be so easy and convenient to use that 'anyone' can do it. We do not share this view. If e-infrastructures are to be at the cutting edge and provide advanced services for scientist, the e-infrastructures will by necessity have a certain complexity. To address this we see that the human layer of e-infrastructures is crucial. These people should be the interface between the advanced e-infrastructures and the scientist, where they provide the necessary help. They could be integrated with the e-infrastructure itself or be a separate organizational entity. The important aspect is that these people should be part of a service organization that helps other to do science.

ESFRI

We support the proposed model but would like to emphasize the need for the human layer in e-infrastructures (see above).

Users and there role

The white paper raises the question of who the user is and we would like to propose that users are both Research Infrastructures (such as ESFRI projects) and individual researchers and their groups. It is important to recognize that some research groups may have very large needs for e.g. data transfer, storage and computational capacity, which could be comparable to some RIs.

In general, users need to become aware of the costs associated with large-scale e-infrastructures and they have to be able to get funding for these types of costs. The essence of this problem is very well captured in the first chapter in the statement 'users need to be prepared and empowered to pay for e-infrastructure services'.

Authentication, authorization and identification (AAI)

AAI is an issue that is crucial for all e-infrastructures in order to allow researchers controlled access. Currently there is not a single method to do this and we believe this may hamper further development and improvement of research using e-infrastructures. AAI is mentioned a number of times in the white paper but we would like the white paper to emphasize this more strongly.

The role for e-IRG

The white paper describes a clear need for coordination of the strategic work on e-infrastructures and for coordinating advice to the commission and on a national level. e-IRG offers to take on the role to be such a hub. We note this and similarly note that e-IPF has a very similar mandate. In our opinion it would be logical to make a clearer distinction between the aims and mandates of the two organizations. The white paper mentions the need to separate strategy and operations of e- infrastructures and we believe this would be useful also for policy organizations. As of today, e-IRG is a mix of both.

One possible future direction for e-IRG would be to tackle the issues raised in the last chapter Legal barriers to commercial use of e-infrastructures. These issues are complex and hard to penetrate for individual e-infrastructures, funders etc. If e-IRG would commit to these issues and provide advice for both for national and European organization this could potentially be a very important contribution from e-IRG.

For a policy organization to be powerful we believe it needs to have a clear mandate and a clear mission. Furthermore, to achieve high legitimacy the members need to be appointed in a transparent process and clearly state who they are representing.



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