



e-IRG

e-IRG
e-Infrastructure
Reflection Group

Task Force Document

Paving the way towards a general purpose European e-Infrastructure

Experiences of e-IRG involvement in ESFRI proposal evaluation

Arjen van Rijn

on behalf of the e-IRG Overarching Working Group (OAWG)

<http://e-irg.eu>

Colophon

Acknowledgments

This e-IRG document was produced by the e-IRG Overarching Working Group (OAWG) on February 20, 2016 and adopted by the e-IRG plenum on September 27, 2016.

This document was assembled by the e-IRGSP4 project for e-IRG.



e-IRGSP4 is supported by the FP7 Capacities Programme under contract nr RI-632688.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

ISBN 978-90-823661-2-9

Version 1.4

e-IRG secretariat

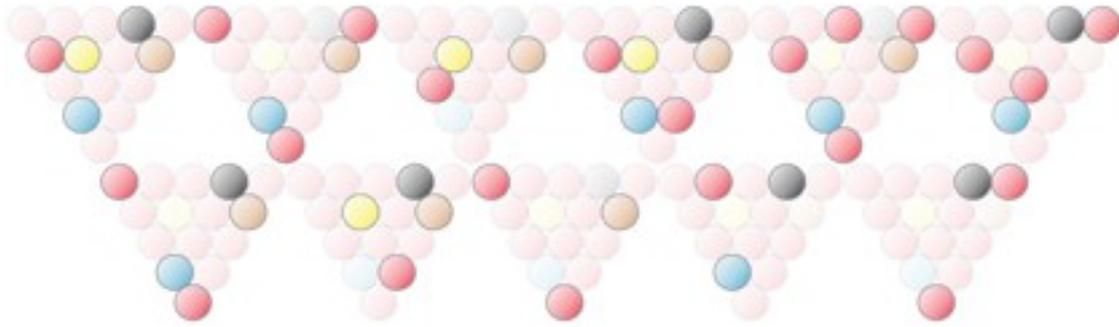
P.O. Box 93575,
NL-2509 AN The Hague,
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)70 344 0526
E-mail: secretariat@e-irg.eu

Visiting address

Java Building, Laan van Nieuw Oost-Indië 300
NL-2593 CE The Hague
The Netherlands

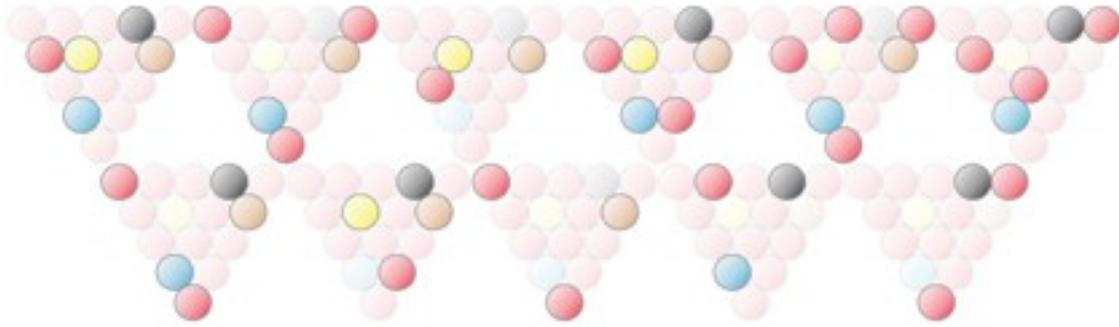
Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Composition of the OAWG.....	5
3	e-Needs questions.....	6
4	Procedure.....	7
5	Observations and experiences.....	8
5.1	Membership of SWG and IG.....	8
5.2	Formulation of the e-Needs questions.....	8
5.3	Content of the e-Needs responses.....	9
5.1	Rating the e-Needs responses.....	10
6	Conclusions and recommendations.....	11



1 Introduction

In the preparation for the update of its Roadmap ESFRI has decided in 2013 to incorporate questions on e-infrastructure needs in the ESFRI proposal submission form. It was also agreed between ESFRI and e-IRG that e-IRG members would participate in the ESFRI Strategic Working groups and be responsible for the evaluation of the responses to these 'e-Needs' questions. Another e-IRG member participated in the Implementation Group. This short report presents the collective experiences with this evaluation process and some recommendations for improvement.



2 Composition of the OAWG

Sverker Holmgren, chairman

Panos Argyrakis, SWG Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)

Françoise Genova, SWG Physical Sciences and Engineering (PSE)

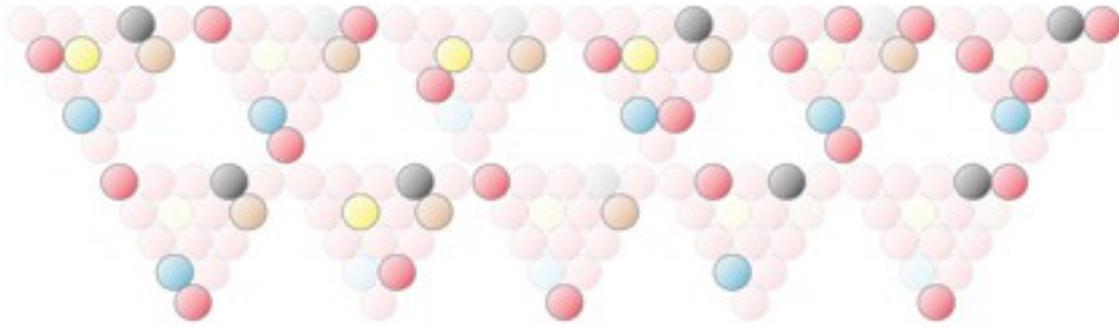
Sergi Girona, SWG Health and Food (H&F)

Norbert Meyer, SWG Energy

Arjen van Rijn, SWG Environmental Sciences (ENV)

Roar Skålin, ESFRI Implementation group (IG)

Rosette Vandenbroucke, chair Editorial Board Guidelines document

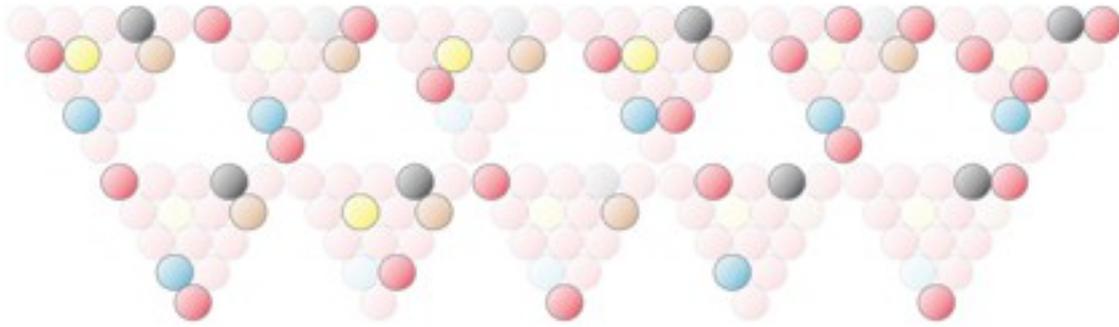


3 e-Needs questions

In the ESFRI proposal submission form the following e-Needs questions were included:

Nr.	Head
4.1	What will be the data management and open data policy of the RI? (e.g. would data become accessible from a repository to the public? Would the RI be interfaced to e-Infrastructures for science?)
4.2	What is the plan for supporting advanced data management and how will it be funded?
4.3	What is needed (if applicable) from external e-Infrastructure services (resources for storage, computing, networking, tools for data management, security, access, remote analysis, etc.)?
4.4	Will the RI contribute to the development of e-Infrastructure commons in the field or in general?
4.5	Will the RI policy on data include training services for “data practitioners” to enable the effective use of data repositories and data analysis tools by non-scientists?

To help proposers of ESFRI projects with these questions e-IRG prepared a guidelines document (“Best Practices for the use of e-Infrastructures by large-scale research infrastructures” [<http://e-irg.eu/guidelines>, 24 February 2015], which provides background on the European e-infrastructure landscape, explains the concept of the e-infrastructure commons and gives information on the interpretation of the questions (indicators).

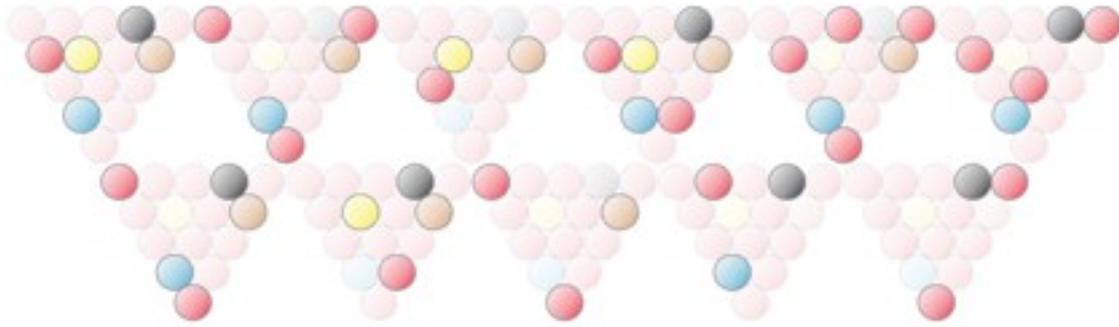


4 Procedure

After final submission of the proposals and the eligibility check the e-IRG members participating in the SWG were given access to the documentation of each proposal in their SWG.

In order to obtain a common understanding of the evaluation the full Overarching Working Group had a meeting (15 June 2015, Amsterdam), in which the members shared their observations about the responses on the e-Needs questions. The confidentiality principle was honored: no proposal documents were shared between the SWG members and also no traceable information was shared on the (provisional) evaluation results and ratings. Also at that meeting the OAWG exchanged ideas about the formulation of 'intelligent questions', which were part of the preparation for the hearings.

The e-IRG members participating in the SWGs all attended the hearings for 'their' proposals and were fully involved in formulating the texts regarding the post hearing evaluation of the responses on the 'intelligent questions'. The ratings given by each e-IRG member were incorporated in the final assessment.



5 Observations and experiences

5.1 Membership of SWG and IG

The OAWG members felt welcome in their SWG and fully involved in the evaluation process. They had full access to all relevant documents. Thus, no obstacles were experienced in taking part in the evaluation process. The e-IRG members in the SWGs report that although the whole evaluation process took more time than anticipated (attending SWG meetings, reading proposal documentation, attending hearings) it was 'manageable'. Evaluations were primarily based on the responses provided in the designated e-Needs sections. Individual e-IRG members differed in the amount of time spent in finding information on e-infrastructure related issues in the additional proposal documentation.

The one e-IRG member in the IG (consisting of seven senior ESFRI delegates and this e-IRG member) was active on equal terms with the other IG members and there was absolutely no difference in the tasks assigned. Some of the other IG members were as concerned with the data issue as the e-IRG member (if not even more). The workload for this e-IRG member was quite heavy. This included the assessment of implementation of 16 projects from the 2010 roadmap (which the IG did prior to assessing the new proposals), assessment of maturity for the new proposals and establishment of methodology.

5.2 Formulation of the e-Needs questions

Although the e-IRG Guidelines document provides information on the interpretation of the e-Needs indicators, the OAWG experienced some ambiguity in the way proposers responded to them, partly due to the way the questions were phrased. Some of these comments are listed:

1. Some of the questions were not really phrased openly (in principle they could be answered with 'yes' or 'no', whilst a 'how to' approach might have delivered more information.
2. Question 4.1 refers to an 'open data policy' in which the word 'open' is already prescriptive. The essence is in having a data policy altogether.

3. In question 4.1 it is also unclear if the data management policy is only needed for open data; the OAWG feels that having a data management policy is independent from having an 'open' data policy
4. Question 4.1 and 4.2 seemingly contain overlapping topics, which incline proposers to describe their data management issues in both responses.
5. Question 4.4 relies quite heavily on the interpretation of the concept of the e-infrastructure commons.
6. Question 4.5 already raised ambiguity amongst the OAWG members themselves, especially w.r.t. the terms 'non-scientists' and 'data practitioners'. Training, in general, is a good activity, but this is not what was asked. For instance: if there are no plans to open the data for non-scientists then there is no need to train non-scientists.

The OAWG has not systematically checked, whether ESFRI proposers have actually used the e-IRG Guidelines document (it was released late in the process, just over a month before the submission deadline). Anecdotal evidence shows it has been used.

5.3 Content of the e-Needs responses

OAWG members reported a large variety in size and content in responses to the e-Needs questions. Also part of the responses to specific e-Needs questions were incorporated in responses to other e-Needs questions. The OAWG felt, this was caused both by the above described ambiguity in the phrasing of the questions as well as by the differing level of maturity in addressing e-Needs between research fields.

Another quite general observation was that responses on question 4.2. lacked information on funding the various data management activities and on 4.3 lacked quantification of required resources (data storage, computing, networking). Also it was not always clear how these were to be provisioned and funded for (e.g. from local, national, regional or European e-infrastructure providers). Answers sometimes tended to use many words, but were less specific in addressing the relevant issues.

This led OAWG members to formulate 'intelligent questions' such as:

"Could the RI elaborate more on how it plans to build up the team and facilities needed to implement its data policy (making the data available to a broad set of internal and external stakeholders) and how it plans to sustainably fund and maintain this policy?"

"Could the RI elaborate more, quantitatively, on the demand on e-infrastructure resources (data storage, computing, networking) and indicate, whether these resources will be provided from within the RI and/or whether external resources (local, national, international, industrial/commercial) are required and how these are provided for in the RI budget?"

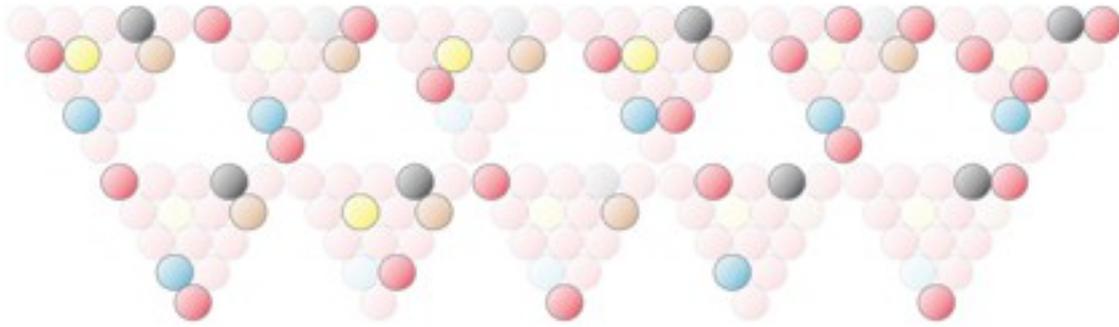
Although the e-Needs questions were part of the 'scientific' evaluation, many aspects of addressing e-Needs and in particular data policy and data management are real implementation issues.

A more general conclusion amongst the OAWG members is, that many of the proposed RIs are basically *data RIs*: they are distributed by nature and the principle reason for establishing an RI organization is to gather and preserve good quality research data.

5.1 Rating the e-Needs responses

The OAWG considered it not really feasible to agree on a rating for the e-Needs responses that would really mean the same for the evaluations in all five domains. The answers and the level of understanding of the e-Needs questions were so different in each domain, that it seemed not possible to have a “common” rating basis. In general the OAWG felt that the ESFRI Roadmap procedure lacked guidance on what could be the basis for rating an aspect low, medium, high or very high.

The ratings given to the e-Needs responses appeared mostly to be in line with the ratings of other parts of the proposals, however with some exceptions, where the e-Needs ratings were lower than other parts.



6 Conclusions and recommendations

- From the OAWG perspective the cooperation between ESFRI and e-IRG in the evaluation process was excellent.
- The OAWG considers the inclusion of e-Needs questions in the ESFRI very useful: they provide insight in the importance of e-infrastructure provisioning for European RIs and in particular the data management aspects. This process should be continued in the next ESFRI Roadmap exercise.
- In many (European) RIs e-infrastructure requirements and in particular deploying data policies and data management activities have profound impact and could therefore also be valued as implementation issues.
- The e-Needs questions need improvement: clearer, less ambiguous formulations targeting at what we want to see included in the responses, with reference to templates where relevant, such as a template for data policy and a data management plan.
- It would also help if there could be a common understanding of what is meant with rating a response 'low', 'medium', 'high' or very high'.
- In general the level of quantification of e-infrastructure requirements was less detailed than the OAWG had expected. While quantification of e-infrastructure requirements is not a goal in itself, it does elicit an awareness of the size of the ambitions, that need to be managed in your RI.

In summary, we propose that e-IRG should work together with ESFRI to improve the e-Needs section and the assessment process also for the next roadmap, integrating the e-Needs issues even firmer in the procedure. We believe it is beneficial to e-IRG, ESFRI and the infrastructure projects that e-IRG takes part in this process. It increases our common understanding of the needs and issues of a large group of European e-infrastructure users.



<http://e-irg.eu>