



User communities at the heart of European Grid Infrastructure

Yannick Legré was recently appointed director of EGI.eu, which coordinates and manages the European Grid Infrastructure (EGI). iSGTW speaks to Legré about his vision for the organization, as well as the challenges it faces, ahead of next month's EGI Community Forum in Helsinki, Finland.

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European editor

You've been involved in grid computing in



The four key words for me are serving, supporting, coordinating, and collaborating. Image courtesy Yannick Legré.

Europe for over a decade now. Could you tell the *iSGTW* readers about this?

I worked with [the DataGrid project](#) right from the beginning. My work was concerned with integrating the different components produced by the project and ensuring that they were appropriate for the communities served. I also started playing with [the Globus toolkit](#) back when it was still at version 1.1 or 1.2, so a very early stage.

Most of my time since then has been spent supporting and working for the various user communities. I have also been quite strongly involved in working with the French [National Grid Initiative \(NGI\)](#), so I have a good idea of the work done by NGIs and the kind of issues they face.

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Why do you believe that distributed computing is vital for science in Europe? And, what do you believe to be the greatest barriers to further adoption?

I think the technological issues are not really a problem, because most of them can be solved within three to five years. However, there are more complex challenges that we are facing this year and beyond. We need to understand how we can integrate the European grid into all researchers' workflows. Key to this is maintaining proactive, meaningful engagement with all our user communities. This means we can understand and provide for their needs and can change how we do things if necessary. This will enable us to help them see the different ways of working and collaborating through our infrastructure. We also need to demonstrate EGI's added value to influence political opinion and policy at the national level.

I'm really convinced that distributed infrastructure can play an important role in helping scientists to overcome the barriers they're currently facing. For example, a recent paper about the global environmental research community predicts that within five to 10 years they will be producing around one exabytes of data every day. No one can deal with such an amount of data, so we really need to start thinking about worldwide collaboration. Naturally, it is important that there is a strong European component in this worldwide collaboration to continue to lead and steer this research.

What is your vision for EGI?

EGI.eu is working to strengthen the relationship with every NGI and the resource and service providers. These are the building blocks at the forefront of the relationship with the 'long tail' of users and on top of which EGI builds its unique distributed infrastructure. EGI will put more emphasis on supporting the work done by the NGIs on the national level and services providers and strengthen the relationships between users.

Over the next year, EGI will be working to serve the communities. The user communities have needs and we need to satisfy them and provide appropriate services. We have to convince the user communities that we are here to serve them.

The four key words for me are serving, supporting, coordinating, and collaborating. Collaboration is especially important: budgets are shrinking for everyone, we have to work together to maximize efficiency. People need to change their mindsets and start supporting one another more.

What, in your opinion, is the most exciting development we're going to see from EGI over the coming months?

There are so many things. Right now, of course, the federated cloud is one. It's going to be launched at the upcoming community forum. The vision is to have ten million cores and one exabyte of storage by 2020. This is a huge challenge but we will work hard to achieve this.

However, the main work I would like to do in the next month or two is more at the human level. We have to increase our efforts in approaching the user communities. They will bring their needs to us and will, undoubtedly, present new challenges for us to solve.

You mentioned the upcoming EGI Community Forum there. With the event just over a month away, why do you feel it is important for members of the community to come together like this?

I think that the community forum is essential to understanding the entire EGI community. It is a place where we share experiences and learn from one another. The richness of these events comes from interactions and the knowledge exchange that takes place. This year we are pushing real hands-on interactions with our hackathons.

Over three days, users will also work with EGI experts to have their applications ported onto the federated cloud. Having everyone in one room, answering questions and having face-to-face discussion will accelerate the process, so that by the end of the week they will be able to take full advantage of EGI. However, the real 'meetings' happen over coffee and at lunch breaks: people just talking to people, kick-starting collaborations, and making EGI a community of people spread across 54 countries working together.

EGI is a critical support for the European research area. Whether someone is an individual scientist or

represents a research group, resource provider, or research infrastructure, EGI has the answer for them.

Read more about the EGI Community Forum on the event website, [here](#).

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