Community Engagement with eResearch Infrastructure – what works, what doesn’t.

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DESCRIPTION

Australia has provided significant funding to the development and operation of eResearch infrastructure, through Federal and State government funding, as well as institutional contributions, and direct researcher funding. These infrastructure initiatives are often intended to lead to a sustainable, operational service, with the occasional capital refresh, that is valued by the research community.

Over the last twenty years we have had a range of such initiatives, within different frameworks. Some have wound up as the funding ran out, others have evolved, and a few have flourished. Almost independently of how they turned out, the research community’s fondness of these initiatives is highly variable. Some are fondly remembered, others are barely recalled, sometimes both.

One of the key concepts around eResearch infrastructure that keeps coming up is ‘culture change’, usually applied to the practices of research which may or may not be appropriate. Since it is the research community, both researchers and their institutions, that ultimately prioritises the infrastructure they care about, and hence (hopefully) foster ongoing investment in it, it seems important to look at how the various initiatives today are working on this engagement. It goes well beyond marketing and communications. It goes into the way the initiatives are proposed, designed, deployed, operated and evolved. Ultimately it goes into the value proposition for these initiatives, where value is assessed by the community, including the funding bodies.

This BoF provides an opportunity for interested parties, from both sides of that discussion, to briefly get together and consider what works and what doesn’t, and the contexts in which they worked, or not.

OUTLINE

This BoF will invite representatives from
1. All of the national “eResearch infrastructure” programmes, defined very broadly, including the wider NCRIS community
2. All of the state eResearch support programmes
3. Somebody appropriate from the Federal (and State) governments
4. Anybody we can find from earlier programmes

Many of these can be facilitated through the AeRO group, and their wider network of contacts.

Each speaker will be asked to briefly (10 minutes) present how their programme was designed and set up, what worked, and what honestly did not work. Each presentation is to be interactive, with questions encouraged. However, it is not intended to provide opportunities to sink boots into past or present programmes.

The opportunity to have government representatives participate would be very helpful. They provide the interface for these initiatives with their Minister(s), the institutions, and the wider research communities, and are often the first port of calls for complaints, and compliments, about the initiatives – coming up or down the chain of command.

If the discussion takes off it could lead to a brief report and some ongoing analysis.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

The convener is Dr Markus Buchhorn, a former astrophysicist, a former sys-admin and geek, a former university IT director, a former state eResearch services director, and a current consultant and evangelist for eResearch infrastructure initiatives within Australia and overseas. Over the last twenty years he’s been involved in more acronymed “eResearch” organisations than he cares to remember, often several at the same time. He fully expects to leave all the speaking at this session to others.