WestGrid's 2017 User Survey

Results Summary

May 2018

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Summary

WestGrid conducted a user survey in November 2017 to gather feedback on satisfaction with WestGrid's current support and services, with a purpose to build upon the findings from the 2016 survey and continually improve our service delivery. The survey was sent to all WestGrid newsletter subscribers (7,594 emails), which included account holders on WestGrid systems.

A total of 283 respondents took the survey over a three-week period ending November 20, 2017, an 8% increase in responses compared to the 2016 User Survey.

Key findings include:

Overall

- The **overall satisfaction with WestGrid was 91%** (those who reported being somewhat or very satisfied).

  - This is higher than the **81% satisfaction** rating reported in the Governance Survey issued to WestGrid stakeholders in May 2017.

  - It is also higher than the average overall satisfaction rating from WestGrid based researchers reported in the Compute Canada 2018 Account Renewal survey (**81%** reported being somewhat or very satisfied with Compute Canada).

- When asked to estimate how their ARC needs will change in the next five years, **71%** said their **compute and storage** needs will **at least or more than double**, with **37%** estimating their **GPU** needs will **at least or more than double**.

- Requests for **more resources, new user support, and bioinformatics support** were the most commonly cited needs, however they were mentioned less often than in the 2016 survey.

- As in 2016, there was a very high response rate to open-ended questions, with many giving praise for WestGrid support staff.
  - Most comments were requests for more resources including more local support staff.

Resources & Services

- Consistent with 2016, the **top resources and services** (not including raw compute or support staff) selected as being **somewhat or very important** were:
  - long term data storage (89%),
  - file sharing services (82%), and
  - large shared memory systems (81%).

- The most common **requests** related to resources and services were:
  - more options and support for interactive computing, and
  - more resources to support high memory and highly parallelized jobs.

- Suggestions for **additional** resources and services included:
  - version control repositories,
  - job management tools,
  - long term storage, and
  - big data clusters.

Support

- **74%** of respondents had used WestGrid support in the past year, a **23% increase** from 2016. Of those who had used WestGrid support:

  - **99%** said the support was good or adequate in terms of '*helpfulness of advice/recommendations*' and **97%** rated it good or adequate in terms of '*timeliness of response*'.

  - **97% said** they had **NO unresolved issues or concerns** with WestGrid support.

- ■ Those who had issues noted the need for **more support** and more support tailored to **new or non-traditional users**.

  - ○ **69%** of respondents felt they DO have adequate **support specific to their field** of research. The **12%** who felt they DO NOT were in the following fields:
    - ■ Medical, Biological or Life Sciences 23%
    - ■ Environmental or Earth Sciences 20%
    - ■ Humanities or Social Sciences 17%

  - ○ Half of respondents felt they DO have adequate **local (on campus) ARC support** (down from 56% in 2016), while 11% said they DO NOT have adequate local support and 20% "*didn't know*".

    - ■ Of those who *didn't know*, 25% were from UBC, 15% from the University of Alberta.

    - ■ Those who felt they DO NOT have adequate local support, 21% were from the University of Alberta, and 16% each from the University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University.

    - ■ Only 35% of less experienced users felt they DO HAVE adequate local support, with 38% unsure.

  - ○ As in 2016, the overwhelming majority of comments about support were positive, referring to staff as "excellent" and "amazing", with **30%** of all respondents indicating they had received **extraordinary support**.
    - ■ When asked to share details of extraordinary support, staff from the **University of Victoria**, the **University of Alberta** and the **University of Manitoba** had the most mentions.

  - ○ The awareness of **specialised services** provided by WestGrid has increased compared to 2016:
    - ■ Research Data Management, 51% increase (53% aware)
    - ■ Video Conferencing & Collaboration Services, 35% increase (50% aware)
    - ■ Bioinformatics, 35% increase (46% aware)
    - ■ Humanities & Social Sciences, 16% increase (29% aware)
    - ■ Visualization, 7% increase (61% aware)

Training

- ● The topics respondents were **most interested** in for training were:
  - ○ *Parallel Programming* (49%, no change from 2016),
  - ○ *Data Visualization* (45%, a 29% increase from 2016),
  - ○ *Using Graphic Processing Units (GPUs) and parallel computing platform CUDA* (42%, up 27% from 2016), and

- ○ *Research Data Management Best Practices* (38%, not listed in 2016).

- The topics of most interest to those with ***little to no experience*** (12% of respondents) were:
  - ○ *New User Support* (58%)
  - ○ *Data Visualization* (58%)
  - ○ *Basic Programming* (46%)
  - ○ *Research Data Managemen*t (46%)

- The **preferred delivery method** for training sessions were:
  - ○ In person/ on campus (26%)
  - ○ Watching recordings (23%)
  - ○ Live Online/Video conferencing (21%)

- Compared to all respondents, users with *little to no experience* prefer *watching recordings* or *in-person training sessions* (27% each).

- Of those users who prefer receiving training via *in-person sessions*, **25%** were from the University of Victoria, **19%** from the University of Alberta.

Website

- **83%** of respondents had visited WestGrid's website in the past 12 months, down from 91% in 2016.

  - ○ The top **reasons for visiting** the website were:
    - ■ *to find system status and system information* (62%, a 48% increase from 2016);
    - ■ for *user support, training and documentation* (40%, a 67% increase from 2016)
    - ■ for *general information* (14%).

  - ○ **89%** found WestGrid's website *Very Easy* (34%) or *Somewhat Easy* (55%) to find the information they were looking for.

  - ○ Suggestions for improvements to the website included:
    - ■ more details on system status,
    - ■ more detailed and updated software listings, and
    - ■ sample jobs submission scripts.

  - ○ Complaints about WestGrid's website were mainly due to confusion between the different national / regional websites and an inability to easily find information about the national systems.

- **56%** of respondents had visited the **Compute Canada Documentation wiki** in the past 6 months.

- ○ The primary **reasons for visiting the wiki** were to:
  - ■ *Find information on the national systems* (48%)
  - ■ *Learn how to submit jobs* (27%), and
  - ■ *User support* (19%).

- ○ **81%** found it *Very Easy* (29%) or *Somewhat Easy* (52%) to find the information they needed on the wiki.

- ○ **Feedback and suggestions for improvements** to the wiki included:
  - ■ More detailed user support documentation,
  - ■ New user guide with simple slides for reference rather than videos,
  - ■ Cheat sheet of common commands and job submission scripts, and
  - ■ Better searchability and links to the wiki from other sites.

General Demographics

- ● The **primary role** of survey respondents were:
  - ○ Masters or Undergraduate Student (42%, an increase of 250% from 2016)
  - ○ Principal Investigator (28%)
  - ○ Post-Doc or Doctoral Student (16%)

- ● The **top fields of study** of respondents were in line with the 2016 results:
  - ○ Medical, Biological or Life Sciences (24%)
  - ○ Engineering, Math or Computer Science (23%)
  - ○ Chemistry or Biochemistry (16%)
  - ○ Physics (12%)

- ● The **province of residence** of respondents were:
  - ○ British Columbia (44%)
  - ○ Alberta (28%)
  - ○ Saskatchewan (16%)
  - ○ Manitoba (6%)
  - ○ Ontario (5%)
  - ○ Quebec (4%)
  - ○ Atlantic Provinces (4%)

- ● **96**% of respondents had WestGrid / Compute Canada accounts, with the main reason for getting an account being:
  - ○ *Referral from a colleague/superviso*r - 69%
  - ○ *Referral from university IT/ARC/Research Computing Department* - 18%
  - ○ *Attended a presentation or meeting with WestGrid* - 12%

- ● When asked to describe their research computing experience level:

- ○ **48%** had *basic experience with using Linux and high performance computing systems,*
- ○ **40%** were *very experienced,* and
- ○ **12%** had *little to no experience.*

Next Steps

- WestGrid will develop a User Experience / New User Support Working Group to start developing materials and resources more targeted at non-traditional and less experienced users.

- Results from this survey and other consultations with users will help advocate for more dedicated support staff to help users.

- Services & resources indicated as most important and forecasts for future needs will be used to help develop WestGrid's future operations and services strategic plan.