

Strategies for Working Remotely: Advice from colleagues with experience

A Panel Discussion

April 3, 2020

Approved for public release



Panelists:

- Mike Bernhardt, ORNL – ECP Communications and outreach lead
- Lois Curfman McInnes, ANL – ECP ST Deputy Director
- Mark Miller, LLNL – IDEAS-ECP team member
- Kathryn Mohror, LLNL – Co-PI of ExaIO project in ECP
- Elaine Raybourn, SNL – IDEAS-ECP team member

Moderator: Mike Heroux, SNL – ECP ST Director



Who are we?

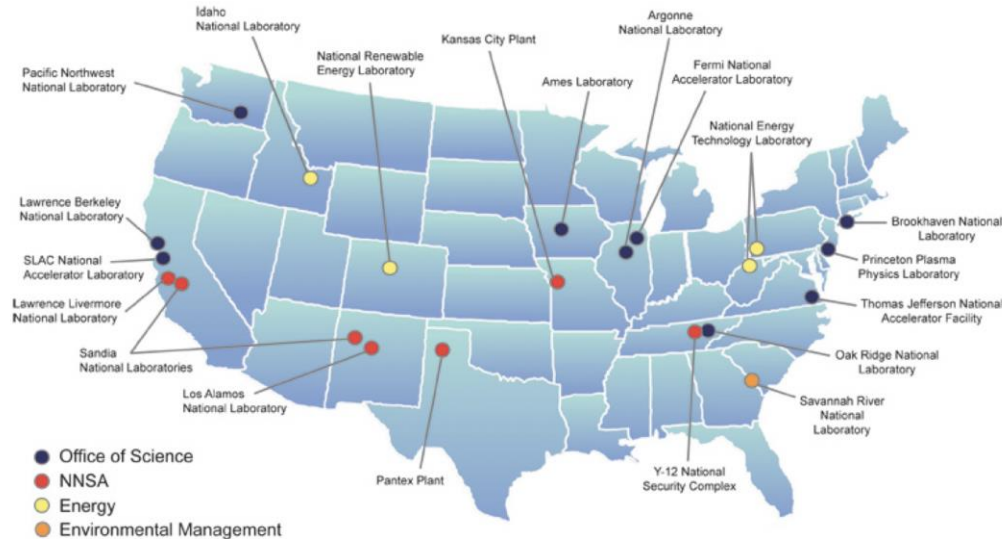
- Staff at U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) laboratories

- Involved in the DOE Exascale Computing Project (ECP)

– <https://www.exascaleproject.org>

- Have experience working remotely

DOE national laboratories: Leaders in science and innovation



The screenshot shows the ECP website interface. At the top left is the ECP logo (EXASCALE COMPUTING PROJECT). A red banner at the top right reads "How the DOE Labs are fighting COVID-19 +". The main heading is "The Next Leap Forward in Computing". Below the heading is a text block: "Exascale computing will provide the capability to tackle challenges in scientific discovery and national security at levels of complexity and performance that previously were out of reach." A blue button labeled "Details +" is positioned below the text. Navigation arrows (left and right) are visible on the sides, and a progress indicator with four dots is at the bottom.

Agenda

- Brief introductions from panelist addressing prompts:
 - *Advice you would give to someone just getting started.*
 - *Challenges you have experienced.*
 - *Unforeseen benefits.*
 - *Opportunities to look for from this experience.*
- Q&A:
 - Type name and question in the Zoom chat box.
 - Moderator will ask you to ask your question.
- Slides, bios from today:
 - <https://www.exascaleproject.org/event/remote>
- Google doc Q&A link:
 - <https://bit.ly/workrmt>

Mike Bernhardt – Opening Remarks

- **Advice:**

Don't think of your work-at-home situation as:

“I'm at home and I should try to get some work done.”

Do think of it as:

“**I'm at work**, but at least I don't have far to commute.”

- Discipline is paramount
- You must make a mental leap each day: you left your house and went to work
- A designated work area (permanent or mobile) is really important

- **Challenges I've experienced:**

WFH is not for everyone. Some employees didn't adapt.

- **Unforeseen benefits**

Learned the art of brevity. (not brevity as in shortness of time, but brevity as in “concise and exact use of words in writing or speech)

- **Opportunities to look for from this experience**

Time not commuting is valuable. Take advantage of it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Just another tool
- Video etiquette

Lois Curfman McInnes – Opening Remarks

- **Advice**

- Proactively stay in touch with others
 - Regular communication among collaborators + informal communication with colleagues
 - Yet ensure plenty of time for deep work
- Effective remote working (+ a balanced life) look and feel different for everyone. Find what works for you.
 - “A long time ago — like, last week — we would have talked about setting up a home workspace and setting personal schedules. But this is a new world now.” ... *Figuring Out Work and Family in the Age of Coronavirus*, F. Donner and C. Purtill, New York Times, 03/19/2020

- **Challenges**

- Pay attention to ergonomics – desk, chair, keyboard height (not too much slouching on the sofa!)
- Take breaks to move

- **Unforeseen benefits**

- Build skills with distributed collaboration, focus, efficiency

- **Opportunities to look for from this experience**

- As a community, we can create better approaches for distributed, collaborative computational science

Mark C. Miller – Opening Remarks

- **Advice**

- Maintain your “normal” schedule (wake, breaks, meals, off-hours, sleep)
- Have a “work area” and close it off your when not “at work”
 - Close door, cover with a sheet/blanket, turn off screen/sound
- Look for the humor in things

- **Challenges**

- Interruptions from others you live with
- Too much snacking

- **Unforeseen benefits**

- Fewer interruptions from co-workers

- **Opportunities to look for from this experience**

- Learn new technologies and skills for remote interaction (e.g. pair programming with WebEx)



Kathryn Mohror – Opening Remarks

- ***Advice***

- Choose a dedicated space for working
- Find a way to indicate to your family when you are in a meeting
- Choose your work hours and stick to them, take breaks!

- ***Challenges***

- Stress from feeling like I always have to be “on”
- Voice-only communication lacks information
- Missed opportunities from hallway interactions

- ***Unforeseen benefits***

- Multitasking! Better able to focus on long telecons if I am doing something mindless
- More time with family, more downtime
- Better exercise habits (work in between meetings more easily, walk on telecons)

- ***Opportunities to look for from this experience***

- Learn what you actually like about being at work

Elaine Raybourn – Opening Remarks

Advice

- Be a team player, and if you lead a team – *do it*.
- Leave digital footprints that are persistent, collaborative, and shared
- Know the pros and cons of communication and when to use for best results (this takes practice!)

Challenges I've experienced

- Motivate team members, build trust and rapport
- Co-located vs dispersed teams require leadership that is expressed differently
- Need results? Adapt, change your approach

Unforeseen benefits

- Learning new skills, *unlearning old habits*

Opportunities to look for from this experience

- New perspectives on diversity and inclusion
- Expanded mental model of “productivity”
- Keep process changes that are positive – challenge assumptions and “how we used to do it”



- [Resources for Maximizing Remote Working](#)
Elaine Raybourn, 3/18/2020
 - Remote versus co-located work
 - The remote work playbook
 - 15 questions about remote work, answered
 - How to lead in the age of newly remote teams
 - 8 strategies to set up remote work during the conavirus outbreak
 - COVID-19 and the shift to remote work
- [Clean Your Work Surfaces: One Way to Help Flatten the Curve](#)
Mark Miller, 3/19/2020
- And more to come ...



<https://bssw.io>

[Contribute to BSSw](#)

[BSSw digest](#)

The screenshot shows the BSSw website homepage. At the top, there are navigation links: "Information For", "Contribute To BSSw", and "Receive Our Email Digest". Below this is a dark blue header with the BSSw logo and navigation menus for "Resources", "Blog", "Events", and "About". A yellow banner highlights the current page: "Productivity and Sustainability Improvement Planning (PSIP)". The main content area has a dark blue background with a white grid pattern. The title "Better Scientific Software (BSSw)" is prominently displayed, followed by a paragraph describing its mission: "Software—the foundation of discovery in computational science & engineering—faces increasing complexity in computational models and computer architectures. BSSw provides a central hub for the community to address pressing challenges in software productivity, quality, and sustainability." Below this is a "GET ORIENTED" section with four blue buttons: "Communities Overview", "Site Overview", "Intro to CSE", and "Intro to HPC". At the bottom, a "Featured" section highlights a blog post titled "Cleaning Your Work Surfaces: One Way to Help Flatten the Curve" with a "BLOG POST" link. To the right of the featured post is a line graph showing a bell-shaped curve (representing a peak in cases) and a flatter curve (representing a flattened curve). A horizontal dashed line indicates "HEALTHCARE SYSTEM CAPACITY FULL".