

# Strategies for Working Remotely: How to Make Teams Tick

## A Panel Discussion

Approved for public release



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Panelists:

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Ryan Shaw, SNL – Scrum Master, Sierra

Tyler Shelton, SNL – Scrum Master and DevOps, Sierra

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Jan Velechovsky, LANL – Staff Scientist, Portage



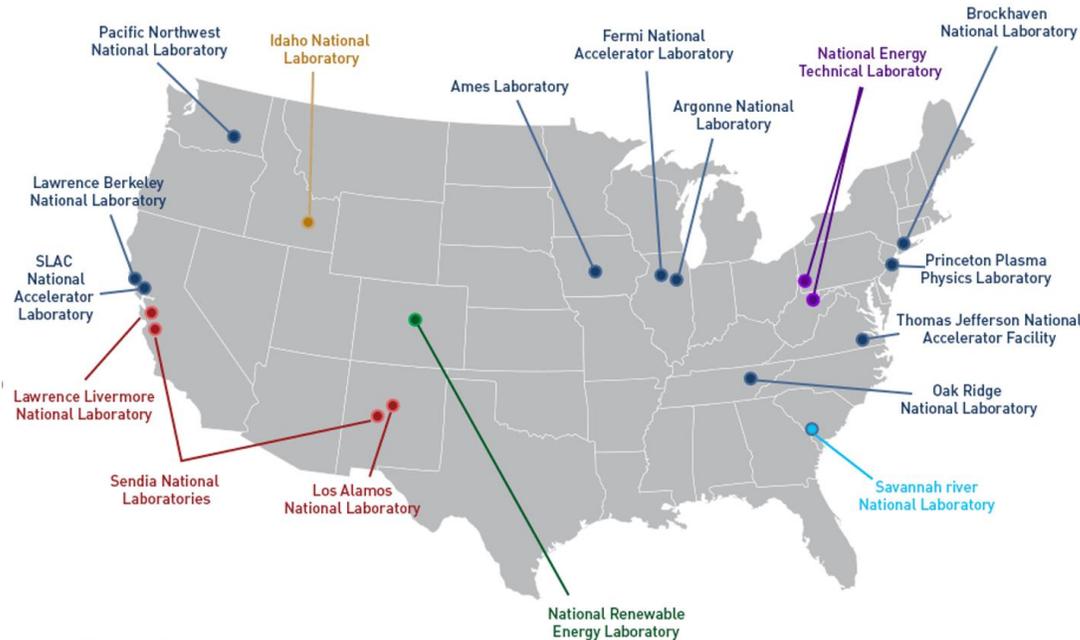
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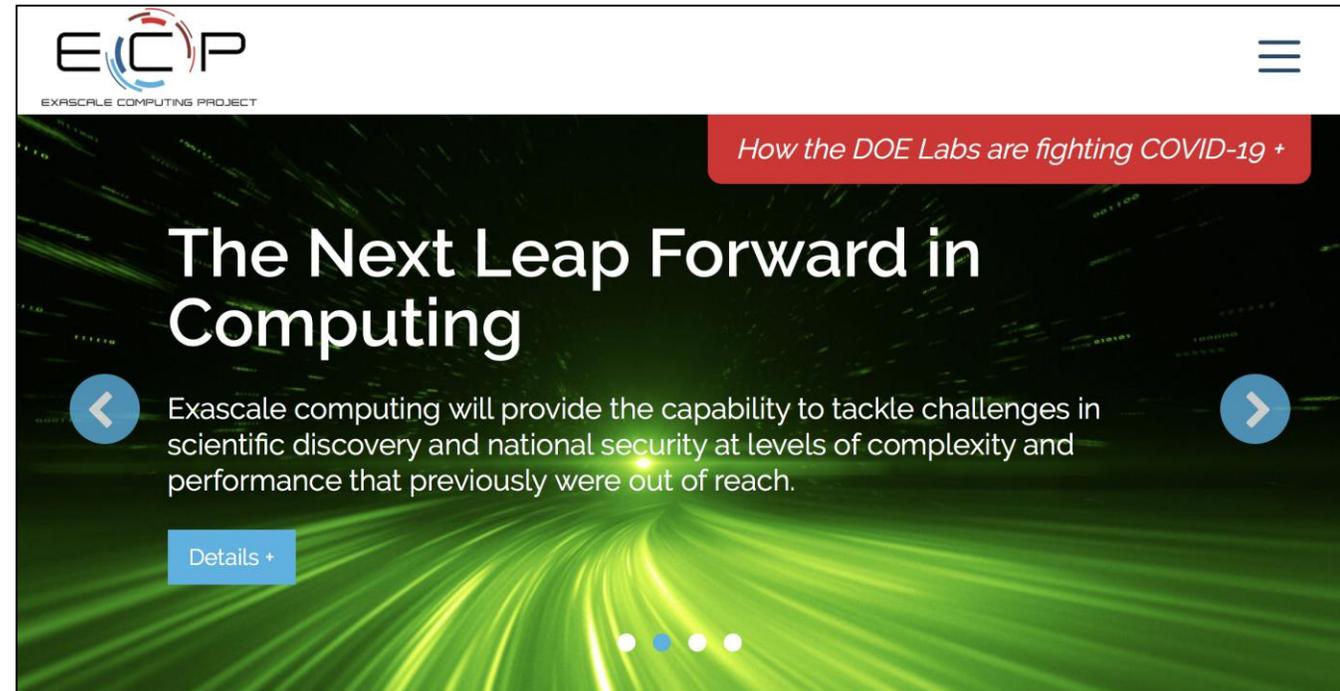
# Who are we?

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

DOE national laboratories: Leaders in science and innovation



- Involved in the DOE Exascale Computing Project (ECP)
  - <https://www.exascaleproject.org>
- Currently working remotely



# Panel Discussion Format

- Brief introductions from teams addressing questions:
  - *What makes the team successful*
  - *How you have managed change*
  - *Unforeseen benefits and silver linings*
  - *What you are learning about yourself*
- Q&A:
  - Type your question in Zoom chat box, please indicate your first name and affiliation if possible
  - Moderator will ask if you'd like to unmute to ask your question, or if you prefer the moderator can ask on your behalf.
- We value your feedback
  - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/95ML8Q5> fill out anytime after panel
- Slides, video, and bios from today are available:
  - <https://www.exascaleproject.org/event/teamproductivity/>

# Portage Team – Opening Remarks

- Tell us about your scientific software teams—what do you do, and what do you like most about your teams? What has made them successful?
  - We develop an open-source linking/remapping library and support our users from the lab.
  - **JV:** Our team is quite compact with a strong leadership. However, our members have also diverse backgrounds and quite some freedom in what we can work on. This is extremely useful in solving complex problems and I think that these two points made the team so successful.
  - **NR:** One aspect of the team that I like is how the work is planned. The agile framework that we follow is fundamental, I would say, to the level of productivity achieved and reaching the functionality goals of the library. Every sprint is focused on particular goals while allowing individuals to work on something that they are interested in. This has helped us to make targeted efforts to particular aspects of the library development.
- Now that your teams have become fully virtual what has been most disruptive to your productivity and how have you managed change?
  - **JV:** There were initial issues with network connectivity. We had to learn how to manage our time and how to use new tools. However, we were already using web-based products for planing and tracking progress before, so that made the the transition easier. All these settled in couple weeks.
  - **NR:** Same, some initial network connectivity issues. Learning time management and keeping to a schedule.
- Have there been any silver linings to the disruption you have experienced?
  - **JV:** For me personally, I got the opportunity to spend much more time with my daughter that I would ever thought about.
  - **NR:** I got the opportunity to talk more to my family and friends than I would usually do.

# Portage Team – Opening Remarks, continued

- What personal challenges have you and your teams faced, and how are you bringing back into balance team dynamics and individual developer well-being?
  - **JV:** I was challenged with organizing my time in the very beginning. The lack of personal contact is hard on us as people, still teleconferencing works great for organizing work. We organized couple "social" teleconferences as well to enhance our moods.
  - **NR:** I was having a hard time with the lack of in-person discussions, its easier to sit down together in front of a machine or a whiteboard, and work out the issues, however, as the remote work routine progressed I would say that I became more used to doing such discussions remotely. I think as a team we go well with each other, which is why the transition to remote hasn't affected the team dynamics significantly. If anything, people have become kinder and understanding.
- What are you learning about yourselves and each other that has been unexpected?
  - **JV:** We are learning that we are able to manage our time, and that it is possible to work productively from home. With proper leadership and organization, we can actually make it not only possible but also enjoyable.
  - **NR:** That it has been possible to retain the level of productivity (if not more) while doing work remotely. We generally go through discussions on variety of topics and surprisingly such discussions without the physical whiteboard has been almost as useful as done in person.

# Sierra Team of Teams – Opening Remarks

- Tell us about your scientific software teams—what do you do, and what do you like most about your teams? What has made them successful?
  - Develop and deploy a suite of C++ coupled multiphysics simulation codes.
  - Five Scrum Masters (+ developer).
  - Respect and common purpose; openness and adaptability.
  - Expertise and commitment to the mission of the lab.
- Now that your teams have become fully virtual what has been most disruptive to your productivity and how have you managed change?
  - Lack of proximity and venues for social interaction.
    - Virtual team rooms (video and/or chat).
  - Technology issues.
  - Reflect on tools, applications, and behaviors for improvement. Iterate.
- Have there been any silver linings to the disruption you have experienced?
  - Enjoy working from home.
  - Higher levels of focus.

# Sierra Team of Teams – Opening Remarks, continued

- What personal challenges have you and your teams faced, and how are you bringing back into balance team dynamics and individual developer well-being?
  - Easy to raise voices and talk over each other
    - Make the problem visible and call each other out on it; read books on communication to encourage respectful behavior.
  - Novice developers suffered with lack of proximity
    - Have constructive and positive discussions to make necessary changes in behaviors and processes. Knowledge share meetings, adoption of pair programming, encourage novice developers to seek out assistance and remove any assumed barriers.
  - Shared understanding of development tasks
    - More precise definitions for work being done.
- What are you learning about yourselves and each other that has been unexpected?
  - Capable of being an independent person.
  - We can work at home with nearby personal distractions and still get work done.
  - Willingness to make changes in order to achieve a common goal.
  - The need for self-care
    - Exercise, taking breaks, and meditation

# Panel Discussion

## We want to hear from you!

Please type your question in the Zoom chat window, and if possible type your first name and affiliation.

The moderators will ask if you'd like to unmute to ask your question, or if you prefer the moderators can ask your question on your behalf.

Put your settings on gallery view to see all panelists



We value your feedback

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/95ML8Q5> fill out anytime after panel



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• **Working Remotely: The Exascale Computing Project (ECP) Panel Series**

- E. Raybourn et al., 7/30/2020, blog post

• **Working Remotely: The Spack Team**

- T. Gamblin, E. Raybourn, 5/16/2020, blog post

• **Remote Working in an Agile World**

- R. Bartlett, 4/12/2020, intro to podcast by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

• **Resources for Maximizing Remote Working**

- E. Raybourn, 3/18/2020, curated content on:
  - *Remote versus co-located work*
  - *The remote work playbook*
  - *How to lead in the age of newly remote teams*
  - *COVID-19 and the shift to remote work*

• **Clean Your Work Surfaces: One Way to Help Flatten the Curve**

- M.C. Miller, 3/19/2020

