Executive Summary of XSEDE Advisory Board Meeting

Meeting Date: April 26th, 2017
Meeting Place: Face-to-face, Chicago, IL.

***Preface*:** *The XSEDE Advisory Board (XAB) notes that the advance work of the XSEDE team was evident both before the meeting, in relaying preparatory materials and collecting preliminary comments from the XAB, and then also during the meeting, with solid presentations which were clearly well organized and delivered. The format provided the XAB time to both dig deep, as well as make minor suggestions and comments.*

Summary of comments and suggestions

Metrics

The XAB noted that XSEDE'S "processes" for developing and evolving performance metrics are a significant accomplishment, and worth highlighting. The group discussed at some length the issue of metrics getting complicated/confusing when funding periods and their associated goals are not necessarily predictable, and what to do when tracking metrics across those boundaries requires considerable effort. The goal is for any metrics to be tranparent and well described, yet there is difficulty when trying to evolve metrics over time. This is described further in a subsequent section.

Suggestions from the XAB:
- Recommend identifying ways to compare to other organizations so that XSEDE metrics can be seen in context – perhaps looking DOE ASCR resources for points of comparison.
- Recommend tying metrics with a narrative that emphasizes the "holistic" nature of XSEDE, so that reporting on metrics is not just a collection of individual metrics. It isn't obvious how to do this, but worth trying to explore as a team.

Cloud Computing Environment

The XAB appreciated the detailed description of the Cloud Computing environment, and the ways the team is exploring further strategic use of resources.

Suggestion from the XAB:
- When communicating about this aspect of XSEDE infrastuture, making an effort to give more background information might be helpful. For example, the difference between an "internal cloud" (which used to be known to some as a "compute farm"), and outsourcing to a cloud service such as Amazon Web Services.

User Perspectives

The presentations and discussion made very clear how vital the "User's" perspective is to provide the best resource possible, and how to communicate XSEDE's value to the scientific community, to ensure the needed funding support.

Suggestions from the XAB:
- Using 4-6 "hypothetical" (or actual) XSEDE users in the descriptions of XSEDE program plans and annual plans can help illustrate rationale for program decisions and the impact on the users and the value of XSEDE for their science.
- "Scientist-centric" value was highlighted in the F2F presentations at several points, and this might be brought forward even more in the materials and review presentations.

Consistency and Clarity in discussion of Program Years and funding periods, regarding various metrics

The XAB noted several places in the presentations where it was not clear whether metrics or other comments referred to entire duration of XSEDE program, or some other division of program year(s). This is a completely understandable, and difficult, problem to address.

Suggestions from the XAB:
- Recommend taking care that each table of metrics or stats is very clearly documented about the period it represents (and why). It might be worth having a minor introductory slide that just mentions this issue, so that it is clear XSEDE realizes this complication, and is willing to dive into details when needed. You were certainly prepared to do that for XAB, but might be best to just mention it up front.
- It is worthwhile to note to constituents that not only is XSEDE collecting metrics, XSEDE has a process for adapting them – they aren't just static – they can evolve as the team identifies new metrics that would be useful for the program. That might seem obvious within XSEDE, but it is worth calling out to external constituents/reviewers.
- Recommend articulating in online and funding agency communitcations how you actually use the metrics as productively as XSEDE does – including the process for continual improvement when targets are consistently met (all green results in "upping the game", for example), but also also description processes for considering the metrics "holistically" ... not just responding to red-yellow-green, but the collection as a whole.

Project Improvement Plan

Because many award mechanisms require a set-aside for PIP, it is worthwhile to call out that XSEDE's PIP process has been developed through XSEDE Leadership's own initiative. One XAB member commented (and others concurred) that this provides evidence of agility.

Conclusion

The XAB found this meeting very informative, and continues to feel strong confidence in the XSEDE leadership team, and the processes, operations and outreach they have established and continue to maintain and develop.