

Using the Access Grid Videoconferencing System for Collaboration and Training: An Experiment with Distributed Personal Interface Grids (PIGs)

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The Access Grid and Personal Interface Grid (PIG) videoconferencing systems were set up at four NN/LM MCR resource libraries to provide members with a mechanism to participate in distance education training and events.

What is the Access Grid?

- ❑ The **Access Grid** is an high-end videoconferencing system for use with the Internet II.
- ❑ Internet II is a consortium of over 200 universities creating high end applications.
- ❑ The primary goals of the Internet II are to:
 - Create a leading edge network capability for the national research community
 - Enable revolutionary Internet applications
 - Ensure the rapid transfer of new network services and applications to the broader Internet community
- ❑ The Access Grid is an ensemble of videoconferencing resources to support group communication.



What are PIGs?

- ❑ **Personal Interface Grids (PIGs)** are a desktop version of the high-end Access Grid system.
- ❑ The access grid system costs over \$50,000 per installation and require high-end technical expertise.
- ❑ The PIG costs less than \$1500 and can be managed by information technology personnel with minimal training.
- ❑ The Access Grid hardware consists of cameras, projectors, microphones, control equipment, and a large projection screen.
- ❑ The PIG hardware consists of a desktop PC, echo cancellation microphone, video camera, and video graphics card.
- ❑ Both systems use free software available from accessgrid.org.



The MCR PIG Project

Objective:

- ❑ The MidContinental Region wished to offer its members new methods of participating in distance education using the Access Grid and PIGs.

Methods:

- ❑ The RML has an Internet 2 Access Grid onsite. The MCR supplied three of its resource libraries with Personal Interface Grids (PIGs).
- ❑ The AG and PIGs can be used for distributed meetings, collaborations, and training. Multiple participants located at multiple sites can see and hear each other almost as if they were in the same room.



Challenges & Successes

Challenges:

- ❑ Set up of the PIGs took much longer than expected due to coordinating different schedules for testing and difficulties with firewalls. University IT personnel had to be contacted to open the appropriate ports.
- ❑ Since library personnel did not access the equipment frequently, adequate testing time had to be built into each event.

Successes:

- ❑ The Access Grid and PIG set-up provides a high quality videoconferencing experience for small groups at each site.
- ❑ Members can travel to their nearest resource library to participate in training or other events.

Future Work:

- ❑ With regular use, operation of the PIGs will become routine.
- ❑ Members may be able to participate in an Access Grid event from the desktop using the free VRVS software.