Putting It All Together
Using Numerical Packages in Practice

Presented to
ATPESC 2019 Participants

Ann Almgren
Deputy Director, ECP Block-Structured AMR Co-Design Center

Mark Miller
IDEAS-ECP/ATPESC SQE Support and Training Coordinator

Q Center, St. Charles, IL (USA)
Date 08/06/2019
Recall from this morning’s introduction:
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None of us can actually do it all
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So where do you want to spend your time?
Key steps of simulation science application development

• Physical model
  – Expertise may be very domain-specific

• Mathematical model
  – Expertise may require detailed mathematical knowledge

• Discretization and algorithm development
  – Expertise includes knowing regimes of applicability, stability, approximation, error bounds

• Parallel implementation
  – Expertise in hardware, software stack and parallel programming models
That’s a lot of expertise!

Very few of us are experts in all of these areas. So how do we optimize the insight/impact of our computational science?

• Team science – in an ideal world we could work in teams that have all the relevant expertise within one team

• That’s not always possible – so one way to broadly share expertise is through software libraries
  – Expertise in discretization and algorithm development
  – Expertise in hardware, software stack and parallel programming models
In the short-term we often prefer to do things ourselves

$$\nabla^2 T = 0 \in \Omega$$

$$T(0) = 180^\circ$$

$$T(1) = 0^\circ$$

For the 1-D heat equation why bother learning a software package?
Sometimes simple is good

We can prototype in matlab, build simple serial implementations, and demonstrate proof-of-concept.

This can be good:

- New algorithms are often designed and validated in this mode.
- Sometimes writing your own version of a known technology (e.g. multigrid solver) is worth it -- “learning by doing”

This can be bad:

- Our own implementations are more likely to lack generality, be inefficient or even buggy.
- How much time do we spend “reinventing the wheel?”
The “supply” side of software libraries

Software libraries/frameworks/tools are made by real people.

The people aspect matters

• Software developers know a lot about their product
• But they don’t necessarily know exactly what you need

Communication/Collaboration is an important part of the process it’s good for the developer as well as the user!
Why don’t people “just” use software libraries

Lack of knowledge – how do you know whether the right tool even exists?

And if it exists: Where do you find it? How do you use it? Will it work with your other tools?
Why don’t people “just” use software libraries

Frustration! It can be really frustrating to not have the tool do what you want as well as you want. And how do you tell whether it’s you or the tool?

So how can you find the right tool – if it exists - and how do you learn how to use it correctly?
Ideal solution: a “toolbox” of compatible (interoperable) tools that “just work”

- This is exactly what the software developers are working towards

- But it takes time and resources

- The developer/user interaction can be a win-win
On a practical level, there are trade-offs

### Challenges

- Something new to learn
- Hard to predict show-stoppers
- Not always plug-n-play
- Trusting the work of others
- Overhead of collaborating
- Funding priorities

### Advantages

- Key challenges addressed well
  - Portable, Performant, Scalable, Interoperable
- Numerics are well tested/vetted
- Functionality is often more general than you would have made yourself
- More science, more impact; less time writing/debugging software
- Become part of a community – for collaboration and help
### How do we tip the balance?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Mitigation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Something new to learn</td>
<td>Many examples and documentation</td>
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<td>Hard to predict show-stoppers</td>
<td>Engage package developers early</td>
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<td>Not always plug-n-play</td>
<td>Submit build issues</td>
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<td>Trusting others</td>
<td>Identify or develop tests</td>
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<td>Overhead of collaborating</td>
<td>Builds relationships</td>
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<td>Funding priorities</td>
<td>Add to the package yourself</td>
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**The point of open source is to encourage use**

Package teams want users to make progress.

If package is missing a crucial feature, ask.
And … many contributors started as users!

If you like to code … and you like to contribute … think about joining the “supply side”!

It’s not that big a leap – and it’s a win-win.
Auspices and Disclaimer

Support for this work was provided through Scientific Discovery through Advanced Computing (SciDAC) program and the Exascale Computing Project funded by U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Advanced Scientific Computing Research.

This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344.

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