

'Fold here,' say 130,000 computers

August 19 2005

It's already made computations equal to a single PC running continuously for more than 14,000 years. It has 83,000 human members and more than 130,000 machines. It may be among the 20 largest "computers" in the world. It's World Community Grid. Announced in November, World Community Grid is simple in concept: harness some of the unused computing power of the world's 650 million PCs.

To join, anyone with Internet access simply downloads a secure, free, and small software program onto their laptop or home computer. Then with World Community Grid's agent running in the background of each PC, the project applies massed computing power to math-intensive research that will unlock genetic codes underlying diseases such as cancer, HIV and Alzheimer's. It's a model similar to the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), but with a more down to earth focus. As one headline writer put it: Forget aliens; cure malaria.

Currently World Community Grid is running research for the Human Proteome Folding Project. Knowing the shapes of proteins will help researchers understand how proteins do the work they're supposed to and how diseases stop proteins from maintaining healthy cells. The versatile grid can also take aim at HIV and AIDS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), malaria and other diseases. And grid applications can help researchers and scientists with earthquake warnings, improving crop yields and evaluating the supply of critical natural resources like water. The organization is accepting proposals for other research projects.

IBM donated the hardware, software, technical services and expertise to

build the infrastructure for World Community Grid and provides free hosting, maintenance and support.

"We're taking IBM's innovative on demand grid technology - the same technology we share with customers - and applying it to humanitarian issues about which the world cares. We look forward to working with our employees, customers and the public to execute this exciting vision," said Stanley S. Litow, vice president of IBM Corporate Community Relations and president of the IBM International Foundation.

World Community Grid also continues to build a network of dedicated partners who encourage their employees, members, students and faculty to join. Along with IBM, other partners include United Devices, Semiconductor Industry Association, United Way of New York City, the Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College and Information Technology Association of Canada.

You can join at www.worldcommunitygrid.org

Citation: 'Fold here,' say 130,000 computers (2005, August 19) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-08-fold-here-say-computers.html>

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