

RECENT ADVANCEMENTS AND DEPLOYMENTS OF EPICS VERSION 4

G. White, M. Shankar, SLAC, Menlo Park, California, USA

A.N. Johnson, S. Veseli, ANL, Argonne, Illinois, USA

A. Arkilic, L.B. Dalesio, M. Davidsaver, M.R. Kraimer, N. Malitsky, B.S. Martins, BNL, Upton, Long Island, New York, USA

M. Sekoranja, Cosylab, Ljubljana, USA

D.G. Hickin, DLS, Oxfordshire, England

T. Korhonen, ESS, Lund, Sweden

G. Shen, FRIB, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

R. Lange, ITER Organization, St. Paul lez Durance, France

S.M. Hartman, K. Kasemir, ORNL, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, USA

Abstract

EPICS version 4 is a set of software modules that add to the base of the EPICS toolkit for advanced control systems. Version 4 adds the possibility of process variable values of structured data, an introspection interface for dynamic typing plus some standard types, high-performance streaming, and a new front-end processing database for managing complex data I/O. A synchronous RPC-style facility has also been added so that the EPICS environment supports service-oriented architecture. We introduce EPICS and the new features of version 4. Then we describe selected deployments, particularly for high-throughput experiment data transport, experiment data management, beam dynamics and infrastructure data.

EPICS BASE AND EPICS VERSION 4

The Experimental Physics and Industrial Control System (EPICS), is a software framework for high-performance distributed control and data acquisition in large scientific instruments, such as accelerators and telescopes.

The "base" of EPICS is software for supervisory control, closed loop control, archiving, alarm management, timing and other aspects of front-end processors and device facing hardware. Typically hosted in an embedded system processor such as RTEMS or VME, this software and its host are collectively known as the IOC (Input/Output Controller) in an EPICS control system. IOCs are optimized for low-latency I/O. They control and/or monitor a collection of devices such as actuators and measurement diagnostics. Each IOC node contains a memory resident real-time database.

The IOC database is a set of "smart" records, which are interconnected in a *data flow* pattern. They're smart in that their field values may come directly from hardware, or a result of processing that was dependent on the type of record. The records may contain "device support" code, to interface the processing to physical devices through device drivers. Much more information can be found on the EPICS base at [1, 2].

EPICS base and the software extensions built on top of it have proven very successful for the control aspects of

scientific instruments, providing excellent low level I/O, DAQ and optimal control.

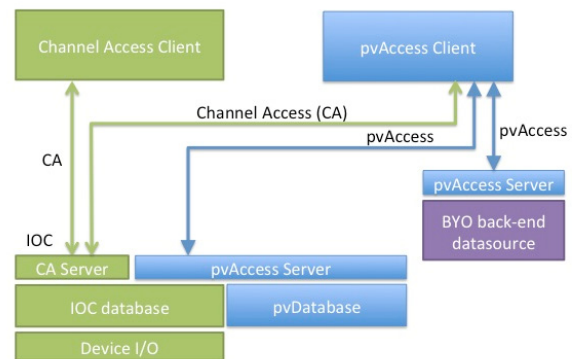


Figure 1: The basic architecture of EPICS version 4, showing the classic "base" components of EPICS in green, and components added by version 4 in blue. A new protocol, pvAccess, transports potentially complex data types encoded by pvData. pvAccess connects clients to IOCs, which may include a new database type, pvDatabase to support complex data processing services (and is the basis of the high-performance detector streaming applications described here), and to middleware services that can themselves connect to enterprise data stores, the web, etc. Note that hardware device I/O remains under the IOC database.

EPICS Version 4 for New Controls Problems

Modern control systems of large instruments call for more science to be done in the control system itself, than is possible with the EPICS base software alone. High output detectors call for pipelined data processing; physics applications deal with systems of process variables and their values rather than one process variable (PV) at a time; process variables may be structured, multi-modal, or require significant metadata associated with values in order to be understandable (such as images, or timing related metadata to give context when reviewing archives).

EPICS version 4 is a system of software modules that extend EPICS base to address these emerging requirements.

Core Modules of EPICS Version 4

Apart from EPICS base, the two core modules of EPICS version 4 are “pvData” and “pvAccess.”

The pvData module is the high-performance structured data backbone of EPICS version 4. It provides an introspection interface for the dynamic creation and management of structured data types and arrays. Although types can be created on the fly, EPICS version 4 also defines a standard set of data types oriented towards scientific controls data (called “Normative Types” [3]). The types there defined include matrices, key-value sets, tables, histograms, continua, and images, among others both generic and application specific.

pvAccess is the network protocol of EPICS v4. Like the equivalent protocol in version 3, “Channel Access”, named endpoints (PVs) are discovered by broadcast, while data I/O is by TCP. In addition to the expected get, put, and put/get methods one would expect, pvAccess supplies a Remote Procedure Call (RPC) method, and a method to deal efficiently with exchanging only the changed elements of large arrays. Working in concert with pvData, the two include memory management and efficient encoding and deserialization, to minimise copy and wire transactions for even large complex data I/O. For

```
$ eget -s XCOR:IN20:491:RMAT -a b BPMS:IN20:525
0.669544 0.694654 0 0 0 0
-0.57085 0.901274 0 0 0 0
0 0 1.333434 0.966896 0 0
0 0 0.358411 1.009578 0 0
0 0 0 0 1 0
0 0 0 0 0 1

$ eget
pva://mccas0.slac.stanford.edu/XCOR:IN20:491:RMAT?b=BP
MS:IN20:525

$ eget QUAD:LI24:900:TWISS
energy 5.00512
psix 37.7625
alphax 13.6562
betax -2.78671
etax -0.00698294
etaxp 0.00107115
psiy 31.9488
alphay 116.762
betay 5.2592
etay 0
etayp 0
z 2438.72
```

Figure 2: Examples of three *normative types* used with the new pvAccess command *eget*. The first shows an RPC request for the response matrix between two accelerator devices (sometimes called “rmat A to B”), in LCLS. The PV is “XCOR:IN20:491:RMAT”. An argument named “b” whose value is the name of the second device was also given. Since the returned data self identified as normative type *NTMatrix*, *eget* displayed the data appropriately. The second example is of *eget* being given the same request in URL form. In fact, in both the first and second examples, the server received its request in the form of the normative type *NTURI*. The last example shows use of *NTNamedValue* to get and display the Courant-Snyder parameters of a quadrupole.

instance, in the case of a PV defined by a complex structure, a client can subscribe only to the fields of the structure of interest to that client [4].

The RPC channel method enables a client to pass arguments along with a PV value request, in which case the value is computed with respect to the arguments.

Notably, the same PV may be accessed by either an asynchronous get method, or an RPC method. In this way, a get-value operation on one PV, can be either the familiar “monitor”, or the “compute value subject to given parameters and return result.” In either case, the processing path (and so potentially the PV’s value) would be different. This RPC facility is being used extensively at SLAC, and is being adopted also at ESS, for beam dynamics (see Figure 2), infrastructure, and directory service data.

RECENT ADDITIONS TO EPICS VERSION 4

The pvAccess system is now codec based; the communication layer is decoupled from the transport layer, allowing alternative transport layer protocols such as one using zeroMQ. A codec for the former transport layer of pvAccess is provided.

Array handling has been greatly enhanced in the C++ implementations of the core modules. Reference counted shared vectors help minimize copy operations. Fixed and bounded arrays have been added in order to more easily facilitate high-performance array management. These complement the existing unbounded arrays. Stride length can be specified in put and get operations.

The Normative Types have been extended to include full dynamic typing (essentially an “Any” in the CORBA sense).

A plug-in architecture for implementing security schemes has been added, along with the plugin for Channel Access security.

The command line tools have been extended to better support time stamp, alarms, and correct display of enumerated types. All of the command line tools now support both pvAccess and Channel Access operations. A new tool, *pvlst* gives information about pvAccess servers on the network, including lists of the PVs they host.

Extensive API changes have been made to give greater flexibility for channel callbacks and converting from one introspection data type to another.

New Data Processing Database

The new “pvDatabase” module of EPICS v4 implements a framework for a memory resident database of records defined in terms of pvData structures. Like the IOC database of classic EPICS, the records of pvDatabase can process on I/O events; unlike the IOC the records may be of any structure the engineer wishes, and may pull in data from any pvAccess-ible data source, plus Channel Access. pvDatabase images may be standalone, or hosted within an IOC, where they might interface directly to base records, asynchronous device driver support (*asynDriver*), or detector control (*areaDetector*). pvDatabase is then useful for complex optimal control tasks, data assembly, and preprocessing. Combined with pvAccess streaming, it can be used as the basis of a data processing pipeline.

CONCLUSIONS

EPICS can be easily integrated into an EPICS installation to supplement existing device support, DCS and SCADA. It effectively extends EPICS to support structured scientific data and complex processing. Early users have found it particularly useful for high-throughput detector data and for integration of beam dynamics and accelerator enterprise data, into the controls system.

THANKS

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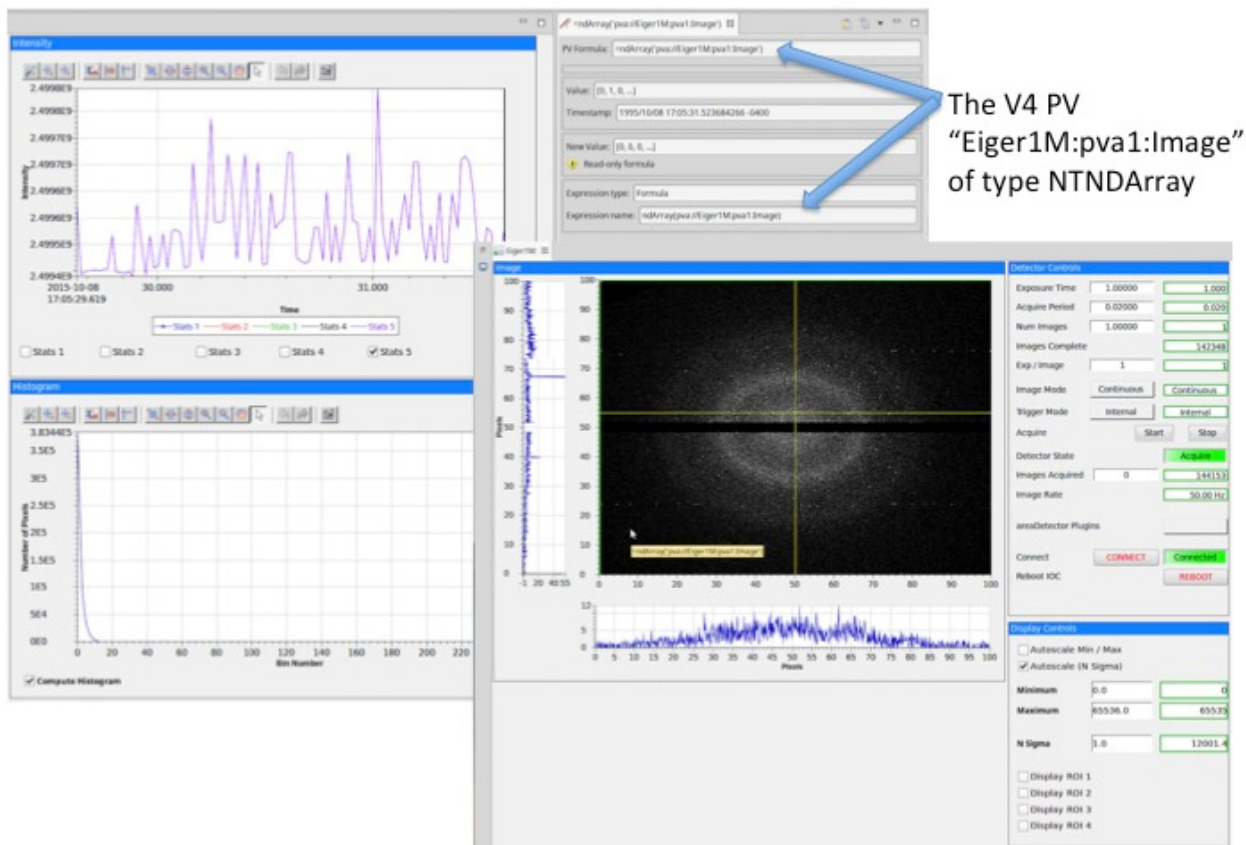


Figure 4: CS-Studio screenshots from NSLS-II, showing an EPICS V4 PV of the Normative Type for areaDetector images (NTNDArray) displayed using a CS-Studio “formula.” *Thanks to Bruno Martins, BNL.*