Getting Started in a FOSS Project

COMP8440: FOSSD Lecture 2



Researching the project

- So you've chosen a project
 - How do you find out more?
 - What do you need to know?
- Common sources of information
 - Manual page/documentation
 - Binary package description
 - Web search
 - freshmeat.net

Key Project Attributes

- Try to find out:
 - Who does the development?
 - How is it organised?
 - How is it licensed?
 - How is the source code managed?
 - How are stable releases done?
 - What communication methods are used?
 - How are bugs tracked?
 - How does it interact with other projects?

Project Structure

- How is the project structured?
 - Is there a project team?
 - Is it part of a larger project?
 - Does it have any corporate involvement?
 - Is there any formal legal framework?
 - Who makes decisions?
- 'Cathedral' or 'Bazaar'?
 - Priests in a tower or a milling bazaar?

Making contact

- Do your homework!
 - Don't ask questions that are answered on the website
 - Read the "Asking smart questions" FAQ
 - Read the mailing list for a while first
- When asking questions
 - Check that nobody has asked it before
 - Include enough information for an answer to be possible
 - Don't be demanding, ask nicely
 - Show that you've put some effort in to find the answer yourself

Contributing a patch

Research first!

- What patch format is wanted?
- Against what version of the code?
- How much explanation is wanted?
- Are tests and documentation expected?
- Is there a developer guide?
- What happened with other patches?

Testing!

- Make sure the patch works
- Check it doesn't break anything else
- Is it portable?

Calm and patient

It may take a lot of time to get a patch integrated

Case Study: vlc

- vlc video player
 - What does it do?
 - Who maintains it?
 - How is the project structured?
 - How do the developers communicate?
 - What has happened recently?
 - How do I build it?
 - How do I contribute?

Let's look at vlc

Exploring vlc

vlc main page

- developer wiki
- coding howto
- sophisticated website

source code

- git directions
- multiple repositories
- gitweb interface
- high development speed

communication

- user and separate devel lists
- commit msgs to devel list
- development and user forums
- IRC channel

vlc packaging

Binary packages

- project offers binaries for several platforms
- offers tips on repositories
- detailed project description
- package separation
- 'skins' for customisation

Dependencies

- build dependencies
- runtime dependencies
- exploring dependencies with synaptic

vlc team

- team page
 - Details on major contributions
 - Map location
 - svn login details
 - sub-project teams
 - legal contact
- team events
 - team meetings at conferences
 - development days