

STARTING A NEW PROJECT

Free software and open source software

Theory and practice

- Burst of enthusiasm
 - Many/most projects start with a burst of enthusiasm by one person
 - Few projects actually think about all the issues of running a FOSS project at the start
- Follow a recipe?
 - Knowing the recipe helps, but a good cook also improvises!
- Help or motivation?
 - Do you need help to write the first version, or just motivation from enthusiastic users?
 - If you need help, then setting up the infrastructure well is especially important

Things to decide

- Think about
 - What are the project aims?
 - Don't be too grandiose at first
 - World domination takes time – start small!
 - What structure do you want?
 - Usually start with a very simple structure One committer, easy contributions
 - What license do you want?
 - Don't invent a new license!

Things to decide

- Think about
 - Source code management
 - Use a canned hosting site?
 - Do you need
 - a mailing list?
 - Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel?
 - Web site?
 - How will you track bugs?

Working code

- Start with working code
 - Before the first announcement, get something working
 - Working code gives positive feedback from potential contributors and users
 - Working code doesn't mean perfect code!
- Follow common conventions
 - Look at how related projects handle build and coding issues
 - Follow their lead if possible
- First impressions matter
 - Make it very easy to build and try the first time

Nurturing the project

- Positive feedback
 - The key to early success is positive feedback to contributors
 - Answer every contribution, be encouraging!
 - Answer email fast, encourage IRC discussions
- Releases
 - Get releases out fast and frequently
 - Use snapshot releases if need be
 - Post a summary of changes in each release
- Encourage discussion
 - Ask others' opinions
 - Listen to the feedback you get

As the project grows

- Things to start considering
 - Packaging for major distros?
 - Do you want to do binary packages?
 - Should you write articles for magazines/web sites?
 - Should you have a development blog?
- Project structure
 - Regularly evaluate how the project is working
 - User community has different needs from development community
 - Do you want to formalize the structure?
 - If so, make sure to discuss it first!
 - Do you need to start defining project roles?

Scaling up

- FOSS projects can grow quickly
 - Is there too much load on one person?
 - Can you break the project into modules?
 - Use separate mailing lists for different parts?
 - Delegate! Find people you trust, and give them a role
- Things that can help
 - Post a regular development summary?
 - Start a project conference? Or a mini-conf?
 - Look at how other projects handled growth.
 - Pick an approach that worked for them