

Starting a new project

COMP8440: FOSSD
Lecture 13

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!
 - Source code management
 - Use a canned hosting site?
 - Do you need a mailing list? 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

Announcing

- Initial announcement
 - Add the project to freecode.com
 - Find mailing lists for closely related projects
 - Don't spam every list!
 - Be humble – don't oversell the project
 - Make sure you include vital project info
 - What is it for?
 - What programming language?
 - What platforms does it target?
 - What license have you chosen?
 - Where do people find out more?

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
 - Give careful credit for all contributions
- 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
 - Do you want to formalise 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