Starting a new project

COMP8440: FOSSD
Lecture 12

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
  - 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
    - User community has different needs from development community
    - 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