

Open Source and Sustainability

Oxford 2006

'Open Source'

- Aspect oriented programming parallel
- 'Open Source Software' is like saying 'hydrocarbon powered machines' - a cross-cutting concern
- As a result, there are many types of software, projects and users involved in Open Source, a wide range of which are represented at this conference

'Sustainability'

- Of what for how long?
 - Reach v2, v3?
 - Still in use in 15-10-5 years?
 - Continuing to be developed?
- Technology is immature and big changes will continue to occur

Software sustainability requires

- Adequate motivation and incentives among developers (differs across the range of Open Source projects)
- Real needs/*valuable* benefits addressed by the project
- User feedback mechanisms to ensure real need continues to be addressed
- ‘Marketing’ (user need communication, product awareness and explanation)

Sakai at Cambridge

- Our motivation for choosing open source vs commercial software
 - Ability to change the code, without the cost of maintaining a large complex code base alone
 - Robustness of code that is developed and running at a number of sites
- In addition, we are choosing to pay for reassurance on coordination and QA of releases - payment is optional in the project, contributions count more.

Beware Grant Funding

- Competitive grants do not help to create sustainable open source projects
 - Create competitive atmosphere among those with whom we need to be cooperating
 - Are finite, but allow sustainability considerations to be deferred
 - R&D (typical grant target) is only 10% of getting a product to market
 - Most software requires significant continuing development

An option for a better aligned grant model

- Fund (reward) those contributing to projects *that get used*
- What about a 3 year, peer-reviewed, fellowship to provide mechanism for continuity without sacrificing accountability and to allow 'new blood' to participate

Social Processes

- When thinking about an OS project, think about Social Processes
 - Development; single developer marathon (Exim MTA) vs. team relay (Sakai, Dspace)
 - Range of *community* complexity; developer is user - to - developer, user and decision maker for adoption are all different (TLRP)
 - Complexity requires ‘marketing’ as well as development and has less obvious developer motivators
- Don't forget: successful software products deliver benefits to users - be clear about what benefits to whom.

OSS Watch

- Exists to help UK FE and HE understand open source and its relevance to them
- Seb, Randy and the team have assembled a great collection of speakers and projects.
- I'm really looking forward to the meeting I hope you all enjoy it as much as I expect to