

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