Mentoring in the Debian Med team

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Example for user contact
On Wed, Jan 18, 2012, Luis Ibanez wrote:
Subject: Looking for a Debian packager for FIS-GT.M: Change the History of Healthcare!!

Dear Debian packagers:

We are looking for one of you to help us change the history of Healthcare

We are working at OSEHRA (http://www.osehra.org/) on building an Open Source environment for VistA, the Electronic Health Records system of the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

VistA is the best proven EHR, and it has been used for the last 30 years at the VA. It currently runs about 170 VA hospitals and about 1,000 ambulatory facilities.

...

Answer to user request: MoM
On Wed, Thu, 19 Jan 2012, Andreas Tille wrote:
Subject: Happy birthday Debian Med and announcement of MOM

...To ensure that this development of a strong team will continue I would like to propose a new effort I would like to call "Mentoring Of the Month" (MOM)

In this program I would like to dedicate a part of my spare time to a newcomer (the "student") providing any packaging knowledge I have to enable him working more or less independently on packaging after passing this MOM period. I like to guide the student kindly into all secrets of Debian packaging at the example of a specific program which is in the focus of the Debian Med team. The student is free to pick the package however, ...

Debian Med has attracted one developer per year

According to a questionnaire in Wiki
- Debian Med has 28 DDs+DMs
- 11 DDs *because* Debian Med exists;
  4 DDs before Debian Med started
- 7 out of the 11 above extended their activity to other fields in Debian
- 9 out of the 11 above remained active in Debian Med

Mentoring of the Month (MoM)

- mentor dedicates a part of his spare time to a newcomer
- guide the student kindly into all secrets of Debian packaging
- learning per *relevant* example
- student is free to pick the package (mentor has a vetoing right)
MoM Goals

- The package in question is finished and uploaded.
- The student is able to do advanced packaging tasks and is introduced into the communication channels of Debian Med team.

Communication

- Teach open communication on mailing list
- Do not bother other readers too much and use [MoM] tag in subject

Rules (1/5): Responsiveness

If the mentor is posting something on the mailing list containing [MoM] in the subject, the student tries hard to respond with a comment (if not better possible), something like: I have no idea but I will do some research like asking upstream or whatever - just leaving a hint that he feels responsible somehow.

Rules (2/5): Confirm understanding

- The student tries to follow any of the commits of the mentor to the package which is in focus of the MoM plan, and favourably sends a comment like Its OK for me; What does this mean, please explain; I would prefer ... instead of your change.
- Follow changes (subscribe commits) or do frequently SVN up | git pull; {SVN|git} log.
- Student should try to find a useful comment to confirm understanding.

Rules (3/5): Confirm ability to built

The student confirms that he succeeded in building the package according to the state in VCS in case it builds, or that he is able to reproduce the error message of the build process.

Rules (4/5): Communication

- In case of problems the student will ask on Debian Med mailing list ([MoM]: Subject)
- Show others:
  - We are working on a problem
  - Sort things out via open discussion
  - How also others could learn things about packaging
- Alternative: #debian-med IRC channel.
The student posts a status report about the packaging every day, reporting about done changes, issues raised, discussions with upstream etc.

MoM formalism

- MoM is work
- Hopefully it shows that this work is also fun
- Mentor trades his spare time for the work of the student
- Attempt to train “silent observers on the list”
- Focus not only on technical details but also on learning to know relevant communication channels

After learning that GSoC has 0% woman applicants (out of 181) but Google Outreach Program for Woman had 100 applicants, I’m wondering:
Should I explicitly dedicate every second month for women only?

Some people put their names in the waiting queue but did not answer a ping.

MoM Conclusions

- Time spent into mentoring is worth the effort
- No student for each month so the workload is bearable
- Students have just read recent documents which I did 15 years ago → I can learn new stuff from them
- Major advantage: training upstream to pool their knowledge about the code with ours about packaging is very efficient for the hard packages
- About 50% of students had strong connection to upstream and requests for upstream changes went very smoothly

Sponsoring of Blends (SoB)

- Blends concept remains widely unknown amongst newcomers (but also amongst DDs)
- Newcomers might desperately seek for sponsors and simply do not know how to find one
- Kill two birds with one stone: Get the package sponsored after proving that you understood the Blends techniques

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Package</th>
<th>Uploaded?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02.2012</td>
<td>Luis Ibanez</td>
<td>fis-gtm</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.2012</td>
<td>Scott Christley</td>
<td>libswarm</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.2012</td>
<td>Eric Maeker</td>
<td>libquazip</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2012</td>
<td>Tomás Di Domenico</td>
<td>python-csb</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.2013</td>
<td>Sukhbir Singh</td>
<td>hunspell-en-med</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2013</td>
<td>Lennart C. Karssen</td>
<td>probabel</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.2014</td>
<td>Jorge Sebastião Soares</td>
<td>snp-sites</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.2014</td>
<td>Stephen Smith</td>
<td>phyutility</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.2014</td>
<td>Ian Wallace</td>
<td>opensemrm</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-“silent observers on the list”

About 50% of students had strong connection to upstream and requests for upstream changes went very smoothly.
SoB rules

- You confirm to have understood the Blends principle (have read the Blends documentation, are member of some team on alioc, reading the relevant mailing list)
- Your package is maintained in a VCS used by the Blends team
- Your package is listed on the Blends tasks pages (which is either because the package is inside Debian or in any Blends VCS)
- You are unable to find a sponsor on the specific Blends list even after posting there at least twice

SoB results

- SoB is heavily used by Debian GIS team, partly used by Debian Science
- I get mail when Wiki page is changed and take mostly immediate action
- I’m lurking on relevant mailing lists as well on debian-mentors to catch maintainers in need of a sponsor
- If you notice a candidate for SoB please redirect them to me

Face to face meetings with users and upstream developers

- Have a quick look at what happened since 2011 when we started doing yearly sprints by also inviting users and upstream developers.

Thanks to Debian for supporting sprints which we have proven to be successful

Top 10 Uploaders of Debian Med team

Top 10 discussion on Debian Med user mailing list

Top 10 discussion Debian Med developer mailing list
Top 10 bug hunters of Debian Med packages

- Andreas T: 583
- Mathieu M: 217
- Charles P: 194
- Olivier S: 105
- Steve M. R: 74
- Aaron M. U: 42
- Steffen M: 35
- Dominique B: 29
- Laszlo K: 28
- Thorsten A: 21

Top 10 committers to Debian Med VCS

- Andreas T: 6572
- Charles P: 3739
- Mathieu M: 1900
- Olivier S: 1065
- Steffen M: 1034
- Laszlo K: 569
- David P: 538
- Steven M. R: 496
- Thorsten A: 302
- Aaron M. U: 294

Number of Packages in selected tasks

- bio
- bio-dev
- epi
- imaging
- imaging-dev
- practice
- psychology
- tools

Inviting environment

In several talks at DebConf and in discussions before I have heard the argument that it is hard to find friends. But it is not. The answer is to create inviting teams.

Team

Waking up in the morning and realising that somebody else has solved your problem from yesterday

Links

- Debian Med policy
- Mentoring of the Month
- Sponsoring of Blends
This talk is available at
http://people.debian.org/~tille/talks/
Andreas Tille <tille@debian.org>