Board Minutes 2009 Nov 3

Sakai Foundation Board of Directors Meeting

November 3, 2009

This document contains minutes from the Sakai Foundation Board of Directors meeting held on November 3, 2009. Corrections, suggestions should be sent to Josh Baron and Mary Miles.

These minutes capture both the discussion and formal resolutions of the board. Simply because something was discussed does not mean that it is the agreed-upon position of the Board. When the Board makes a formal resolution to approve an item, it will be noted as such in the minutes. If there is no such notation, readers should assume that the minutes are simply the notes of the Board discussions.

Board members present: Attending in person: Josh Baron, Mara Hancock, Lois Brooks, Michael Korcuska (ex-officio), Mary Miles (staff). Attending by phone: John Norman, Jutta Treviranus, Joseph Hardin, Stephen Marquard

Topic: General Board Business

Michael Korcuska briefly reviewed the financial snapshot from September 30. This document was provided to Board members in advance of the meeting. The cash balance is lower than the previous month due to fewer collections and no additional memberships, and represents a widening gap between revenue and expenses.

The board must look at attrition, rates charged, and ways to control expenses. In addition to the current membership drive, other strategies need to be considered, such as a document which defines the "value proposition." Pieter Hartsook is currently working with Michael to develop this material. A draft is expected within the next week. The board agreed that by action will need to be taken on the expense side by March 2010 unless there has been a substantial increase in revenue.

Stephen noted that there are really two different audiences for the value proposition: conservative and aggressive. The aggressive audience is interested in investing in something that might have some potential while the conservative audience are those who are currently using the product and want to see results in QA and other areas. Retaining members who have been in the community for a while is a different message from the one needed for new adopters.

An immediate priority is the value proposition document, including some benchmarks. Then, more strategic planning documents and milestones need to be developed. This would include some shorter term goals (6-12 months), including C-level and other kinds of communications. In addition, timelines and activities around the roadmaps need to be understood.

Joseph requested monthly feedback on how this process is going, beginning the first of December. He also requested that a sub-committee be formed to determine what to do if the goal is not achieved by March. Michael responded that by the end of February he has targeted 12 new membership candidates in the pipeline. Initiative funding should have made substantial progress by that time as well. Michael will also provide a monthly report on staff activities and will require monthly blogs from each staff member. These blogs will be placed on the new Sakai website. In addition, he will circulate a one-page plan for when C-level briefings and/or webinars will take place. A sub-committee of Michael, Josh Baron and Stephen Marquard was formed to develop alternative plans. A Google spreadsheet will be used to track activities and updates.

Topic: Product Council Update (Clay Fenlason)

Clay reported on activities of the Product Council by referred Board members to two relevant links: http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/display/MGT/How+Sakai+Development+Works and http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/display/MGT/Development+Efforts. The first document delineates the actual stages projects will go through. The Product Council continues to work on establishing criteria for projects but only one has gone through the incubation process thus far. While work continues on this effort, this is not a big departure from past activities, but is a warm-up exercise for what will happen at a later date. The Council believes these are the right steps but acknowledged that more products need to get into the release process in the next six-months.

A major strength of the Product Council is the ability to start discussions well ahead of a release and urge improvements ahead of the freeze date. Michael added that the response of the individuals and teams involved have been very positive. The Council is also focusing on documentation for future cases – defining the particulars after something has been through the process rather than trying to define them in advance.

Next steps for the Product Council include keeping some of the current focus on providing Sakai 2 teams with what they need in order to be successful. If they are unable to meet the deadlines, they should be allowed to provide independent releases. From there, attention will be turned to Sakai 3 where the front-end work will serve as a good example for the breadth of skill sets and individual institutions even if it seems too big.

Michael noted that there are three significant efforts going on now in terms of Sakai 3 development:

1. K2 – under the leadership of Ian Boston
2. UX Design – the Foundation has engaged (with funding from 4 institutions) a designer to work on this. Stanford is working on user research around assessment which is based on the requirements visioning out of the Teaching and Learning group. The Sakaibrary group is doing similar work.
3. Hybrid mode – spearheaded by Lance

Clay noted that the interesting thing is how these three efforts are coordinated. User research is being done at the front end and then fed into the design work. The design effort is separate but also feeds into the design work. Those things can really be done together as opposed to separating them out. Lance's work will be invaluable in trying to get Sakai3 work into development.

Michael noted that he would like to see the documentation work completed and packaged into something that could be pointed at as a way to design for Sakai. The idea of design committers has also been discussed. Ontario College of Arts and Design has a very active interactive component and they are interested in adopting Sakai. Student sourcing is another method to pull together a polished FCK and specification.

This conversation will continue as work progresses.

Topic: Reporting Out From Board Sub-Committee on Longer-Term Foundation Strategies

Mara reported that the main goal of this sub-committee had been to look at a potential merger with other academic open source project and to consider what that meant in terms of value to Sakai. They also tried to think a little broader about the variables that need to be in place to consider a merger with other community or open source groups in the future. Some time was spent building criteria, which resulted in three primary areas:

1. Improving sustainability of Sakai
2. Improving the quality of the product
3. Increasing the size and quality of the community.

Some of the challenges are that the organization we are talking with does not have a sustainable plan or future which may cost us more that providing actual value. There could be issues around infrastructure incompatibility. This needs to be articulated in terms of value of the integration to our end-users. Overall how would one look at the merger of governance between the two organizations. The sub-committee started developing a list of pros and cons from an institutional perspective.

Overall, the sub-committee felt that it is in the best interest of the community to pursue those kinds of mergers. This would result in a governance and financial structure that would be appealing to institutions that had an interest in only one of the projects under the umbrella. A straw governance model needs to be crafted and circulated for feedback.

Joseph requested that the sub-committee's documents be made available for full Board review. He expressed concerns about the advantages and disadvantages being discussed and when and how it would be surfaced to the community. The sub-committee suggested that a board member facilitate that discussion, reframing it as an exploratory document that the Board is undertaking.

Action: The Board agreed that the sub-committee document would be sent to Joseph for review. He will then who will launch a discussion on this issue using the lists and Sakai website.

Topic: Appointment of External Board Members

The by-laws have been amended to allow for the appointment of up to two (2) external Board members as needed. Michael felt that the appointed board member should be a financial person, perhaps a CFO, and ideally with an open source background, but not necessarily a part of Sakai.

There was also some discussion concerning the creation of an advisory council that might meet occasionally to assist the Board in specific areas. This was seen as useful but there has not been enough discussion on this issue to proceed. The question for today is do we go forward with finding financial expertise on the board, and if so, are there people who could be suggested? John suggested asking Hewlett and Mellon Foundations if they could recommend individuals who would be willing to consider this.

Action: Josh and Lois will begin building the list. Suggestions should be sent to them via email and this discussion will continue at a future meeting.

Topic: Changes to December meeting

The next meeting of the Sakai Foundation Board will be held on December 10. This represents a change to the standard meeting time and Mary will update the calendar and circulate the information to the Board.

With no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Miles