UX Lead Initiative

The UX Lead Initiative

The Sakai software is evolving as a leading platform for scholarly collaboration in teaching, learning and research, using the emerging community source model for directed open source software development. Over the past two years Sakai has pioneered models for community organization and coordination that helped us adapt success in open source infrastructure software to the community source model. Our next frontier is to incorporate successful models in the development of *user-centered* applications.

We have an opportunity to tap the talent in our community and harness it to achieve unprecedented results in the Sakai software. The design talent in our community is exceptional, and there is a strong collective will to make Sakai exceptionally usable and accessible. Adding a key leadership position will help us harness the talent and collective will and utilize them effectively to achieve a dramatically improved user experience. Although no one person is going to single-handedly handle all of Sakai's usability issues, there is a strong need for this leadership and coordination to help the community take on these challenges. A lack of this leadership to date has stood as a barrier to settling on clear and coherent design goals and strategies, while a lack of this coordination has stood as a significant barrier to designer engagement, since designers cannot themselves simply dive in and start reworking or producing tools the way a developer might.

During the recent 6th Sakai conference in Atlanta the Sakai board heard a clear call from the community for the Foundation to increase leadership and accountability for Sakai's user experience. An exceptional user experience in Sakai will be the result of a coherent vision and coordination of the user experience designers, user interface developers, and architects among us. The amount of effort required of this leadership, coordination, design, and development merits a full-time foundation staff position.

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Fund Progress

Target: $110,000

Contributing Organizations	
The rSmart Group	
University of Cambridge	
Yale University	
Johns Hopkins University	
Indiana University	
Charles Sturt University	
Total	**$30,000**
Remaining Gap	($80,000)

Foundation staff position

The Sakai Foundation intends to recruit a user experience design lead as a full-time staff position. This UX lead will:

- Develop and execute a plan for Sakai's user experience that balances a coherent long-term strategy and alignment with projects like FLUID and FLUX with near-term progress that enhances the user experience with each release
- Define a sustainable UI strategy that leverages existing and expands the talent in the community
- Be accountable for the Sakai user experience ¿ coordinating input, user research, designs, bringing UI decisions to closure, and communicating and documenting those decisions
- A full job description is attached.

Contributions

The Foundation needs support from your institution to implement this strategy. The most straightforward way to show your institution's support is to pledge some funding for the position. Many of you have asked the Foundation to provide a way for members to show support for a particular initiative or aspect of the Foundation. The Sakai board is responding to this need with a program that allows members to "pledge" funds to support projects, staff positions, or other initiatives that are important to your institution.

One of the great strengths of our community is our ability to bring our collective energy and resources to bear on a common objective. We know that the improving the user experience is an objective worthy of our collective attention. Please show your support today. Contact chris.coppola@rsmart.com to discuss this further or to pledge a donation. If you have current UI design or usability capacity in your organization that you can contribute to the project, contact Mara Hancock: mara@media.berkeley.edu.

Initiative "roadmap"

1. Develop shared understanding of UX lead position with prominent members of Sakai's design community (completed in Jan., 2007)
    - see job description attached
2. Announce initiative and Board members will proactively begin seeking targeted community contributions (announced the week of Feb. 11, 2007)
3. Form a hiring committee and begin recruitment efforts (coming soon)

Initiative FAQ

How much will this cost?

Including benefits, we estimate roughly $110K per year.

Can this really not be funded from the current foundation budget?

The short answer is "no." See the closing section of Chuck Severance's Foundation Overview presentation from the Atlanta conference in December. We are stretched pretty tight as it is.

What if community contributions don't cover the cost?

We're going to begin by encouraging community pledges, and we feel that's the best solution - where the community extends its resources to meet an expressed, compelling and shared need. We heard very clearly from community members in Atlanta that usability is among the most prominent concerns, and so we think there is enough support out there in the community to approach the funding goal. In the event of a shortfall, however, the Board is prepared to consider other sources of funding in order to make up the gap, perhaps as a last resort even a budgetary tradeoff, but we haven't yet approached the point of being ready to think about what it might mean to exact that pound of flesh.

How much has been collected already?

See the chart above

When will the hiring process begin?

We're currently planning this. The first step will be to establish a hiring committee. Once we have the committee established, that group will set a timeline.

How do I apply for this job?

If you're interested in applying for the job, contact Chris Coppola for now. Once a hiring committee has been established this answer will be updated.