Product Council FAQ

What does the Sakai Product Council do? (draft)

The Council's role is defined formally in our general wiki page, excerpted below:

The Sakai Product Council will act on behalf of the entire Sakai community to ensure the exceptional quality and cohesiveness of Sakai product releases in their support of varied teaching, research and collaboration needs. It does this formally by determining those projects which will go into a release, and informally by advising projects as they progress from R&D to production-ready maturity. The Product Council will undertake its work:

- by employing the expertise of its members
- through direct consultation with experts in the community
- with reference to best practices for technology, pedagogy and standards
- by establishing and communicating clear and objective criteria
- with a transparent process that allows review and comment from the community

More specifically, the Council stewards the lifecycle of Sakai projects as they move through the various stages of Sakai’s development process, from incubation to end-of-life, in relation to Sakai’s overall roadmap as a coherent product.

In the research & development and incubation phases, the Council acts primarily as an advisory body, available to projects that seek guidance on their progress through the product development lifecycle. In this advisory role, the Council may foster the dissemination and clarification of community standards and practices. In these phases, interaction with the Council is typically initiated by specific project teams.

For the product development, maintenance, and end-of-life phases, the Council reviews projects seeking to change to these statuses and projects identified as nearing end-of-life to ensure they have met community standards and practices appropriate to a new status. In each case, the Council will work iteratively with project teams and appropriate community bodies until a status change can be made, or a request for change of status is withdrawn. Specific project teams typically initiate requests to the Council for changes in status to the product development and/or maintenance phases. Any community member or body may initiate requests to the Council for a change in status to the end-of-life phase, but should typically first propose and discuss end-of-life with the wider community.

The Council operates not as a dictatorial authority, but as a body that crystallizes the questions the community would ask to maintain product coherence:

- For innovation: how has your project addressed specific community standards and practices to meet its stage in the development process?
- For end-of-life: is your project still addressing those specific community standards and practices that signal viable participation in Sakai as a coherent, live product?

Who owns the Sakai product roadmap? (draft)

Sakai’s roadmap is owned primarily by the Sakai Foundation Product Manager, who stewards its development via broad community collaboration. The Product Manager treats the roadmap like a formal Sakai development project and guides versions of it through the product development lifecycle in collaboration with the Sakai Product Council.

What is the relationship between the Sakai Product Council and other community bodies/teams, such as the QA team, release team, and maintenance team? (draft)

The key difference between the Product Council and these other groups is the Council does not actively work on Sakai technologies (though individual Councilors may), but rather considers Sakai projects more broadly in relation to standards and practices related to overall product coherence and the product roadmap. Other groups (eg, QA, release, maintenance) are likely to bring specific issues to the Council’s attention and be consulted by the Council about specific issues and projects. The Council does not direct the work of any other group, but rather seeks to apply community consensus to broad decisions that shape Sakai as a coherent product and may guide the work of other groups.

What are the differences between how the Sakai Product Council works with Sakai 2 versus Sakai 3? (draft)

At a fundamental level, the Product Council approaches Sakai 2 and Sakai 3 projects in exactly the same way: considering them in relation to established community standards and practices for product coherence. Given the very different maturities of Sakai 2 and 3, Sakai 2 projects will tend to be measured against more settled standards and practices, while Sakai 3’s framework is itself still (at the time of this writing) inchoate. Because Sakai 3 itself now exists as a single project, the Council must evaluate it from the perspective of whether it is moving in the right direction toward a generally acceptable community release.

Who selected the product council?
A subcommittee of the board, led by Lois Brooks, and including Jutta Treviranus, Josh Baron, Joseph Hardin and Michael Korcuska undertook two activities. First, the subcommittee defined the selection process, council structure and membership renewal process. Members of the board who were nominated for the product council were offered the opportunity to give comment, but were recused from voting on the processes we defined. Second, the subcommittee reviewed all nominations, selecting a slate of candidates. The slate was passed to the full board for comment, but again, members who were nominated, whether selected or not, were recused from voting. The full board did not see all the names of the nominees; this information was restricted to the subcommittee.

**Why did you choose the people you chose?**

We received quite a long list of nominations with many well-qualified colleagues from the community, more than could be seated on the council. Hence, the selection process necessitated that we pass over individuals who would make fine council members. These decisions, some of which which were quite difficult, were ultimately made with the overall balance of the council in mind. This slate was selected certainly because of individual qualities, but also with a goal to form the council with as much expertise amongst the members as possible, and to find breadth and balance of institutions, perspectives, and experience.

**Should board members also be on the product council?**

The Sakai Foundation board is responsible for legal and fiduciary activities, and business viability of the Foundation. The Sakai board does not directly intervene in product decisions, nor does it undertake product decisions as part of the board's agenda. This is purposeful for several reasons. First, as a community source project, product directions are ultimately the domain of the community. The board's role is to assure resources and coordination, but not to direct the details of the product. Second, skills needed to assure an excellent product are not necessarily the same ones needed to govern a Foundation. There is certainly some overlap in necessary expertise between the board and council, and there is some different expertise as well.

Because the board is ultimately responsible for the viability of the Foundation, it has ultimate responsibility for the success of the council. The council process establishes that the council activity will be reported to the board twice yearly. The Executive Director will act as interface between the board and the council.

That said, the board members are active in the community as individuals, and most rely on Sakai at their home institutions. Several are quite active in product development, either as leaders or regular contributors, so it's natural that some were nominated for the product council. The board subcommittee is sensitive to the question of board/council overlap. We decided that it was fine to have some overlap because of individual expertise, but that board officers (chair and vice-chair) could not be on the council. The chair sets the board agendas and has managerial oversight of the Foundation staff, and the vice-chair has this responsibility in the chair's absence. Hence, limiting board officers from serving on the council creates an arm's length relationship that will allow the council to proceed without micromanagement from the board.

John Norman, who has chaired the Sakai Foundation board for the past several years, will step down from his Board Chair role to take a seat on the council. He remains as a member of the Sakai board until his term expires. Per the by-laws, the board will vote for a new chair.

As part of determining the long term policies for the product council, the board will consider whether individuals should be allowed to serve on both the board and the product council.

**Why are the council appointments tied to the 2.8 release?**

We would like to revise the council and process in about a year's time. Given the council's role with product definition and release, it would be detrimental to set a date review/revise timeline that might disrupt this work. We also would like to see how the process works through an entire release cycle. Hence, it makes more sense to review the council success and composition in cycle with product releases rather than hard dates. Since 2.8 will release in about a year, the timing works.