

Board Minutes 2006 Feb 25

Sakai Foundation Board of Directors Meeting
Fitzpatrick Manhattan Hotel
New York, New York
February 25, 2006

This document contains minutes from the meeting of the Sakai Foundation Board of Directors held on February 25, 2006. Corrections, suggestions should be sent to Joseph Hardin 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: Joseph Hardin, Brad Wheeler, Ian Dolphin, Chris Coppola, Jutta Treviranus, Lois Brooks, Mara Hancock, John Norman, Chuck Severance, Mary Miles (staff)

Topic: Debrief from JA-SIG Joint Meeting

Joseph stated that he was impressed with their interest in doing many things. They didn't seem to have given much thought to the open source items, but they have their own foundation and so are ahead of us in that regard. The meeting allowed two almost completely independent open source spaces to look into EduCore spaces. There appear to be several different routes to work together. uPortal exists as a committer group of approximately 40-50 committers. It is very natural to expand their communities, and doing a requirements process is one way of doing that. Mara indicated her willingness to talk with them about what Sakai has done.

The two boards discussed ways in which they can work together. John stated his feeling that they were a group of like-minded people that we could work with. Our goal is to do whatever it takes to make that happen, keeping in mind that there is change coming. He continued that the goal of Sakai is to work with this community and do whatever it makes to help them with the change. The Sakai message should be that Sakai will work with any portal, not just uPortal. Joseph noted that Sakai needs to send a clear message that the uPortal community is a peer, and not a sub-project of Sakai. Sakai has always viewed them in that manner, even though they did not. The two boards will encourage the communities to explore overlapping projects and determine where they meet. Not only did the grant divers JA-SIG from making the necessary development at the property time, the impact on the community is that many people are not moving up to 2.0 and 2.5, but are waiting for 3.0. They were very interested in the de-coupled services from Sakai. These are important issues we can learn from.

Action item: Ian will craft a message that goes out after this board meeting that speaks to this issue.

In a discussion of JA-SIG funding, it was noted that they receive enough money to cover their core conferences expenses primarily from commercial sources (around \$60,000). JA-SIG then charges \$180-\$250 per attendee. Ian will get exact figures on Sun's contribution. If Sun is willing to fund JA-SIG, they might also consider funding Community Source Week. Sun is doing a lot of marketing around open-source, as is IBM, who also may be a source of funding for Community Source Week. While there are usually strings attached, it is worth considering. There are many sponsorship opportunities and multiple ways to raise money. The concern is that Sakai could end up taking on a disproportionate amount of responsibility, becoming an EduCore in a sense. By just taking on small bits of Community Source Week, a different model emerges. Regardless of the source of funds, contributions need to be explicitly detailed so you can delineate the expectations of the two communities.

Topic: Accessibility

Jutta raised a question of accessibility. Joseph asked for opinions from the other board members as to where Sakai should stand on this issue. Chuck noted that there are things that Sakai can't let the market decide. Joseph asked if Sakai could find something like 286. We know we are going to need to have this in a year or so, but with no individual willing to put in the work, do we wait? Chris added that there are limited resources and limited band width. That is not something he would pick to work on. Chris continued that internationalization is happening and that it's in the strategic best interest of Sakai but Sakai should respond to the community's needs and work on accessibility ourselves and not wait for EduCore. Ian agreed, stating that Sakai should not be afraid to look at what other communities have done. Jutta further noted that accessibility done right is from the ground up, and is not a single specialized effort that is restricted to a single group.

The significant developers need to be identified, as well as what is required. Then a seeding discussion can begin where you can see that something of significance is happening. Jutta's group is also working on a transformation service guide. A big part of the shift happened at the time of the Austin conference. Two groups were formed: a technical group and also the UI design group. A similar message was delivered in those two forums. As a result, it served to bring various people back on track. Things are moving along. Chris responded that he is having a hard time responding to that because he has his own ideas about where we should be at the end of the year or two years. He doesn't believe that Sakai knows that answer. Ian agreed that the same is true for a lot of things. In terms of the style guide, sometime the community is a bit sensitive about something like that. In Austin, the principle was agreed to. People are just somewhat bruised by having the requirements coming outside of what they need.

Sakai is trying to encourage development that will result in architectural design principles that completely separate presentation styling from the code. It's just good practice. Similarly, if there is anything to be controlled, you separate function from control, modularizing where you can. Mara asked if the people who have the most understanding of the levels were involved. Chuck said no. Jutta stated that from the Austin conference there was agreement that this was something that needed to be done and the various groups would work toward that goal. However, after the conference, and the agreements there, there was some "push back" from others who were not in attendance at the conference. Mara stated that it sounds like a group of people left the Austin meeting with a design goal that was not communicated to the rest of the community. Mara asked if they have the authority to say "this is the way we are going to do it" and have the authority to go forward with that directive. Chuck replied that there is no way to give that stamp of authority to someone or something. John noted that the current culture is that people will rear up and smack down on folks. Chris asked what needs to be put in place to change that behavior. John replied that we need to find a way to reinforce good behavior. Joseph added that we need to encourage people to move forward even without consensus. Chris added that one way is to help that person by providing public backing of their activities. Another is to clearly document some of the decisions made as a collective; a way of stating that we have agreed to do certain things. John stated that one of the relevant issues is how you get a tool in a release. At some point there will be a set of criteria that specified what it would take to be really useful. Mara added that some of the governance questions could be laid to rest if the board simply stated that "this is the way it is." John asked Jutta if there was some way to actually state requirements or principles or some overarching thing that could be done or if it must continue to be moving, shifting or organic. How can we get an authority on this issue? Joseph stated that he sees this as a part of a larger problem. Chris stated that we need to be vigilant, public, and have more activists for forward progress. Brad remarked that just as Mara was given responsibility for the Requirements process, Jutta had been empowered to lead the accessibility effort. Jutta replied that the difficulty is that there were already fairly effective processes in place. The board agreed previously that Jutta would head this effort and that Gonzalo Silverio should be the person to take the activist role in this effort, in coordination with Jutta. The Board will back his efforts in this endeavor. If he needs assistance or backing, Jutta will be there to reinforce his efforts.

Joseph asked if Sakai should spend a significant portion of available resources to make sure Sakai can interface with things like the Student Information Services. Brad replied that when it is convenient and when the board has to make a choice, we would go that direction. But if it's a trade-off, Sakai wouldn't spend the extra time. Chris added that Sakai needs to focus on being the best CLE we could be. Joseph asked if it is a general design goal that we be as global as possible. Chris responded that if the Student System requires us to do something differently, it's not a general priority. The strategic goal at this time is to focus on our own product, and not do extra things. Ian added that there is an initial investigational grant for a student system that's gathering data, the workshop at UBC. The requirements from this should be reviewed prior to making any decisions.

Chris continued that there are many things that need to be done to make it easier to develop for Sakai, some of which is paying some attention to the framework. Sakai is getting to the point where the api's are documented enough that people can count on them and design to them. Chuck stated that he sees two options: 1) invest a lot of time to clean up things for the next year and then write a lot of documentation; 2) decide that what we have is not too bad and put a lot of energy in documenting it and then proceed with reinventing it. The decision of which comes first must be made. Chris stated that if it is Sakai's strategic decision to make it very easy for Sakai, you must talk to a lot of people and bring that information back to the board. Even the timing of the answers is somewhat dependent on your perception of the community. Make it easy for WHO to develop? Joseph responded that there are numbers of IT education people who are scripters, working with php, python, perl, ruby, and others. They build tools that make their faculty happy. If Sakai can't make it easy for those people to develop to Sakai within the next six months, we will fall way behind and potentially lose them. Chuck stated that there are about 100 Java developers also working on this stuff.

Action: Based on this discussion, Chris took the action item of writing a document describing ways to make it easier to develop to Sakai.

Chris continued that if you interview 100 people, asking them what Sakai needs to do to make their life easier, they would have a lot to say. Jutta added that the thing that grinds things to a halt is the UI discussion. Functionality is easy, but the UI debate is more difficult. Chris stated that if we made it easier for the developers, we would be getting so much more than we currently are. We need to focus on doing a better job on that front than we are doing today.

The board agreed that that making it easier for developers to develop things for Sakai is a priority. They also agreed that they need to accelerate adoption.

Topic: Strategic Goals

The board identified the following as strategic goals:

User Interface (Chris will take action to create document and circulate to board)

- ¿ Deployability
- ¿ End-User Engagement (involvement)
- ¿ Conferences
- ¿ Membership Development (benefits, retention)
- ¿ Requirements (gathering, defining, delivering, and mobilizing.
- ¿ Communications/Marketing (define the who)
- ¿ Partnerships
- ¿ Fellows program
- ¿ Develop community
- ¿ Improve the user experience
- ¿ Evolve for the future (improve the developer experience and other items.

Membership:

In terms of membership, there are two categories: 1) Supporting Membership (capital M) those who pay the \$10,000; 2) Supporting membership (small m) those who contribute to the development. While there is value in the money transfer, the budget should be targeted at \$1-3 million and methods identified for how to getting that amount of money. Brad argued that the budget should be \$1.5-2 million, with the goal being to maximize the effectiveness of the community through coordination. In order to generate \$2 million, it would require 50 new members and 100% retention. The question becomes, why would people pay for membership if all the services and software is free. It's the insurance that a lot of people provide. It's also the belief that the coordination has value and will lead to something they can benefit from. The goal of this board should be to report how the money has been used. The ongoing statement should be that you should join because you recognize that you can build something complex out of those contributions. The board agreed that the major benefit is coordination and that message should be put out to members and potential members

Action: John agreed to draft a statement on membership development and report back to the board.

Partnerships:

What can Sakai say about partnerships? We want to be open to working with others. It was suggested that the SCA criteria be used to develop future partnerships. The goal remains to grow/enhance our community and evolve our future. Associate partner status with JISC was proposed because their structure allowed that as an option. While Sakai can be guided by those points, there are some overarching things that are common to the two groups. Sakai needs to partner with people who are actually doing things and normalize those efforts. Other groups suggested were JASC, DEST, the Learning Foundation, LAMS, and Sakai Quebec.

Jutta reported briefly on Sakai Quebec. CRIM is a 25-year old organization that receives money from the government and does good things having to do with learning technologies. They came to sakai with an interest in acting as an intermediary for these schools. This effort is extremely effective in Canada. They have a Sakai server currently running for 6 institutions, and are in the middle of a pilot analysis. This effort provides outreach to higher education, cities, K-12, and others. It is also being used for emergency preparedness - a form of non-profit intermediary to many places. This represents another distinguishing aspect of a Community Source Model. The board should support these kinds of things.

If Sakai had a membership coordinator, a person to go after existing members and make sure they renew their membership, would they go after them now? Jutta responded that Sakai should consider going after projects and not just institutions. In terms of making membership contacts, it was suggested that Anthony perform this function, as well as the Fellows group that has been proposed. The membership development person would provide coordination, not the hands-on contacting.

Sakai needs to be a little sensitive to consortiums that have approached us about memberships in the past. Some consortium will help, such as CRIM, and other will follow CRIM's lead. By putting an agreement in place, additional conversations can follow. Membership on CRIM's part will also deal with the French language issue. Consortia membership will remain the same. The consortium joins as a Sakai member, not their group of members. If the members choose to join as well, they will also be required to pay their fee, and not be covered under the umbrella of the consortium.

It is critical that the new membership agreement be completed and new members joining Sakai come in under the Foundation, not the former project. This new membership would also apply to renewals as well as new members. Joseph has a draft currently in progress. It was agreed that the new agreement will continue to be for a three-year period to encourage people to have a long-term view.

Budget:

The current and proposed budget were reviewed and revised. The revised document is attached to these minutes.

In terms of the budget, the Executive Director is the person who should make some of these decisions as they would be responsible for achieving the goals of the foundation within the goals that we have. Chuck agreed, but added that somehow we have to run Sakai until that person arrives. The model Chuck has been using is to keep it as simple as possible, make sure we don't overspend and get through the next 6 months. He felt that the Board should plan the direction for the Foundation and then let the ED execute it.

Joseph reported that the board has not determined that we need to hire the ED. Chris noted that Chuck has been filling that role and doing the kinds of things he would expect the ED to do, but probably not doing it in the way we would ask an Executive director to function. Chuck is simply functioning. If we are not resolved to finding an ED, we need to do something in the meantime. What is that?

Joseph added that the hiring process stalled out when the board was unable to develop a job description. His feeling is that we should grow our own staff in terms of experienced people. The question of the ED could be approached the same way. In this case, if we ask Chuck to be the ED, what's left over? Sakai is not looking for someone who will come in and tell us what the future is. Sakai is looking for someone who will work within the constraints that we have. If Chuck is doing all of this, remaining pieces are marketing, planning, legal, and others. These are things we have no formal person for and it's not always good when those things just happen.

Lois stated that she is somewhat uncomfortable with separating out an operational role to something that should be taken to the community for long term futures. Joseph asked who Sakai would want for the ED position. If they are not technically proficient, he would be surprised. There's too much to do in each of the roles for one person to handle. Each role is a full-time job. Chuck stated that he could be the Chief Architect or he could be the Executive Director, but he could not do both. Lois suggested that Chuck continue as the chief architect and an Executive Director be sought from outside the organization.

The board developed a list of things they agreed on:

- ¿ The roles have some similar characteristics
- ¿ The roles have some differentiating characteristics
- ¿ The role is highly technical
- ¿ Greatest qualification is the ability to communicate on a technical level.

Action: Lois will take the lead in developing a job description for the Executive Director position. The board will review the job description, it will be posted and interviewing will take place.

The board elected to continue this discussion in closed session and further minutes were not recorded.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Miles