

Engaging the software in research community

Wednesday, 10 April 2013 16:00 (20 minutes)

Impact

Knowledge transfer:

Increasing the capability of the specific Fellows and similar researchers in their domain or institute.

Increasing the training capacity of the Fellows as representatives of the research community.

Creating advocates:

Increasing the number of researchers highlighting the importance of software management, software development and software developers to research.

Real Policy:

Having real researchers in the field attending and supporting software focused policy discussions.

Understanding the domains:

Have a representative understanding of software in domains and how it helps important research and thus guides the institutes' efforts.

Iterative improvement:

Refining and honing the skills needed to engage with the research community to bring benefit to the Institute and to the researchers in a way that is not too disruptive to the researchers normal way of operating.

Summary

'How do we know what the users want?' is one of the recurrent questions faced by technology-focused organisations working in academia. This can also be phrased as 'Are we doing the right thing for our users?' . The Software Sustainability Institute is such an organisation and our strategy has been to 'recruit' amenable members of the research community to help us be effective and set the right priorities. In this presentation we focus on the Community engagement activities of the Software Sustainability Institute in 2011 to 2013, specifically the Agents & SuperPals of 2011-2012, the Fellowship programme in 2013, and the SeIUCCR network run with the UK NES (previously NGS). We will cover various aspects of this 'recruitment' from its purpose, what makes a good recruit, how do you know you have a representative set, what we hope to get from the recruits, what they gain from being involved and the outcomes of having them aboard.

Description

The Software Sustainability Institute works on the mantra that better software produces better research. The Institute has a specific focus on four areas: skills and training, recognition and reward, career paths, and reproducible research. By engaging with the software in research community –including researchers, developers, managers and PIs - we can identify the areas which could benefit from our help, set the distribution of effort across our focus areas and be adaptive to the ever-changing landscape of research.

In 2011-2012 the Institute recruited a set of early career researchers in such diverse fields as polar science, pro-environmental behaviour change, and sports science. The Agents gathered intelligence from conferences about major research themes in their domains, the software that was being used and key contacts. We also had more senior input from our SuperPals who were more established people in their research domains (bioinformatics and environmental science) with a large array of contacts and experience. This helped the institute gain an understanding of which projects and people to approach. The Agents also promoted the Institute's

message of improving software and thus improving research. They also collaborated with the SeUCCR community champions network which we ran along with the UK NES. A number of Agents ended up doing more than they were recruited to do, and we explore the reasons why in the presentation.

In 2012 we launched the Fellowship programme and announced 15 Fellows (at a variety of career stages) for 2013. The Fellows are expected to help with capacity building in their institutes or domains by running training courses to improve computational skills, attending conferences and taking part in policy level discussions.

The presentation covers our approach for engaging the community, what makes a good Agent/Fellow, how the Institute and the Fellows gain, management, and the programme outcomes to date.

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