

A Year of Strategic Initiatives at GNOME

Molly De Blanc, Melissa Wu

>> Hey, everybody. Welcome back to Track two of GUADEC 2020. Next up we have Molly and Melissa. Can you hear me?

>> I can hear you.

>> All right. Take it away.

>> Well, let's wait a couple of minutes for Molly to join us. She's going to be kicking us off. I believe we both can be on screen at the same time, correct?

>> Yes, we can.

>> It's great to be early. You're keeping the room happy. I guess it's time. So, Alex, do you want to start?

>> Yes. We have the next one a year of strategic initiatives at GNOME.

>> Hopefully you can find us on Twitter and so if you want to make any comments and e-mailing us so it's also really useful and I'm Molly De Blanc. So to start here I'm the strategic initiatives manager. I came here because I have had this background in free and open source software for a while now. I started my career working at one (inaudible) Child. And now I have gigs in GNOME and a few other places over the years. Generally my work has been done around community organizing as well as organizing in stability. And Melissa, Melissa Wu is really cool and is going to introduce herself.

>> So I'm a Melissa Wu and I'm the project coordinator for the community engagement challenge which is a challenge that we launched earlier this year. I come from outside the GNOME community. My background is in business and marketing. I'm a consultant and I now own a travel agency called Woodlyn Travel when I do in my non-GNOME time.

>> So we have a few goals today for what's going to happen for the rest of the session. My first goal is to really tell some great jokes. I actually almost opened up a laugh track to play. So I appreciate you thinking I'm hilarious. Another thing I'm going to do is share a foundation activities. So we're going to talk about stuff that the foundation has been doing over the past year. Hopefully this will be exciting to everyone. I hope Neil will find this stuff new if not it will be really bad. So I want everyone to view this as being super cool. And actually mostly what I do is I tell jokes and I try to get people excited about things. Sometimes it's really easy, sometimes it's not so easy.

Someone I know once described my job as being a digital story teller. I really like that idea and I try to think about it in that context a lot. So I'm here to talk about what we do and to share what we do with other people who aren't already part of the GNOME club to get them knowledgeable and to get them involved and to get them enthusiastic and to enroll them in the process of what we're doing. At the same time I spend a lot of time talking with people who are already part of the club and to help them understand how they can participate and to grow our community and foundation really from a personal perspective.

I also tell a lot really bad jokes. I try to keep my coworkers from having to hear with many of them. But if you've had meetings with me you might be familiar with this. So real talk, a lot of this is about to be about money. We have employees, we need to pay them. We have a conference, we need to pay for it. We have lovely captioning right now which has amazing and great. It also costs some money. I know that talking about money is kind of a dirty word in a lot of places and a lot of cultures. So that's a thing we're going to be doing a lot right now. And I wanted to break the ice and say this is going to be a lot we're going to be talking about. So whether it's keeping the lights on and things how do we get people enthusiastic to go to the next talk fest and that's all part of this story.

But supporting GNOME is a lot more than just money. I don't really like the angle about talking about things too much. It's a really necessary money conversation to have. But a lot of what happens is support collaboration and contribution. And those things come from all over. Whether that's another company lending us developer time or that's you showing up at your event sharing your opinions or experiences that's pretty valuable. Participation whatever form is part of contributing and it's part of building the foundation and it's part of building the community. And those are the sorts of things that I think about in my work. So GNOME is pretty big ecosystem and talking about money is not the only thing about it. It's collaboration, contribution, and partnership.

So here's my first joke. Do you know any good sodium jokes? I can make a poll. Raise your hand if you know any. Nah, this is really a lot less fun without the audience. This is great because the chemical symbol for sodium is Na and, you know, Nah. Oh, somebody is smiling, I appreciate that.

So free software is great. We talked about GNOME in the context of being free software. I will be using those terms interchangeably during this talk, but free software isn't always free. It costs a lot of money. Things like infrastructure, servers, staff, conferences, hackfests, travel grants, interns, outreach, T-shirts, legal fees, and parties. I'm a really big fan of this BigBlueButton and I'd like to give a shout out for making it happen.

So we do a lot with not that much as a foundation. This is kind of a little bit of background. So this is some stuff from our budget and spending. Our income from 2018 to 2019 was just under \$800,000. This is all public information. The link is at the bottom. Our budget was a little more than that. So that's an exciting challenge that we have to think about. So we do a lot without a lot of income. And for a little more context on that, here are some other nonprofits in the sphere. I think about us being somewhat similar to some of these foundations in terms of size. I think we have eight and a half staff members now.

I'm looking at Melissa helplessly, helplessly hoping that she knows the answer off the top of her head. So the free software foundation is about \$3 million, the Python foundation is about \$3 million, and the Linux foundation \$96,500,000. So we have a broad range of funding and resources available to different organizations. So in this context GNOME has a staff size between that of the conservancy and we work in a smaller budget as this other organizations. This information are 990s. You can find them online if you search them as a non-profit. Websites have this information on them and you can learn where they spend money and what kind of resources they take and put out. Even if they don't have other financial documents available.

I'd like to quick note about the numbers from the previous slides that's included in this. In 2017 something magical happened. Bitcoin became a whole lot of money. Bitcoin seems really stupid I used to tell people. But someone who goes by the name of Pine had a large number of bitcoin and donated to non-profits and other organizations. So during 2017 a number of us got

between about 500,000 to a million dollars of, like, donations from this one person which was really exciting for a number of organizations and really enabled us to take big leaps across the whole field. So when you think of that money in funding and see where we are it's this Pineapple Fund that has helped create that.

So here are some things that we've done over the past years. We have a ninueli is the catch all expert who I think tends to think that knows everything about GNOME. We have Neil, our executive director. Kristi, I always call the program manager. Program manager was the title of the previous place I worked. That was irrelevant.

Then we have Caroline, our branch manager and Melissa the project coordinator. So that's the status. And we definitely help each other a lot from every one. Kristi has done really great things. Melissa has been super useful and super careful. And Caroline is always there. We would not work without her. So a lot of this work that happens, a lot of the stuff is work -- Hi, cat. Sorry, that's my cat. His name is Bash.

Anyway, fundraisers, we have three. For that -- so the idea behind the yearly fundraisers is looking at the goal of donors overall. So generally when you start a fundraiser you set out your numbers and dollar amount, but we want to have our fundraiser covered in this many publications. We want a reTweet or from at least three board members. And you can focus on increasing the number of GNOME and getting new donors. People who haven't contributed financially. Our messaging and it was focused in collective action of us as a community of them joining us. We're going to step up together. And we want you to participate in that. The strategy was based on experiences I've had before. They're called appeals. An appeals is a message where you say, hey, here's what's going on, please support us. And we send those out as e-mail and blogs and social media posts. Really I want to thank the staff who helped write this, Emmanuele and this is before Caroline worked with us. So I'd like to thank Caroline for helping in making everything look good.

So this is where it went. It was not where we wanted it to be. I'm not sure where this deep is here. I couldn't figure out why it was doing that. So I might switch to R the next time I make graphs. This makes just as much sense. So what happened was we met -- we deposit over 50 percent over the course of the campaign which lasted to the end of November through the first week of January. You can sort of see the raises along with -- I'm pointing with my hands and you can't see that.

So this is when it started. I think here is where we posted an appeal or request that had to do with technology. And around here was at the end in the final push. So we had a pretty quiet state in the middle and then a big push and then other things sort of steadied off for a while. This was the first of many things that were really educational of running a fundraiser for GNOME because it began to help us see what sorts of things were valuable by the community. And what sorts of tactics worked. I'm talking about community right now but it's really important to contextualize not just the people involved but everybody in the ecosystem. If you look at Fedora and other organization you may come to the conclusion that millions of people use GNOME. So you know if everybody gave a dollar but that's not the case. So what we found in this is reaching out to the people we're already talking with they care most about technical direction. It also was really clear that we needed to do a lot to build mailing lists. Mailing lists for a lot of non-profits consider to be one of the most effective things you can do to increase fundraising. Some of them are already supporting your work.

So those were some of the takeaways from it. Yes. So those are some of the things we learned that were very useful. We also had a legal fundraiser. So this thing happened in October

while I was in vacation in Japan -- well, I was visiting my brother but took some time off. And I get this frantic text from Neil that said I started a fundraiser. And I'm, like, wait, what's happening? And it turned out that we were being sued by which I really mean that a non-practicing patent said that we were in violation of their patents. So what we did and what Neil did was launch a fundraiser. Our goal was to pay legal fees. It was an emergency like oh my God we need this to happen now.

So the goal was \$125,000, it cost more than that but we had another goal amount that came from larger companies. And the general methodology was just to keep asking about it. I think this is a really good parallel to those of you who remember the GNOME trademark conversation with Groupon I think it was. Talk to Sri about that.

So we did that and it was wildly successful. We raised about \$150,000 from over 4,000 donors and what this taught us is that people get really excited and when things can utilize to people outside of the GNOME glob it makes a lot more sense to them. You want to get behind supporting open source. They want to get behind about supporting small projects and they want to get behind about things that matter to them especially when they feel very timely. So that was a great experience and I'm not glad it happened but I'm glad we did it from an educational perspective. So the goal for that was \$10,000 and someone randomly picked raising funds in a short period of time. And the legal fees we picked \$10,000. Our messaging was project-based. We were looking at work GNOME was doing and inspired by the enthusiasm for people and how do we get other people excited about those things. So we kind of had this idea of charity buckets where we picked three topics. We picked the development for Gtk and the idea was when people would donate for that fundraiser they're basically putting a vote.

We had appeals, e-mails, blogs, and social media again and the staff was super awesome from all perspectives and the engagement channel had great ideas too. I like to give a special shout out to Sigu and Regina.

If you're better at graphs more than I am please help me. The highest point that is the general funds. Yes, that is the general funds. This one, the middle one is the WebKit GTK and this one is building GNOME community in Africa. This is where the original announcement was made and then we have these flat areas and this is where the WebKit GTK announcement was made. And in between these two we made the GNOME Africa announcement.

So what we learned from this again was that we hadn't done a lot e-mailing, we did some but we weren't reaching as many new people as we would have liked to. So we were having many conversations with people who care a lot about the technology. The people that we were reaching out to were largely heavily involved with GNOME and having talked to some of them didn't feel as though making financial contributions was what they wanted to be doing. We were reaching out to new people and we are still looking for new avenues of conversations. So those are some takeaways from that. Things that we won't do in the future we'll focus in one thing and try to get more people involved in sharing stories.

We also have some major gifts and sponsorships. Indeed very generously gave us \$10,000. They made wonderful things happen. So thank you Indeed. So major gifts and sponsorships. So the Indeed was more than general funds but other things would be like \$6,500 and sponsorship would fund, our general internships were \$8,000 for three months. So people interested in doing those and supporting a very specific project within GNOME whether it's technically based or infrastructure. Travel grants are something we talked to people about. There has been a lot of interesting travel grants. Things are a little different now than when we first had those

conversations. Infrastructure improvements and your idea here. So if you're an individual and say, hey, I've got five thousand dollars, I would like to get everybody who is a GNOME foundation member to have a rainbow GNOME shirt, we could talk.

We also conference sponsorships. That is a major source of funding for us. The 2018-2019-fiscal year, so after we moved how much it cost to run a conference we had about \$78,000 -- I don't want to call it profit because we don't profit but that money went back to general funds. So in 2019-2020 the growth is 26,000. It's actually a little more now because we had some wonderful friends pull through at the last minute for GUADEC. So thank you to them.

So why is it different? And the answer is COVID-19. Right now things have really changed because of the coronavirus. And there's a lot less interest in supporting conferences and events because even though people are still getting attention they're not getting a lot of attention. One of the things that happens whether we realize it or not is when we go to the event -- if we see their name later, oh yeah. GNOME was there. Melissa works for GNOME. I like Melissa. So you do lose a lot of things by not having in-person interactions with people. But there's still opportunities left. We're doing a lot of community work and GNOME.Asia is still coming up. So there are more opportunities to still sponsor at the GNOME foundation.

We also have the advisory board. That consists of these members. We would like to expand the advisory board. We've been talking with some organizations and the advisory board has a fee to join. If you're a company it is based on the size of your company. The advisory board does a lot -- we have regular conversations with them where we listen to their feedback and they listen to our feedback and we talk about what kind of things we can do to build a better project than anyone. I see some names here I know would be great to talk with. I know we don't have lots of time so I'm trying to speed along.

We've also been getting into grants. So that's an exciting new territory. I'd like to thank a few people. Britt Yazel, Matthias Clasen, Ruth. So we've applied for four grants and we're waiting to hear back from one. So the grant application process is medium successful so far. But the fact is when we first started talking about grants I think it was Deb Nicholson who gave me this advise that the first year you apply for the grant you don't get it. And the next year you apply for the same grant then you get it.

As far as partnerships we've been working with Hypra informally. They're going to be speaking tomorrow and has been doing super awesome job. Emmanuele talked about in his talk this morning or yesterday which I hear was great. And you can find Jean tomorrow. And then we have this other great partnership that Melissa is going to talk about.

>> Thank you, Molly. So my name is Melissa Wu and I'm the project coordinator for the community engagement challenge. This was created as a result of the grant from Endless. And we designed the challenge around some findings that existed in the current community. We found through research that there's a need for improved access globally. This is found through the statistic that 91.7 percent of engineers identify as male and 70.8 percent as white or of European descent. I used this statistic the other day but in the past engineers do not contribute to open source projects more than once a year compared to the year before that. Now, these numbers are from 2019 and 2018 which gives you an idea that there was a downward trend.

Another 25 percent of developers use Linux as their primary operating system. We believe that addressing these challenges or in setting the challenge that we did, we thought that addressing

this challenge and the GNOME foundation was in a position to guide people on this path. So next slide.

So like I said, as we designed the challenge we wanted to make this an opportunity to engage new users and find ways to attract new contributors. As Molly mentioned earlier we want to get people excited. We want to also make sure to recognize individuals and teams who support the next generation of contributors. So as we've done -- we did all of this to ensure the long-term success of freedom open source. So the challenge encouraged individuals or teams to submit stimulating ideas that, one, connect the next generation of coders to the FOSS community, two, improve the coding skills of beginner, and three encourage the FOSS community. Not on an easy challenge I tell you.

So this is what we did. The foundation staff, Caroline and I created a outreach program and we reached out through conference, e-mail campaigns, community managers, Listserves and community chats. This is what we did this time but if you take a look at this list and if it sparks an idea of oh, oh, why didn't you guys do this please let us know. Your help and your guidance and your insight really kind of helps to spread the word. Next slide.

And so this is what I want to show, the spheres of influence. Based on the outreach that we did you can see where most of our proposal set and they heard about the challenge. So about 50 percent heard it through Twitter and then friends and family and associations. Friends and family are so important various groups that you belong to are so important to spread the word. But I don't want to under emphasize. This is made up of a lot smaller. I want to point this out because I want everybody to realize how important their individual contributions are to help spread the word about GNOME, helping us spread the word about this and making a difference in sharing information. Can we go to the next slide?

So we have how we did the outreach. We have how people heard about it. And now I want to show you guys where these submissions came from. You can see that we have a heavy influence some in North America, some in South America. We are missing proposal from other parts of Asia and the other parts of the world. So this just demonstrates that there are areas that we do need to work on in terms of outreach and communication.

Now, I have to say that we had some really fantastic influencers in India, in Africa, and in the United States, in Mexico and South America. That's why we're seeing an increase in proposals from these areas. So I just wanted to kind of give you an idea of what the challenge is about, how we did our outreach and how important you are as an influencer because it affects where you are submissions came from. And if you go to the next slide I hope you all will join us on July 25th to find out who our phase one winners are. We'll invite them to the phase two challenge which ultimately I think it ends six to nine months. So join us on July 25th for the phase one winners and look for more news to come.

I should have put this in the slide, but we do have a challenge e-mail address. It's cechallenge@gnome.org. Thank you very much. Molly.

>> Thanks, Melissa. I'm really excited to hear of who is going to the next phase. So let's talk about the future. This is all a discussion, there are no promises about what's happening next. And I know we're running out of time. We're redefining strategy for COVID. More than likely will not be increasing very well very much over the next year. So we're looking at the types of things we can do by things that aren't happening now. More grants is a big part of that. One of the things I'm

working on right now is defining a grant strategy. A grant strategy is more like a scattered let's apply for grants as they come up. But it's thinking for holistically about the GNOME project and what parts of it need support whether that's material support like, oh, wow, we need to get grants for computers or things like wow, it's great to hire someone to build this particular things. So thinking about what direction the product is going in and what we would like to see happen.

We have GNOME stories. That's what I'm calling them right now. We're looking for building out more materials and conversations and anecdotes on thousand this is affecting your life. I know we've been talking with someone who is blind who says that the GNOME accessibility tool kit, not ATK but the accessibility tool has completely changed their life. So we would like to talk to you about how it has impacted you or has impacted the people you know. So you can reach out to me if you want to talk more about that.

And then we have some secret projects which I'm just not talking about right now. But if you want to message me we can talk about them. I assume people would like to be involved and help out, which is kind of one of the big things that I want to talk about, your idea here, right. So GNOME is people. We're a community of people and people make it all happen. So I want to hear your ideas for what kinds of things, what kinds of partnerships, what kinds of community building that you think we should be doing and how we can support you in making that happen as well as if you want to support us in a few things. I'm going to stop now and go to the next slide which is some time for questions and places to contact us.

I can see you're all clapping. Alex, are there questions?

>> Yes, it was a great presentation. Thank you, Molly. Thank you, Melissa. So first off people liked your sodium joke. So thank you for that. We have a question, in what ways can we cooperate for distributions for marketing and broadcasting? I ask because many users are using dollar sign but not a lot of shifts with GNOME code?

>> Yes. That's a great question and that's a great conversation to have with advisory board members. Something that I find very useful and raising awareness. One thing that I think is great is actually all the ones that have sponsored GUADEC and talk about those with their users and their communities. I think a lot of that is really marketing co support. Something to think about and I'd love to talk to you about this. What kind of work are you doing that we can be thinking about as we're building our brand strategies and funding strategies and what kind of ways with can integrate it to work together.

>> Okay. That is the only question we have on the chat. If anyone wants to ask a question on here I guess we have a minute for that.

>> I see in Rocket chat somebody asked if the projects are secret projects. No, they are not.

>> We enjoy that too. Thanks for sharing.

>> There is some concern that he might have jumped out of the window.

>> I see another question in Rocket chat. Can we know how many participants applied?

>> Well, we met our goals. We haven't been sharing the numbers but we did meet the goals that we set. So we're pretty excited about that.

>> I don't see any further questions in either channel, chat.

>> I mean that's time and I hope none of that was a surprise especially for Neil. I'm going to tell my whale joke real quick. So two whales are at a bar and one whale goes (descriptive noise). And the other whale goes you are so drunk.

>> That's a good joke.

>> Okay. Thanks everyone for indulging me.

>> Thank you for a great presentation. All right. That concludes the translation for Track two. We invite you to join us on track one for bringing your favorite GNOME desktop app back from the dead. And later on at 21:00 we have social events for which you can check the list of ingredients and then at 22:00 we have Molly again with her great jokes. Thank you all for joining us and see you again tomorrow.