

The logo for FOSS4G 2006 features a stylized red and white graphic on the left, resembling a ribbon or a stylized letter 'G'. To its right, the text 'FOSS4G2006 - Free And Open Source Software' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

FOSS4G2006 - Free And Open Source Software

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Early GRASS Community Views on FOSS

Friday 15 Sep 2006 at 13:00 (00h40')

How do the early GRASS developers feel about the decisions that resulted in the GRASS FOSS efforts of today?

The GRASS development community of the early 1980's created what was called public domain software based on the model of the Unix operating system. Unix was developed by the United States government telephone company for its own internal needs, but was not allowed, by law, to market the operating system. Unix was designed as a powerful open-ended environment and the telephone company decided to share the software with universities, which adopted and expanded Unix - to the benefit of the growing Unix user community. GRASS was originally developed at the small Construction Engineering Research Laboratory to support landscape and environmental planners at military installations. The effort was not centrally funded, nor was much funding available - resulting in an inability to purchase the best available GIS software of the day, and an inability to completely develop the desired capabilities in-house. We elected to develop a library of software subroutines (an API) and encourage others to use their funding to develop capabilities within GRASS. A software development "steering-committee" was formed and participants helped ensure that development efforts across laboratories, universities, and commercial groups in the United States were complementary. Eventually GRASS development was benefiting from many contributors within the community. The GRASS source code was posted on the Internet to complete the establishment of GRASS as Free and Open Source Software. Was it appropriate to release GRASS into the public domain? Should GRASS have been transitioned into a commercial product? Would it have been successful? Why didn't any of the early developers attempt to commercialize GRASS? These questions were posed to a cross-section of the early GRASS developers that includes programmers, collaborators, and managers. In this talk these people and their role in GRASS will be introduced, followed by their views on these questions.

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