Linux User Group HOWTO

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

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The Linux User Group HOWTO is a guide to founding, maintaining, and growing a Linux user group, co−authored by Kendall Clark and Rick Moen (now maintained by Rick Moen).

7. Legal and political issues

8. About this document

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Linux User Group HOWTO is intended to serve as a guide to founding, maintaining, and growing a Linux user group.

Linux is a freely−distributable implementation of Unix for personal computers, servers, workstations, PDAs, and embedded systems. It was developed on the i386 and now supports a huge range of processors from tiny to colossal:

- **Diverse PDA / embedded / microcontroller / router devices:**
  - Advanced RISC Machines, Ltd. ARM family (StrongARM SA−1110, XScale, ARM6, ARM7, ARM2, ARM250, ARM3i, ARM610, ARM710, ARM720T, and ARM920T)
  - Analog Devices, Inc.'s Blackfin DSP
  - Axis Communications ETRAX series ("CRIS" = Code Reduced Instruction Set RISC architecture)
  - Elan SC520 and SC300
  - Fujitsu FR−V
  - Hitachi H8 series
  - Intel i960
  - Intel IA32−compatibles (Cyrix MediaGX, STMicroelectronics STPC, ZF Micro ZFx86)
  - Matsushita AM3x
  - MIPS−compatibles (Toshiba TMPRxxxx / TXnnnn, NEC VR series, Realtek 8181)
  - Motorola 680x0−based machines (Motorola VMEbus boards, ISICAD Prisma machines, and Motorola Dragonball & ColdFire CPUs, and Cisco 2500/3000/4000 series routers)
  - Motorola embedded PowerPC (including MPC / PowerQUICC I, II, III families)
  - NEC V850E
  - Renesas Technology (formerly Hitachi) SH3/SH4 (SuperH: link1 link2)
  - Samsung CalmRISC
  - Texas Instruments's DM64x and C54x DSP families
- **Intel 8086 / 80286**.
- **Intel IA32 family:** i386, i486, Pentium, Pentium Pro, Pentium II, Pentium III, Celeron, Xeon, and

Pentium IV processors, as well as IA32 clones from AMD (386DX/DXL/SL/SLC/SX, 486DX/DX2/DX4/SL/SLC/SLC2/SLC3/SX/SX2, Elan, K5, K6/K6−II/K6−III), Cyrix (386DX/DXL/SL/SLC/SX, 486DLC/DLC2/DX/DX2/DX4/SL/SLC/SLC2/SLC3/SX/SX2, Cyrix III), IDT (Winchip, Winchip 2, Winchip 2A/3), IBM (486DX/DX2/DX4/SL/SLC/SLC2/SLC3/SX/SX2), NexGen (Nx586), Transmeta (Crusoe), TI (486DLC/DLC2), UMC (486SX−S, U5D/U5S), VIA (C3 Ezra "CentaurHauls", C3−2 "Nehemiah"), and others.
- **Intel/HP IA64:** Trillian, Itanium, Itanium2/McKinley
- **x86−64 x86−64 family** including AMD Hammer/Opteron/K8/Athlon64 and Intel Prescott/Nocona/Potomac
- **Motorola 68020−68040 series (with MMU)**: m68k Mac, Amiga, Atari ST/TT/Medusa/Falcon, HP/Apollo Domain, HP9000/300, sun3, and Sinclair Q40.
- **Motorola/IBM PowerPC family:** Most PowerMac (including G3/G4/G5) / CHRP / PReP / POP, Amiga PowerUP System, and IBM PPC64 (AS/400, RS/6000, iSeries, pSeries, PowerMac G5).
- **MIPS:** most SGI, Cobalt Qube, DECStation, Sony PlayStation2, and many others
- **DEC Alpha**
- **HP PA−RISC**
- **SPARC International SPARC32 / SPARC64**
- **Digital VAX minicomputers and MicroVAXen**
- **Mainframes:** IBM S/390 models G5 and G6 / zSeries models z800, z890, z900, and z990 and Fujitsu AP1000+ (SuperSPARC cluster)

Note that some items listed were probably one−time forks, little or not at all maintained since creation. On some of the rarer architectures, NetBSD may be more practical. (Soon, the Debian GNU/NetBSD port should be solid enough to serve as a compromise option, furnishing Linux userspace code on the highly portable NetBSD kernel.)

If seriously interested in the subject of Linux ports, please see also Xose Vazquez Perez's Linux ports page and Jerome Pinot's Linux architectures list, if only because hardware support is more complex than just generic CPU functionality, encompassing support for myriad bus variations and other subtle hardware issues (especially for Linux PDA / embedded / microcontroller / router ports). The above list aims mostly to generally illustrate the breadth of Linux's reach.

1.2 Other sources of information

If you want to learn more, the Linux Documentation Project is a good place to start.

For general information about computer user groups, please see the Association of PC Users Groups.

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2. What is a Linux user group?

2.1 What is Linux?

To fully appreciate LUGs' role in the Linux movement, it helps to understand what makes Linux unique.

Linux as an operating system is powerful −− but Linux as an ***idea*** about software development is even more so. Linux is a **free** operating system: It's licensed under the GNU General Public Licence. Thus, source code is freely available in perpetuity to anyone. It's maintained by a unstructured group of programmers world−wide, under technical direction from Linus Torvalds and other key developers. Linux as a movement has no central structure, bureaucracy, or other entity to direct its affairs. While this situation has advantages, it poses challenges for allocation of human resources, effective advocacy, public relations, user education, and training.

2.2 How is Linux unique?

Linux's loose structure is unlikely to change. That's a good thing: Linux works precisely because people are free to come and go as they please: **Free programmers are happy programmers are effective programmers**.

However, this loose structure can disorient the new Linux user: Whom does she call for support, training, or education? How does she know what Linux is suitable for?

In large part, LUGs provide the answers, which is why LUGs are vital to the Linux movement: Because your town, village, or metropolis sports no Linux Corporation "regional office", the LUG takes on many of the same roles a regional office does for a large multi−national corporation.

Linux is unique in neither having nor being burdened by central structures or bureaucracies to allocate its resources, train its users, and support its products. These jobs get done through diverse means: the Internet, consultants, VARs, support companies, colleges, and universities. However, increasingly, in many places around the globe, they are done by a LUG.

2.3 What is a user group?

Computer user groups are not new. In fact, they were central to the personal computer's history: Microcomputers arose in large part to satisfy demand for affordable, personal access to computing resources from electronics, ham radio, and other hobbyist user groups. Giants like IBM eventually discovered the PC to be a good and profitable thing, but initial impetus came from the grassroots.

In the USA, user groups have changed −− many for the worse −− with the times. The financial woes and dissolution of the largest user group ever, the Boston Computer Society, were well−reported; but, all over the USA, most PC user groups have seen memberships decline. American user groups in their heyday produced newsletters, maintained shareware and diskette libraries, held meetings and social events, and, sometimes, even ran electronic bulletin board systems (BBSes). With the advent of the Internet, however, many services that user groups once provided migrated to things like CompuServe and the Web.

Linux's rise, however, coincided with and was intensified by the general public "discovering" the Internet. As the Internet grew more popular, so did Linux: The Internet brought to Linux new users, developers, and vendors. So, the same force that sent traditional user groups into decline propelled Linux forward and inspired new groups concerned exclusively with it.

To give just one indication of how LUGs differ from traditional user groups: Traditional groups must closely monitor what software users redistribute at meetings. While illegal copying of restricted proprietary software certainly occurred, it was officially discouraged −− for good reason. At LUG meetings, however, that entire mindset simply does not apply: Far from being forbidden, unrestricted copying of Linux should be among a LUG's primary goals. In fact, there is anecdotal evidence of traditional user groups having difficulty adapting to Linux's ability to be lawfully copied at will.

(Caveat: A few Linux distributions bundle Linux with proprietary software packages whose terms don't permit public redistribution. Check licence terms, if in doubt. Offers or requests to copy distribution−restricted proprietary software of any sort should be heavily discouraged anywhere in LUGs, and declared off−topic for all Linux user group on−line forums, for legal reasons.)

2.4 Summary

For the Linux movement to grow, among other requirements, LUGs must proliferate and succeed. Because of Linux's unusual nature, LUGs must provide some of the same functions a "regional office" provides for large computer corporations like IBM, Microsoft, and Sun. LUGs can and must train, support, and educate Linux users, coordinate Linux consultants, advocate Linux as a computing solution, and even serve as liaison to local news outlets.

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3. What LUGs exist?

Since this document is meant as a guide not only to maintaining and growing LUGs but also to founding them, we should, before going further, discuss what LUGs already exist.

3.1 LUG lists

There are several LUG lists on the Web. If you are considering founding a LUG, your first task should be to find any nearby existing LUGs. *Your best bet may be to join a LUG already established in your area, rather than founding one.*

As of mid−2003, there are LUGs in all 50 US states plus the District of Columbia, nine of Canada's ten provinces, all six of Australia's states plus the Australian Capital Territory, in 76 locations in India, and over 100 other countries, including Russia, China, and most of Western and Eastern Europe.

- Groups of Linux Users Everywhere (GLUE)
- LUGs WorldWide Project
- Linux Online −− User Groups
- Red Hat User Group Program
- Open Directory: LUGS
- Yahoo Linux > User Groups
- LUG Webring
- CLUE: the Canadian Linux Users' Exchange
- UK Linux User Groups
- Linux Australia
- LUGs in India
- I Linux User Group italiani

It appears GLUE is more comprehensive for the USA, while the LUGs WorldWide Project offers better coverage elsewhere.

3.2 Solidarity versus convenience

While (most) LUG lists on the Web are well−maintained, likely they don't list every LUG. If considering founding a LUG, I suggest, in addition to consulting these lists, posting a message to comp.os.linux.announce, comp.os.linux.misc, or an appropriate regional Usenet hierarchy, inquiring about nearby LUGs. You should also lodge a query (mailing list post, comment during a meeting) at any existing LUG you are aware of anywhere near your area, about LUGs near you. If no such (nearby) LUG exists, your postings will alert potential members to your initiative.

Carefully balance convenience against solidarity: If a LUG exists in your metropolitan area but on the other side of the city, starting a new group may be better for convenience's sake. On the other hand, joining the other group may be better for reasons of unity and solidarity. ***Greater numbers almost always means greater power, influence, and efficiency***. While two groups of 100 members each might be nice, one with 200 has advantages. Of course, if you live in a small town or village, any group is better than none.

The point is that starting a LUG is a significant undertaking, which should be commenced with all relevant facts and some appreciation of the effect on other groups.

4. What does a LUG do?

LUGs' goals are as varied as their locales. There is no LUG master plan, nor will this document supply one. Remember: Linux is free from bureaucracy and centralised control; so are LUGs.

It is possible, however, to identify a core set of goals for a LUG:

- advocacy
- education
- support
- socialising

Each LUG combines these and other goals uniquely, according to its membership's needs.

4.1 Linux advocacy

The urge to advocate the use of Linux is widely felt. When you find something that works well, you want to tell as many people as you can. LUGs' role in Linux advocacy cannot be overestimated, especially since wide−scale commercial acceptance of Linux is only newly underway. While it is certainly beneficial to the Linux movement, each and every time a computer journalist writes a positive review of Linux, it is also beneficial every time satisfied Linux users brief their friends, colleagues, employees, or employers.

There is effective advocacy, and there is ineffective carping: As Linux users, we must be constantly vigilant to advocate Linux in such a way as to reflect positively on the product, its creators and developers, and our fellow users. The Linux Advocacy mini−HOWTO, available at the Linux Documentation Project, gives some helpful suggestions, as does Don Marti's excellent Linuxmanship essay. Suffice it to say that advocacy is important to a LUG's mission.

A time may come when Linux advocacy is irrelevant, because Linux has more or less won the day, when the phrase "no one ever got fired for using Linux" becomes reality. Until then, LUGs play a vital role in promoting Linux use. They do so because their advocacy is free, well−intentioned, and backed up by organisational commitment. If a person encounters Linux through a LUG's efforts, then that new user's already ahead of the game: *She knows of an organisation that will help her install, configure, and even maintain Linux on whatever computers she's willing to dedicate to it.*

New Linux users already in contact with a LUG are ahead of others whose interest in Linux has been piqued by a computer journalist, but who have no one to whom to turn for aid in their quest to install, run, and learn Linux.

It is, therefore, important for LUGs to advocate Linux, because their advocacy is effective, well−supported, and free.

4.2 The limits of advocacy

Advocacy can be mis−aimed; advocacy can go wrong and be counterproductive; advocacy can be simply inappropriate in the first place. The matter merits careful thought, to avoid wasted time or worse.

Many attempts at advocacy fail ignominiously because the advocate fails to listen to what the other party feels she wants or needs. (As Eric S. Raymond says, "Appeal to the prospect's interests and values, not to yours.") If that person wants exactly the proprietary−OS setup she already has, then advocating Linux wastes your time and hers. If her stated requirements equate exactly to MS−Project, MS−Visio, and Outlook/Exchange groupware, then trying to "sell" her what she doesn't want will only annoy everyone (regardless of whether her requirements list is real or artificial). Save your effort for someone more receptive.

Along those lines, bear in mind that, for many people, perhaps most, an "advocate" is perceived as a salesman, and thus classified as someone to resist rather than listen to fairly. They've never heard of someone urging them to adopt a piece of software without benefiting materially, so they assume there must be something in it for you and will push back, and act as if they're doing you a personal favour to even listen, let alone try your recommendations.

I recommend bringing such discussions back to Earth immediately, by pointing out that software policy should be based in one's own long−term self interest, that you have zero personal stake in their choices, and that you have better uses for your time than speaking to an unreceptive audience. After that, if they're still interested, at least you won't face the same artificial obstacle.

At the same time, make sure you don't live up to the stereotype of the OS advocate, either. Just proclaiming your views at someone without invitation is downright rude and offensive. Moreover, when done concerning Linux, it's also pointless: Unlike the case with proprietary OSes, Linux will not live or die by the level of its acceptance and release/maintenance of ported applications. It and all key applications are open source: the programmer community that maintains it is self−supporting, and would keep it advancing and and healthy regardless of whether the business world and general public uses it with wild abandon, only a little, or not at all. Because of its open−source licence terms, source code is permanently available. Linux cannot be "withdrawn from the market" on account of insufficient popularity, or at the whim of some company. Accordingly, there is simply no point in arm−twisting OS advocacy −− unlike that of some OS−user communities we could mention. (Why not just make information available for those receptive to it, and stop there? That meets any reasonable person's needs.)

Last, understand that the notion of "use value" for software is quite foreign to most people −− the notion of measuring software's value by what you can do with it. The habit of valuing everything at *acquisition cost* is deeply ingrained. In 1996, I heard a young fellow from Caldera Systems speak at a Berkeley, California LUG about the origins of Caldera Network Desktop (the initial name of their Linux distribution) in Novell, Inc.'s "Corsair" desktop−OS project: In surveying corporate CEOs and CTOs, they found corporate officers to be inherently unhappy with anything they could get for free. So, Caldera offered them a solution −− by charging money.

Seen from this perspective, being conservative about the costs and difficulties of Linux deployments helps make them positively attractive −− and protects your credibility as a spokesman. Even better would be to frame the discussion of costs in terms of the cost of functionality (e.g., 1000−seat Internet−capable company e−mail with offline−user capability and webmail) as opposed to listing software as a retail−style line−item with pricing: After all, any software project has costs, even if the acquisition price tag is zero, and the real point of open source isn't initial cost but rather long−term control over IT −− a key part of one's operations: With proprietary systems, the user (or business) has lost control of IT, and is on the wrong side of a monopoly relationship with one's vendor. With open source, the user is in control, and nobody can take that away. Explained that way (as opportunity to reduce and control IT risk), people readily understand the difference −− especially CEOs −− and it's much more significant over the long term than acquisition cost.

4.3 Linux education

Not only is it the business of a LUG to advocate Linux usage, but also to train members, as well as the nearby computing public, to use Linux and associated components −− a goal that can make a huge real−world difference in one's local area. While universities and colleges are increasingly including Linux in their curricula, for sundry reasons, this won't reach some Linux users. For those, a LUG can give basic or advanced help in system administration, programming, Internet and intranet technologies, etc.

In an ironic twist, many LUGs have turned out to be a backbone of corporate support: Every worker expanding her computer skills through LUG participation is one fewer the company must train. Though home Linux administration doesn't exactly scale to running corporate data warehouses, call centres, or similar high−availability facilities, it's light years better preparation than MS−Windows experience. As Linux has advanced into journaling filesystems, high availability, real−time extensions, and other high−end Unix features, the already blurry line between Linux and "real" Unixes has been increasingly vanishing.

Not only is such education a form of worker training, but it will also serve, as information technology becomes increasingly vital to the global economy, as community service: In the USA's metropolitan areas, for example, LUGs have taken Linux into local schools, small businesses, community and social organisations, and other non−corporate environments. This accomplishes the goal of Linux advocacy and also educates the general public. As more such organisations seek Internet presence, provide their personnel dial−in access, or other Linux−relevant functions, LUGs gain opportunities for community participation, through awareness and education efforts −− extending to the community the same generous spirit characteristic of Linux and the free software / open source community from its very beginning. Most Linux users can't program like Torvalds, but we can all give time and effort to other Linux users, the Linux community, and the broader surrounding community.

Linux is a natural fit for these organisations, because deployments don't commit them to expensive licence, upgrade, or maintenance fees. Being technically elegant and economical, it also runs very well on cast−off corporate hardware that non−profit organisations are only too happy to use: The unused Pentium 133 in the closet can do **real work**, if someone installs Linux on it.

In addition, Linux education assists other LUG goals over time, in particular that of Linux support: Better education means better support, which in turn facilitates education, and eases the Linux community's growth. Thus, education forms the entire effort's keystone: If only two or three percent of a LUG assume the remainder's support burden, that LUG's growth will be stifled. One thing you can count on: ***If new and inexperienced users don't get needed help from their LUG, they won't participate there for long***. If a larger percentage of members support the rest, the LUG will not face that limitation. Linux education −− and, equally, support for allied projects such as the Apache Web server, XFree86, TeX, LaTeX, etc. −− is key to this dynamic: Education turns new Linux users into experienced ones.

Finally, Linux is a self−documenting operating environment: In other words, writing and publicising our community's documentation is up to us. Therefore, make sure LUG members know of the Linux Documentation Project and its worldwide mirrors. Consider operating an LDP mirror site. Also, make sure to publicise –– through `comp.os.linux.announce`, the LDP, and other pertinent sources of Linux information –– any relevant documentation the LUG develops: technical presentations, tutorials, local FAQs, etc. LUGs' documentation often fails to benefit the worldwide Linux community for no better reason than not notifying the outside world. Don't let that happen: It is highly probable that if someone at one LUG had a question or problem with something, then others elsewhere will have it, too.

4.4 Linux support

Of course, for the **newcomer**, the primary role of a LUG is Linux support –– but it is a mistake to suppose that Linux support means only *technical* support for new Linux users. It should mean much more.

LUGs have the opportunity to support:

- users
- consultants
- businesses, non–profit organisations, and schools
- the Linux movement

Users

New Linux users' most frequent complaint, once they have Linux installed, is the steep learning curve characteristic of all modern Unixes. With that learning curve, however, comes the power and flexibility of a real operating system. A LUG is often the a new user's main resource to flatten the learning curve.

During Linux's first decade, it gained some first–class journalistic resources, which should not be neglected: The main monthly magazines of longest standing are Linux Journal and Linux Gazette (on–line; note new site). More recently, they've been joined by LinuxFocus (on–line), Linux Format, LinuxUser and Developer, Linux Magazine, Linux For You, and LinuxWorld Magazine.

Standout on–line magazines with weekly or better publication cycles include Linux Weekly News, Linux Today, FreshNews, and Newsforge.

All of these resources have eased LUGs' job of spreading essential news and information –– about bug fixes, security problems, patches, new kernels, etc., but new users must still be made aware of them, and taught that the newest kernels are always available from ftp.kernel.org, that the Linux Documentation Project has newer versions of Linux HOWTOs than do CD–based Linux distributions, and so on.

Intermediate and advanced users also benefit from proliferation of timely and useful tips, facts, and secrets. Because of the Linux world's manifold aspects, even advanced users often learn new tricks or techniques simply by participating in a LUG. Sometimes, they learn of software packages they didn't know existed; sometimes, they just remember arcane `vi` command sequences they've not used since college.

Consultants

LUGs can help Linux consultants find their customers and vice–versa, by providing a forum where they can come together. Consultants also aid LUGs by providing experienced leadership. New and inexperienced users gain benefit from both LUGs and consultants, since their routine or simple requests for support are handled by LUGs *gratis*, while their complex needs and problems –– the kind requiring paid services –– can be fielded by consultants found through the LUG.

The line between support requests needing a consultant and those that don't is sometimes indistinct; but, in most cases, the difference is clear. While a LUG doesn't want to gain the reputation for pawning new users off unnecessarily on consultants −− as this is simply rude and very anti−Linux behaviour −− there is no reason for LUGs not to help broker contacts between users needing consulting services and professionals offering them.

Caveat: While "the difference is clear" to intelligent people of goodwill, the Inevitable Ones are *also* always with us, who act willfully dense about the limits of free support when they have pushed those limits too far. Remember, too, my earlier point about the vast majority of the population valuing everything at acquisition cost (instead of use value), *including what they receive for free*. This leads some, especially some in the corporate world, to use (and abuse) LUG technical support with wild abandon, while simultaneously complaining bitterly of its inadequate detail, insufficient promptness, supposedly unfair expectations that the user learn and not re−ask minor variations on the same question endlessly, etc. In other words, they treat relations with LUG volunteers the way they would a paid support vendor, but one they treat with *zero respect* because of its zero acquisition cost.

In the consulting world, there's a saying about applying "invoice therapy" to such behaviour: Because of the value system alluded to above, if your consulting advice is poorly heeded and poorly used, it just might be the case that you need to charge more. By contrast, the technical Linux community has often been characterised as a "gift culture", with a radically different value system: Members gain status through enhanced reputation among peers, which in turn they improve through visible participation: code, documentation, technical assistance to the public, etc.

Clash between the two very different value−based cultures is inevitable and can become a bit ugly. LUG activists should be prepared to intercede before the ingrate newcomer is handed her head on a platter, and politely suggest that her needs would be better served by paid (consultant−based) services. There will always be judgement calls; the borderline is inherently debatable and a likely source of controversy.

Telltale signs that a questioner may need to be transitioned to consulting−based assistance include:

- An insistence on getting solutions in "recipe" (rote) form, with the apparent aim of not needing to learn technological fundamentals.
- Asking the same questions (or ones closely related) repeatedly.
- Insisting on *private* assistance from helpers active in *public* (Linux community) forums.
- Vague problem descriptions, or ones that change with time.
- Interrupting answers in order to ask additional questions (suggesting lack of attention to the answers).
- Demands that answers be recast or delivered more quickly (suggesting that the questioner's time and trouble are valuable, but that helpers' are not).
- Asking unusually complex, time−consuming, and/or multipart questions.

In general, LUG members are especially delighted to help, on a volunteer basis, members who seem likely to participate in the Linux "gift culture" by picking up its body of lore and, in turn, perpetuating it by teaching others in their turn. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with having other priorities and values, but such folk may in some cases be best referred to paid assistance, as a better fit for their needs.

An additional observation that may or may not be useful, at this point: There are things one may be willing to do for free, to assist others in the Linux community, that one will refuse to do for money: Shifting from assisting someone as a volunteer fundamentally changes the relationship. A fellow computerist who suddenly becomes a customer is a very different person; one's responsibilities are quite different, and greater. You're advised to be aware, if not wary, of this distinction.

Please see Joshua Drake's Linux Consultants Guide for an international list of Linux consultants.

Businesses, non−profit organisations, and schools

LUGs also have the opportunity to support local businesses and organisations. This support has two aspects: First, LUGs can support businesses and organisations wanting to use Linux (and Linux−based applications) as a part of their computing and IT efforts. Second, LUGs can support local businesses and organisations developing software for Linux, cater to Linux users, support or install Linux, etc.

The support LUGs can provide to local businesses wanting to use Linux as a part of their computing operations differs little from the help LUGs give individuals trying Linux at home. For example, compiling the Linux kernel doesn't really differ. Supporting businesses, however, may require supporting proprietary Linux software −− e.g., the Oracle, Sybase, and DB2 databases (or VMware, Win4Lin, and such things). Some LUG expertise in these areas may help businesses make the leap into Linux deployments.

This leads us directly to the second kind of support a LUG can give to local businesses: LUGs can serve as a clearinghouse for information available in few other places. For example:

- Which local ISP is Linux−friendly?
- Are there any local hardware vendors building Linux PCs?
- Does anyone sell Linux CDs locally?

Maintaining and making this kind of information public not only helps the LUG members, but also helps Linux−friendly businesses and encourages them to continue to be Linux−friendly. It may even, in some cases, help further a competitive environment in which other businesses are encouraged to follow suit.

Free / open−source software development

Finally, LUGs may also support the Linux movement by soliciting and organising charitable giving. Chris Browne has thought about this issue as much as anyone I know, and he contributes the following:

Chris Browne on free software / open source philanthropy

A further involvement can be to encourage sponsorship of various Linux−related organisations in a financial way. With the multiple millions of Linux users, it would be entirely plausible for grateful users to individually contribute a little. Given millions of users, and the not−unreasonable sum of a hundred dollars of "gratitude" per Linux user ($100 being roughly the sum *not* spent this year upgrading a Microsoft OS), that could add up to *hundreds of millions* of dollars towards development of improved Linux tools and applications.

A user group can encourage members to contribute to various "development projects". Having some form of "charitable tax exemption" status can encourage members to contribute directly to the group, getting tax deductions as appropriate, with contributions flowing on to other organisations.

It is appropriate, in any case, to encourage LUG members to direct contributions to organisations with projects and goals they individually wish to support.

This section lists possible candidates. None are explicitly being recommended here, but the list represents useful food for thought. Many are registered as charities in the USA, thus making US contributions tax−deductible.

Here are organisations with activities particularly directed towards development of software working with Linux:

- Linux International Development Grant Fund Donations
- Debian/Software In the Public Interest
- Free Software Foundation
- KDE Project
- GNOME Foundation

Contributions to these organisations have the direct effect of supporting creation of freely redistributable software usable with Linux. Dollar for dollar, such contributions almost certainly yield greater benefit to the Linux community than any other kind of spending.

There are also organisations less directly associated with Linux, that may nonetheless be worthy of assistance, such as:

- The Electronic Frontier Foundation

  Based in San Francisco, EFF is a donor−supported membership organization working to protect our fundamental rights regardless of technology; to educate the press, policy−makers, and the general public about civil liberties issues related to technology; and to act as a defender of those liberties. Among our various activities, EFF opposes misguided legislation, initiates and defends court cases preserving individuals' rights, launches global public campaigns, introduces leading edge proposals and papers, hosts frequent educational events, engages the press regularly, and publishes a comprehensive archive of digital civil liberties information at one of the most linked−to Web sites in the world.
- The LaTeX3 Project Fund

  The TeX Users Group (TUG) is working on the "next generation" version of the LaTeX publishing system, known as LaTeX3. Linux is one of the platforms on which TeX and LaTeX are best supported.

  Donations for the project can be sent to:

  ```
  TeX Users Group
  c/o Robin Laakso, executive director
  TeX Users Group
  PO Box 2311
  Portland, OR 97208-2311
  ```

  or, for those in Europe,

  ```
  UK TUG
  c/o Dr RWD Nickalls (Chairman, UK-TuG)
  Department of Anæsthesia,
  Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust,
  Hucknall Road,
  Nottingham, NG5 1PB, UK
  ```
- Project Gutenberg

  Project Gutenberg's purpose is to make freely available in electronic form the texts of public−domain books. This isn't directly a "Linux thing", but seems fairly worthy, and they actively encourage platform independence, which means their "products" are quite usable with Linux.
- Open Source Education Foundation

The Open Source Education Foundation's purpose to enhance K−12 education through the use of technologies and concepts derived from The Open Source and Free Software movement. In conjunction with Tux4Kids, OSEF created a bootable distribution of GNU/Linux (Knoppix for Kids) based on Klaus Knopper's Knoppix, aimed at kids, parents, teachers, and other school officials. OSEF installs and supports school computer labs, and has developed a "K12 Box" as a compact Plug and Play workstation computer for student computer labs.

- PingoS e.V.

  "PingoS e.V." is a registered non−profit entity with the goal of promoting the use of Linux in schools. Any German school can use it for free support concerning Linux, and PingoS staff give presentations about Linux in schools. Also, PingoS e.V. is the legal head of SelfLinux, a project aiming to create a comprehensive and free set of German−language documentation about Linux and free / open−source software.
- Open Source Applications Foundation

  OSAF is Mitch Kapor's non−profit foundation to create and popularise open−source application software of uncompromising quality, starting with its pioneering personal information manager, Chandler.

(Please note that suggested additions to the above list of Linux−relevant charities are most welcome.)

Linux movement

I have referred throughout this HOWTO to what I call the **Linux movement**. There really is no better way to describe the international Linux phenomenon: It isn't a bureaucracy, but is organised. It isn't a corporation, but is important to businesses everywhere. The best way for a LUG to support the international Linux movement is to keep the local Linux community robust, vibrant, and growing. Linux is *developed* internationally, which is easy enough to see by reading the kernel source code's MAINTAINERS file −− but Linux is also *used* internationally. This ever−expanding user base is key to Linux's continued success, and is where the LUGs are vital.

The Linux movement's strength internationally lies in offering unprecedented computing power and sophistication for its cost and freedom. The keys are value and independence from proprietary control. Every time a new person, group, business, or organisation experiences Linux's inherent value, the Linux movement grows. LUGs help that happen.

4.5 Linux socialising

The last goal of a LUG we'll cover is socialising −− in some ways, the most difficult goal to discuss, because it isn't clear how many or to what degree LUGs do it. While it would be strange to have a LUG that didn't engage in the other goals, there may be LUGs for which socialising isn't a factor.

It seems, however, that whenever two or three Linux users get together, fun, hijinks, and, often, beer follow. Linus Tovalds has always had one enduring goal for Linux: to have more fun. For hackers, kernel developers, and Linux users, there's nothing quite like downloading a new kernel, recompiling an old one, fooling with a window manager, or hacking some code. Linux's sheer fun keeps many LUGs together, and leads LUGs naturally to socialising.

By "socialising", here I mean primarily sharing experiences, forming friendships, and mutually−shared admiration and respect. There is another meaning, however −− one social scientists call *acculturation*. In any movement, institution, or human community, there is the need for some process or pattern of events in and by which, to put it in Linux terms, newcomers are turned into hackers. In other words, acculturation turns you from "one of them" to "one of us".

It is important that new Linux users come to learn what Linux culture, concepts, traditions, and vocabulary. Linux acculturation, unlike "real world" acculturation, can occur on mailing lists and Usenet, although the latter's efficacy is challenged by poorly acculturated users and by spam. LUGs are often much more efficient at this task than are mailing lists or newsgroups, precisely because of the former's greater interactivity and personal focus.

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5. LUG activities

In the previous section I focused exclusively on what LUGs do and should do. This section's focus shifts to practical strategies.

There are, despite permutations of form, two basic things LUGs do: First, members meet in physical space; second, they communicate in cyberspace. Nearly everything LUGs do can be seen in terms of meetings and online resources.

5.1 Meetings

As I said above, physical meetings are synonymous with LUGs (and most user groups). LUGs have these kinds of meetings:

- social
- technical presentations
- informal discussion groups
- user group business
- Linux installation
- configuration and bug−squashing

What do LUGs do at these meetings?

- Install Linux for newcomers and strangers.
- Teach members about Linux.
- Compare Linux to other operating systems.
- Teach members about software running on Linux.
- Discuss Linux advocacy.
- Discuss the free software / open−source movement.
- Discuss user group business.
- Eat, drink, and be merry.

5.2 Online resources

The commercial rise of the Internet coincided roughly with that of Linux; the latter owes something to the former. The 'Net has always been important to Linux development. LUGs are no different: Most have Web pages, if not whole Web sites. In fact, I'm not sure how else to find a LUG, but to check the Web.

It makes sense, then, for a LUG to make use of whatever Internet technologies they can: Web sites, mailing lists, wikis, ftp, e−mail, Web discussion forums, netnews, etc. As the world of commerce is discovering, the 'Net is an effective way to advertise, inform, educate, and even sell. The other reason LUGs make extensive use of Internet technology is that the very essence of Linux is to *provide* a stable and rich platform to deploy these technologies. So, not only do LUGs benefit from, say, establishment of a Web site, because it advertises their existence and helps organise members, but, in deploying these technologies, LUG members learn about them and see Linux at work.

Arguably, a well−maintained Web site is the one must−have, among those Internet resources. My essay Recipe for a Successful Linux User Group, for that reason, spends considerable time discussing Web issues. Quoting it (in outline form):

- You need a Web page.
- Your Web page needs a reasonable URL.
- You need a regular meeting location.
- You need a regular meeting time.
- You need to avoid meeting−time conflicts.
- You need to make sure that meetings happen as advertised, without fail.
- You need a core of several Linux enthusiasts.
- Your core volunteers need out−of−band methods of communication.
- You need to get on the main lists of LUGs, and keep your entries accurate.
- You must have login access to maintain your Web pages, as needed.
- Design your Web page to be forgiving of deferred maintenance.
- Always include the day of the week, when you cite event dates. Always check that day of the week, first, using gcal.
- Place time−sensitive and key information prominently near the top of your main Web page.
- Include maps and directions to your events.
- Emphasise on your main page that your meeting will be free of charge and open to the public (if it is).
- You'll want to include an RSVP "mailto" hyperlink, on some events.
- Use referral pages.
- Make sure every page has a revision date and maintainer link.
- Check all links, at intervals.
- You may want to consider establishing a LUG mailing list.
- You don't need to be in the Internet Service Provider business.
- Don't go into any other business, either.
- Walk the walk. (Do the LUG's computing on Linux.)

That essay partly supplements (and partly overlaps) this HOWTO.

Some LUGs using the Internet effectively:

- Atlanta Linux Enthusiasts
- BLUG − BHZ Linux Users Group (Brazil)
- Boston Linux and Unix
- Colorado Linux Users and Enthusiasts
- Düsseldorfer Linux Users Group
- Essex Linux User Group
- Israeli Group of Linux Users
- Korean Linux Users Group
- Linux México
- Linux User Group Austria

- Linux User Group of Rochester
- Linux User Group of Singapore
- Nederlandse Linux Gebruikers Groep (Netherlands Linux Users Group or NLLGG)
- North Texas Linux Users Group
- Ottawa Carleton Linux Users Group
- Provence Linux Users Group
- St. Petersburg Linux User Group
- Tokyo Linux Users Group
- Turkish Linux User Group
- Victoria Linux User Group
- Volgograd Linux User Group

Please let me know if your LUG uses the Internet in an important or interesting way; I'd like this list to include your group.

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6. Practical suggestions

Finally, I want to make some very practical, even mundane, suggestions for anyone wanting to found, maintain, or grow a LUG.

6.1 LUG support organisations

There are several organisations offering assistance to LUGs.

GLUE:
: Groups of Linux Users Everywhere is a user group coordination and support program started by SSC, the same people who publish *Linux Journal*. The GLUE program offers substantial benefits to your LUG membership, and can be joined free of charge at http://www.ssc.com:8080/glue/free_listing.

Cleveland Linux User's Group:
: Own the Internet domain `lug.net`. They will provide your LUG an Internet domain name at `lug.net`: your–LUG–name–or–city.`lug.net`. More information may be found by e–mailing Jeff Garvas.

Red Hat, Inc.'s User Group Program:
: Assists LUGs to develop and grow. More information may be found at Red Hat Web site.

LinuxUserGroups.org:
: A vendor–independent volunteer project to provide LUGs all over the world with the resources they need to run, form, and work with other Linux user groups. There is a discussion mailing list for LUG volunteers, and other resources. More information can be found at the http://LinuxUserGroups.org/ Web site, or by e–mailing founder Kara Pritchard.

Tux.Org:
: Tux.Org is an umbrella organisation for LUGs and open–source software development projects, providing a corporate entity, Web hosting, mailing lists, mirrors of popular software, and expertise and funding in planning special LUG events. More information can be found at the http://www.tux.org/ Web site.

6.2 Founding a LUG

- Determine the nearest existing LUG.

- Announce your intentions on `comp.os.linux.announce` and on an appropriate regional hierarchy.
- Announce your intention wherever computer users are in your area: bookstores, swap meets, cybercafes, colleges corporations, Internet service providers, etc.
- Find Linux−friendly businesses or institutions in your area willing to help you form the LUG.
- Form a mailing list or some means of communication among the people who express an interest in forming a LUG.
- Ask key people specifically for help in spreading the word about your intention to form a LUG.
- Solicit space on a Web server to put a few HTML pages together about the group.
- Begin looking for a meeting place.
- Schedule an initial meeting.
- Discuss at the initial meeting the goals for the LUG.

6.3 Maintaining and growing a LUG

- Make the barriers to LUG membership as low as possible.
- Make the LUG's Web site a priority: Keep all information current, make it easy to find details about meetings (who, what, and where), and make contact information and feedback mechanisms prominent.
- Install Linux for anyone who wants it.
- Post flyers, messages, or handbills wherever computer users are in your area.
- Secure dedicated leadership.
- Follow Linus Torvalds's *benevolent dictator* model of leadership.
- Take the big decisions to the members for a vote.
- Start a mailing list devoted to technical support and ask the "gurus" to participate on it.
- Schedule a mixture of advanced and basic, formal and informal, presentations.
- Support the software development efforts of your members.
- Find way to raise money without dues: for instance, selling Linux merchandise to your members and to others.
- Consider securing formal legal standing for the group, such as incorporation or tax−exempt status.
- Find out if your meeting place is restricting growth of the LUG.
- Meet in conjunction with swap meets, computer shows, or other community events where computer users −− i.e., potential Linux converts −− are likely to gather.
- Elect formal leadership for the LUG as soon as is practical: Some helpful officers might include President, Treasurer, Secretary, Meeting Host (general announcements, speaker introductions, opening and closing remarks, etc.), Publicity Coordinator (handles Usenet and e−mail postings, local publicity), and Program Coordinator (organises and schedules speakers at LUG meetings).
- Provide ways for members and others to give feedback about the direction, goals, and strategies of the LUG.
- Support Linux and free software / open source development efforts by donating Web space, a mailing list, or ftp site.
- Establish an ftp/Web site for relevant software.
- Archive everything the LUG does for the Web site.
- Solicit "door prizes" from Linux vendors, VARs, etc. to give away at meetings.
- Give credit where due.
- Join SSC's GLUE (Groups of Linux Users Everywhere).
- Submit your LUG's information to all the LUG lists.
- Publicise your meetings on appropriate Usenet groups and in local computer publications and newspapers.

- Compose promotional materials, like Postscript files, for instance, members can use to help publicise the LUG at workplaces, bookstores, computer stores, etc.
- Make sure you know what LUG members want the LUG to do.
- Release press releases to local media outlets about any unusual LUG events like an Installation Fest, Net Day, etc.
- Use LUG resources and members to help local non−profit organisations and schools with their Information Technology needs.
- Advocate the use of Linux zealously but responsibly.
- Play to LUG members' strengths.
- Maintain good relations with Linux vendors, VARs, developers, etc.
- Identify and contact Linux consultants in your area.
- Network with the leaders of other LUGs in your area, state, region, or country to share experiences, tricks, and resources.
- Keep LUG members advised on the state of Linux software −− new kernels, bugs, fixes, patches, security advisories −− and the state of the Linux world at large −− new ports, trademark and licensing issues, where Torvalds is living and working, etc.
- Notify the Linux Documentation Project −− and other pertinent sources of Linux information −− about the documentation the LUG produces: technical presentations, tutorials, local HOWTOs, etc.

7. Legal and political issues

7.1 Organisational legal issues

The case for formal LUG organisation can be debated:

Pro: Incorporation and recognised tax−exemption limits liability and helps the group carry insurance. It aids fundraising. It avoids claims for tax on group income.

Con: Liability shouldn't be a problem for modestly careful people. (You're not doing skydiving, after all.) Fundraising isn't needed for a group whose activities needn't involve significant expenses. (Dead−tree newsletters are so 1980.) Not needing a treasury, you avoid needing to argue over it, file reports about it, or fear it being taxed away. Meeting space can usually be gotten for free at ISPs, colleges, pizza parlours, brewpubs, coffeehouses, computer−training firms, Linux−oriented companies, or other friendly institutions, and can therefore be free of charge to the public. No revenues and no expenses means less need for organisation and concomitant hassles.

For whatever it's worth, this HOWTO's originator and second maintainer lean, respectively, towards the pro and con sides of the debate −− but choose your own poison: If interested in formally organising your LUG, this section will introduce you to some relevant issues.

Note: this section should not be construed as competent legal counsel. These issues require the expertise of competent legal counsel; you should, before acting on any of the statements made in this section, consult an attorney.

United States of America

There are at least two different legal statuses a LUG in the USA may attain:

1. incorporation as a non−profit entity

2. tax−exemption

Although relevant statutes differ among states, most states allow user groups to incorporate as non−profit entities. Benefits of incorporation for a LUG include limitations of liability of LUG members and volunteers, as well as limitation or even exemption from state corporate franchise taxes.

While you should consult competent legal counsel before incorporating your LUG as a non−profit, you can probably reduce your legal fees by being acquainted with relevant issues before consulting with an attorney. I recommend the *Non−Lawyers' Non−Profit Corporation Kit* (ISBN 0−937434−35−3).

As for the second status, tax−exemption, this is not a legal status, so much as an Internal Revenue Service judgement. It's important to realise non−profit incorporation **does not** ensure that IRS will rule your LUG tax−exempt. It is quite possible for a non−profit corporation to **not** be tax−exempt.

IRS has a relatively simple document explaining the criteria and process for tax−exemption. It is **Publication 557:** *Tax−Exempt Status for Your Organization*, available as an Acrobat file from the IRS's Web site. I strongly recommend you read this document **before** filing for non−profit incorporation. While becoming a non−profit corporation cannot ensure your LUG will be declared tax−exempt, some incorporation methods will **prevent** IRS from declaring your LUG tax−exempt. *Tax−Exempt Status for Your Organization* clearly sets out necessary conditions for your LUG to be declared tax−exempt.

Finally, there are resources available on the Internet for non−profit and tax−exempt organisations. Some of the material is probably relevant to your LUG.

Canada

Thanks to Chris Browne for the following comments about the Canadian situation.

The Canadian tax environment strongly parallels the US environment, in that the "charitable organisation" status confers similar tax advantages for donors over mere "not for profit" status, while requiring that similar sorts of added paperwork be filed by the "charity" with the tax authorities in order to attain and maintain certified charity status.

Germany

Correspondent Thomas Kappler warns that the process of founding a non−profit entity in Germany is a bit complicated, but comprehensively covered at http://www.wegweiser−buergergesellschaft.de/praxishilfen/arbeit_im_verein/vereinsrecht/vereinsgruendung_1.php.

7.2 Other legal issues

Bootlegging

As a reminder, it's vital that offers or requests to copy distribution−restricted proprietary software of any sort be heavily discouraged anywhere in LUGs, and banned as off−topic from all Linux user group on−line forums. This is not generally even an issue −− much less so than among proprietary−OS users −− but (e.g.) one LUG of my acquaintance briefly used a single LUG−owned copy of PowerQuest's Partition Magic on all NTFS−formatted machines brought to its installfests for dual−boot Linux installation, on a very dubious theory of legality.

If it smells unlawful, it almost certainly is. Beware.

Antitrust

It's healthy to discuss the Linux consulting business in general in user group forums, but for antitrust legal reasons it's a bad idea to get into "How much do you charge to do [foo]" discussions, there.

7.3 Software politics

Chris Browne has the following to say about the kinds of intra−LUG political dynamics that often crop up (lightly edited and expanded by the HOWTO maintainer):

People have different feelings about free / open−source software

Linux users are a diverse bunch. As soon as you try to put a lot of them together, *some* problem issues can arise. Some, who are nearly political radicals, believe all software, always, should be "free". Because Caldera charges quite a lot of money for its distribution, and doesn't give all profits over to *(pick favorite advocacy organisation)*, it must be "evil". Ditto Red Hat or SuSE. Keep in mind that all three of these companies have made and continue to make significant contributions to free / open−source software.

(HOWTO maintainer's note: The above was a 1998 note, from before Caldera exited the Linux business, renamed itself to The SCO Group, Inc., and launched a major copyright / contract / patent / trade−secret lawsuit and PR campaign against Linux users. My, those times do change. Still, we're grateful to the Caldera Systems that *was* , for its gracious donation of hardware to help Alan Cox develop SMP kernel support, for funding the development of RPM, and for its extensive past kernel source contributions and work to combine the Linux and historical Unix codebases.)

Others may figure they can find some way to highly exploit the "freeness" of the Linux platform for fun and profit. Be aware that many users of the BSD Unix variants consider *their* licences that *do* permit companies to build "privatised" custom versions of their kernels and C libraries preferable to the "enforced permanent freeness" of the GPL as applied to the Linux kernel and GNU libc. Do not presume that all people promoting this sort of view are necessarily greedy leeches.

If/when these people gather, disagreements can occur.

Leaders should be clear on the following facts:

- There are a lot of opinions about the GPL and other open−source licences and how they work −− mostly misinformed. It is easy to misunderstand both the GPL and alternative licensing schemes. Most attempts at debating same are, at root, pointless, ritualised symbolic warfare among people who should know better. In the rare event that participants actually aspire to understand the subject, please direct them to the OSI's "license−discuss" mailing list and the Debian Project's "debian−legal" mailing list, where substantive analysis is possible and encouraged.
- Linux benefits from contributions from many places, including proprietary−software vendors, e.g., in the Linux kernel, XFree86, and gcc.
- Proprietary implies neither better nor horrible.

The main principle can be extended well beyond this; computer "holy wars" have long been waged over endless battlegrounds, including Linux vs. other Unix variants vs. Microsoft OSes, the "IBM PC" vs. sundry Motorola 68000−based systems, the 1970s' varied 8−bit systems against each other, KDE versus GNOME....

A wise LUG leader will seek to move past such differences, if only because they're tedious. LUG leaders ideally therefore will have thick skins.

Non−profit organisations and money don't mix terribly well.

It is important to be careful with finances in any sort of non−profit. In businesses, which focus on substantive profit, people are not typically too worried about minor details such as alleged misspending of *immaterial* sums. The same cannot be said of non−profit organisations. Some people are involved for reasons of principle, and devote inordinate attention to otherwise minor issues, an example of C. Northcote Parkinson's Bike Shed Effect. LUG business meetings' potential for wide participation correspondingly expands the potential for exactly such inordinate attention.

As a result, it is probably preferable for there to *not* be any LUG membership fee, as that provides a specific thing for which people can reasonably demand accountability. Fees not collected can't be misused −− or squabbled over.

If there *is* a lot of money and/or other substantive property, the user group must be accountable to members.

Any vital, growing group should have more than one active person. In troubled nonprofits, financial information is often tightly held by someone who will not willingly relinquish monetary control. Ideally, there should be *some* LUG duty rotation, including duties involving financial control.

Regular useful financial reports should be made available to those who wish them. A LUG maintaining official "charitable status" for tax purposes must file at least annual financial reports with the local tax authorities, which would represent a minimum financial disclosure to members.

With the growth of Linux−based financial software, regular reports are now quite practical. With the growth of the Internet, it should even be possible to publish these on the World−Wide Web.

7.4 Elections, democracy, and turnover

Governing your LUG democratically is absolutely vital −− if and only if you believe it is. I intend that remark somewhat less cynically than it probably sounds, as I shall explain.

Tangible stakes at issue in LUG politics tend to be minuscule to the point of comic opera: There are typically no real assets. Differences of view can be resolved by either engineering around them with technology (the Linux−ey solution) or by letting each camp run efforts in parallel. Moreover, even the most militantly "democratic" LUGs typically field, like clockwork, exactly as many candidates as there are offices to be filled −− not a soul more.

It's tempting to mock such exercises as empty posturing, but such is not (much) my intent. Rather, I mention them to point out something more significant: Attracting and retaining key volunteers is vital to the group's success. Anything that makes that happen is good. It seems likely that the "democratic" exercise stressed in some groups, substantive or not, encourages participation, and gives those elected a sense of status, legitimacy, and involvement. Those are Good Things.

Thus, if elections and formal structure help attract key participants, use them. If those deter participants, lose them. If door−prizes and garage sales bring people in, do door−prizes and garage sales. Participation, as much as software, is the lifeblood of your LUG.

The reason I spoke of "key" volunteers, above, is because, inevitably, a very few people will do almost all of the needed work. It's just the way things go, in volunteer groups. An anecdote may help illustrate my point: Towards the end of my long tenure as editor and typesetter of San Francisco PC User Group's 40−page monthly magazine, I was repeatedly urged to make magazine management more "democratic". I finally replied to the club president, "See that guy over there? That's Ed, one of my editorial staff. Ed just proofread twelve articles for the current issue. So, I figure he gets twelve votes." The president and other club politicos were dismayed by my work−based recasting of their democratic ideals: Their notion was that each biped should have an equal say in editorial policy, regardless of ability to typeset or proofread, or whether they had ever done *anything* to assist magazine production. Although he looked quite unhappy about doing so, the president dropped the subject. I figured that, when it came right down to it, he'd decide that the club needed people who got work done more than they needed his brand of "democracy".

But we weren't quite done: A month or so later, I was introduced to a "Publications Committee", who arrived with the intent of doing nothing but vote on matters of newsletter policy (i.e., issue "executive" orders to the volunteer production staff). Their first shock came when I listened politely to their advice but then applied my editorial judgement as usual. Much worse, though: I also assigned them work, as part of my staff. Almost all immediately lost interest. (Bossing around other people seemed likely to be fun; doing actual work was not.)

The point is that the widespread urge to vote on everything is at best orthogonal to any desire to perform needed work; at worst, the former serves as an excuse to compulsively meddle in others' performance of the latter.

To sum up: Have all the "democracy" that makes you happy, but watching after the well−being of your key volunteers is what matters. (To quote Candide, "We must cultivate our garden.")

Last, plan for your replacement: If your LUG is a college student group, and must go through a paperwork deathmarch every year to stay accredited, make sure that and all other vital processes are documented, so new LUG officers needn't figure everything out from scratch. Think of it as a systems−engineering problem: You're trying to eliminate single points of failure.

And what works for the guys in the next town may not work for your crowd: Surprise! The keys to this puzzle are still being sought. So, please experiment, and let me know what works for you, so I can tell others. Have fun!

8. About this document

8.1 Terms of use

8.2 New versions

New versions of the Linux User Group HOWTO will be periodically uploaded to various Linux Web and ftp sites, principally http://linuxmafia.com/lug/ and the Linux Documentation Project.

8.3 Please contribute to this HOWTO

I welcome questions about and feedback on this document. Please send them to me at rick@linuxmafia.com. *I am especially interested in hearing from LUG leaders around the world*. I'd like to include real−life examples of things described here. I'm particularly trying to include more on LUGs outside the USA. Please let me know of things your group does meriting description here.

8.4 Document history

- 1.0: Released on 13 July 1997.
- 1.1: Expanded online resources section.
- 1.3: Added LUG support organisations and expanded the Legal and Organisational Issues section.
- 1.3.1: General editing for clarity and conciseness.
- 1.4: General editing, added new LUG resources.
- 1.4.1: General editing for clarity.
- 1.5: Added some resources, some discussion of LUG documentation, also general editing.
- 1.5.1: Changed Web location for this document and author's e−mail address.
- 1.5.2: New copyright notice and licence.
- 1.5.3: Miscellaneous edits and minor re−organisations.
- 1.6: Added Chris Browne's material: Linux philanthropic donations and LUG political considerations.
- 1.6.1: Very minor additions.
- 1.6.2: Minor corrections.
- 1.6.3: Maintenance assumed by Rick Moen: General initial touch−up, correction of broken URLs, etc.
- 1.6.4: Further minor fixes and additions.
- 1.6.5: More−extensive edits, added "Limits of advocacy", added caveat about conflicting value systems in support contexts. Added more news sites, reordered examples of LUGs using Internet well. General tightening of phrasing, greater brevity in places.
- 1.6.6: More small fixes, added Yahoo LUG list.
- 1.6.7: Added formal−organisational pros/cons, "Elections, democracy, and turnover" section, Web site suggestions, and link to "Recipe for a Successful Linux User Group" essay. Fixed mis−tagged sections under "Legal and political issues".
- 1.6.8: Fixed small glitches. Rewrote section concerning Linux news outlets; parts of sections concerning consultants, businesses, and elections.
- 1.6.9: Minor corrections.
- 1.7.0: Caught up with GLUE membership having become free of charge.
- 1.7.1: Added a bunch more newly supported embedded CPUs.
- 1.7.2: Added more on processor support; furnished matching URLs. Added details about Linux in India, and Linux For You magazine. Expanded legal issues section.
- 1.7.3: Added mention of Debian GNU/NetBSD to the CPU ports section. Reorganised and further expanded the latter. Recorded Linux Gazette's move to new hosting. Added LinuxFocus.
- 1.7.4: Added LinuxWorld Magazine, fixed URL of Recipe for a Successful Linux User Group, which I moved. Added Tux.Org and LinuxUserGroups.org as LUG support organisations.
- 1.7.5: Added several more embedded CPUs to the supported list, implemented licence change to Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 1.0 after securiing permission from Kendall Clark.
- 1.7.6: Corrected addresses for TeX User Group in USA and UK. Added mention of C. Northcote Parkinson's Bike Shed Effect. Other minor corrections.
- 1.7.7: Added reference to the UK Linux User Groups site. Added description of PingoS e.V. Corrected URL for Thomas Kappler's e−mail address. Added Volgograd LUG to Online Resources.
- 1.7.8: Added Jerome Pinot's Linux architectures list, used some data from it. Added "I Linux User Group italiani". Corrected capitalisation of PingoS. After securing permission from Kendall Clark,

added "or any later version" clause to document licence.

8.5 Acknowledgements

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Warm regards and thanks to Chris Browne for describing the situation with non−profit and charitable groups in Canada, his thoughts on financial donations as a way to participate in Linux and the free software and open−source software movements, and his ideas about the kinds of political issues likely to arise within LUGs.

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