

Title of submitted project: ceibalJAM!

Description of project (350-3000 chars):

ceibalJAM is a volunteers organization born in Montevideo in 2008, one year after the Uruguayan government launched Plan Ceibal (<http://www.ceibal.org.uy/>) for giving laptop computers for all school children and teachers of the country.

Since Plan Ceibal started, we noticed the need for local interactive contents to be developed and for having a broader knowledge of the technologies introduced, which were mostly coming from the US-based organization OLPC (One Laptop Per Child, <http://laptop.org>). Moreover, we saw that if some basic computing skills weren't taken closer to common people, teachers and children, the potential of the computers would be underused.

At the same time, there was a lot of discussion around the kind of software that had to be used in the computers, whether it had to be open source or proprietary. As there were big lobbies promoting proprietary software usage, we wanted to show in practice that it was possible to make a more open and participatory development environment, sharing software and technological knowledge with organizations and volunteers from all around the world.

That's how it started ceibalJAM, with two main goals in mind: 1) Learn, master and disseminate information technologies introduced by Plan Ceibal. 2) Develop educational software applications using the free software model.

Our vision of the software development process is very broad, and takes a big focus in integrating the final users viewpoint – mainly teachers, children and parents – as well as receiving contributions from people with different skills, like programmers, artists, social researchers, etc.

In these years we have build a strong community, mainly communicated by a mailing list with more than 300 subscribers and a portal with more than 100 active users.

Our major working events are the “ceibalJAM meetings”, which are two-days activities in which volunteers take the first hours to teach their works in progress and projects, then take a time to discuss how to go ahead, and finally take most of the meeting time for developing. So far, we have made four of these meetings in Montevideo and two in other cities of the country. Two more ceibalJAM meetings are planned for 2010.

The organization is inserted in the international community of developers and educators, having members from different countries and special links with SugarLabs, the organization that developed most of the base software that is being used in Uruguayan schools. For making this cooperation even stronger, an international meeting of free educational software developers is planned for late October this year.

In summary, ceibalJAM is a project for making Uruguayan education better, more independent and participative. It mixes online and presential work in a systematic effort for

disclosing technological knowledge and taking it closer to common people. It is also an effort to collaborate worldwide for making better educational ecosystems.

Keywords: Technology, Education, OLPC, Plan Ceibal, Free software, Collaborative learning.

Project Details (Máx 3000 each)

Project History (What was the project's origin, when and how did it start? How did it develop up to the present day?):

ceibalJAM! had its first expression in May 2008, organizing a meeting where it was established a very important part of our further work: Joining during working journeys with whomever would be interested in knowing more and developing software for the computers of Plan Ceibal, known as XO. This first meeting was made in Universidad de la República, assisting around 60 volunteers from different disciplines, like programmers, teachers and graphic designers. All the organizing work was made by volunteers, without any economical support. In this meeting we setted up the basic infrastructure to continue working, mainly a mailing list and a wiki page.

Some months later, we managed to get a small support from two companies, which was useful for covering the expenses of the next events. Then, we organized a second meeting, which was made in late August 2008, this time in Universidad Católica del Uruguay, where more than 100 people attended. The third and fourth meetings were held in 2009, in May and August, in Universidad de Montevideo and Fundación Cultura Informática respectively. As time went by, meetings got more organized, with better infrastructure and participation. After that, we felt confident for making events outside Montevideo, and kept meetings in Salto and Paysandú cities, where we could involve new groups of developers.

After applying to OLPC, we received 40 XO computers, with which we could start our own developers program, borrowing them for developers with projects in progress. It also allowed us to make agreements with universities for supporting teachers for making hands-on workshops.

Since late 2008, ceibalJAM could get its own place on the web, <http://ceibaljam.org>. There, we can store information about ongoing projects, as well as keeping the community in touch and informed about the activities being held.

We've also made other kind of activities, like giving technical support for teachers, and requirements-gathering sessions. An interesting example of our participative way of working is how we got our logotype – called “terrón”, also known as “sugar lump”, – which was chosen in an open contest with the participation of many artists from Uruguay and other countries (more information in <http://ceibaljam.org/?q=node/78>).

In June 2009 we started the process of formalizing as a civil non-profit association, which was finally obtained in November 2009, after a long process made in agreement with JCI Uruguay. Then, a directory board was chosen, and later also an executive director, for making the work of the organization more effective and professional.

In this point, we have formalized a working strategy for the next five years, and a working plan for 2010, which can be downloaded from http://ceibaljam.org/?q=acerca_de.

More details about history of ceibalJAM in <http://ceibaljam.org/?q=node/707>

Project Objectives (What is the objective of your project? What is the common goal, topic, interest, etc. of the community or the main uses of the software?)

Our mission: Learn, master and disseminate information technologies introduced by Plan Ceibal; develop educational software applications using the free software model.

Our vision: A community of software applications development working in harmony with the educational needs of Uruguay.

Following our mission statement, we've defined a working strategy for the next years, with 3 main action routes: 1) Strengthen ceibalJAM community; 2) Develop more educational software; 3) Learn and teach technology. This plan can be downloaded from http://ceibaljam.org/sites/default/files/Plan_estrategico_ceibal_jam_2010_2014.pdf

At the same time we have established four priority organizational projects for 2010: 1) Community management project; 2) Portal enhancement; 3) Projects office; 4) International exchange. This plan can be downloaded from http://ceibaljam.org/sites/default/files/ceibalJAM_Plan_de_trabajo_2010.pdf

With our plans, our aim is to make the community grow, tackling the difficult problem of finding a common language to communicate different profiles, like engineers, teachers and artists. We want to make more and more integrative activities, to teach and learn in the process. We also want to make more comprehensive online tools, to allow participation from all around the country and the world, and let everyone collaborate as much as possible from their place. Last but not least, we would like to make it easier to find funds and other resources for projects that need them. The results of all of this should be new software and documentation helpful for daily work in schools.

Team (What is the core team carrying the project? How many (groups of) individuals are currently involved as members or users? How would you characterize the people participating in the project? Is access to the project open or restricted?):

The main group carrying the project is a directory board with 4 members, coming from different areas of engineering and education, and an executive director.

When the group got formalized as a non-profit civil association, a group of 20 people signed as founding members, this is the group of more committed members, who also made a small economical contribution. Teachers, programmers, artists and students are the most common profiles within this group.

ceibalJAM is opens to whomever is interested in participating. Hundreds of people participated in the meetings, having more than 100 subscribers in the portal and 300 subscribers in the main mailing list.

Many of the participants come from different countries, and we also receive participation from international working groups, like SugarLabs and OLPC.

Lessons learned (What has worked / what has not worked in the process of realisation of your project?):

The first thing we could realize is that the virtual world is not enough. Before the first meeting, when ceibalJAM was just an idea, we tried to make programmers and teachers collaborate online for developing applications. Even though there was interest from both parties, things didn't go forward until we started to make meetings. After that, projects continuation needs of many web tools, which make possible further work. We still can see how new users get much more involved after they feel personally involved in a teamwork, knowing the people they are working with.

ceibalJAM is a volunteers organization, and has to respect the time of their members, as they are taking it out from other things they could do during their free time. That's why the meetings are effective, as many people can contribute just during this time, without taking more "homework". At the same time, online tools are fundamental for those who are interested in continuing their projects afterwards.

At the beginning, ceibalJAM wasn't so much interested for teaching, having the main focus in developing applications. However, we could notice that if we didn't disclose some of the technological issues of software development, it wouldn't be possible to speak the same language with teachers, for instance. On the other hand, if educators didn't take a time for explaining how their daily work is and their concerns, engineers wouldn't be able to understand their real needs. This is a very tough road we are just beginning to transit. There is also a lot of research to be done to make better the interdisciplinary work, even more if we want to involve children into our development processes.

Finally, we noticed what probably many non-profits already know: Only with volunteer work you can advance, but very slow. That's why formalization, funds gathering and agreements for having interns and other resources become mandatory catalysts. Paying people for working in projects doesn't take passionate people away from their volunteer work; conversely, it gives them an opportunity to work in what they really like, giving routine tasks to the hired assistants.

Technical Information

Software (If your submission is a software, please describe the problem it is answering to, what solutions and most important features it offers):

Software is just a component of our digital community. However, we should say that before having our portal online, the “community feeling” was very weak.

The portal, based on Drupal (<http://drupal.org>), which is a great tool for building online communities, is the software component that keeps us connected within ourselves and with the world.

Statement of Reasons (Why the submitted project deserves to win a prize in the "Digital Communities" category.):

Our work is for transforming education, starting by our country, but taking a worldwide look, sharing the knowledge with all the volunteers of the world that think that education is not just a matter of governments, but from the whole society.

We have innovated in the way of working. There were no previous experiences of jam-style meetings for developing software in Uruguay. There was a big challenge in explaining this different working methodology and convoking people to participate on it. We also innovate when we experiment different ways of making programmers, teachers, artists and so many people with very different profiles to work together. This is a very broad research area in which there is a long road ahead.

ceibalJAM is a reality, build up almost without supporting funds, based on volunteers efforts. In this moment, ceibalJAM has a defined working project looking at the next five years, with clear goals and methodologies.

International awards for our work and working plans would be a catalyst for making them real, making it easier to find sponsors and to make new organizational agreements.

Planned use of prize money:

We would like to use the prize money to promote more people mobilization around ceibalJAM.

Firstly, we would use it to promote a closer integration of artists, experimenting new ways of presenting what we do in open events around the country.

We also would use it to organize meetings with children, teaching them how they can develop and master the computers technology, as well as gathering their requirements for new developments.

Finally, we would use the money for making more tools for sharing our knowledges with the rest of the world.