

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Integrated Project

LAFIS - LAYing the Foundations for the Information Society

Free Software Foundation Europe, Germany
Associação Nacional para o Software Livre, Portugal
Association ABUL, France
Association For Free Software, UK
Association Pour la Promotion et la Recherche en Informatique Libre, France
Centro Tempo Reale, Italy
DIST-Università di Genova, Italy
Easter-eggs, France
Groupe des Ecoles de Telecommunications (GET), France
g10 Code GmbH, Germany
Intevation GmbH, Germany
MandrakeSoft, France
LinuxTag e.V., Germany
Prosa Progettazione Sviluppo Aperto S.r.l., Italy
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1 Description

Free Software – sometimes also referred to as “Libre software” or “Open Source Software”¹ – is best defined by the following four freedoms:

1st freedom: The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.

2nd freedom: The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

3rd freedom: The freedom to redistribute copies.

4th freedom: The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

Free Software provides a new concept, a new discipline as a stable basis for the information age and the knowledge economy. Its working principles are changing the IT sector towards a more stable, lasting and sustainable approach with higher dynamics and increased efficiency.

Any region adopting Free Software on a larger basis can benefit in terms of

- Greater independence from foreign interests
- Increased sustainability
- Freedom from foreign mono- and oligopolies
- Alternative hard- and software possibilities
- Strengthened domestic market and local industries
- Better cooperation between research and economy
- Encouraged transdisciplinary research
- Better protection of civil rights

For a more detailed explanation, please see the *Recommendation of the Free Software Foundation Europe (FSF Europe) and supporting parties for the European Community framework programme 2002–2006* of April 30th, 2002,² in which the FSF Europe with support of about 50 European companies, research institutes and associations explains in more detail why and how Free Software offers these advantages.

This integrated project is aimed towards mass adoption of Free Software in all IT fields.

1.1 Rationale

Software is the lifeblood, medium and fundament of the information society and knowledge economy. Therefore, providing and furthering the strongest and most durable infrastructure has to be a goal of any region willing to participate in the information age.

Because of its significant advantages, it is obvious that the first region to adopt and support research and implementation in Free Software on a larger scale can profit enormously and get a head-start in the information society.

Other regions are beginning to get ready to capitalize on these advantages, as – for instance – the recent activities in Peru have shown.³

Europe, however, is given a uniquely favorable position to become the global leader in the Information Economy due to its vibrant Free Software community. It has already begun taking small steps in this direction within the 5th Framework Programme that should be built upon **now**.

LAFIS intends to promote an Integrated Project to solve problems and close gaps which are present or will arise in Free Software development and production. In doing so, it will complete the infrastructure needed for global mass adoption of Free Software in Europe by end-users, companies, governmental institutions etc.

Through this, LAFIS will lay the foundations for a European information society.

¹For reasons that can be found online at <http://fsfeurope.org/documents/whyfs.en.html>, this document will use Free Software as the preferred term.

²Online at <http://fsfeurope.org/documents/fp6/>.

³For reference, please see the letter by the Peruvian Congressman Villanueva. Mirrored in several places like <http://pimientolinux.com/peru2ms/>.

1.1.1 Issues with integration of Free Software into FP6

Although the 6th Framework Programme and Europe in general would profit immensely from the mass-adoption of Free Software, the current structure of the FP6 makes it difficult to provide adequate support for Free Software. There are several reasons for this that we would like to bring into the FP6 thought process.

First of all, Free Software is not limited to a single domain or thematic area, its positive effects transcend research disciplines, markets, society. The Free Software paradigm changes the workings and rules of software towards a climate that rewards cooperative efforts and stronger integration. This sort of climate change, although very obvious, is hard to quantify.

The paradigms are shifted away from a supply-driven IT industry towards a demand-driven model. In other words: The user truly becomes a determining factor. Therefore the direction of important Free Software projects is often hard to predict. Demand may overrule the ideas of supply and give the project a new direction. This very positive effect – some people go as far as calling it “collateral use” – makes Free Software harder to predict.

Also: Players in the Free Software field can currently not be judged by their finances. Competence, not money is the most important capital of Free Software players today. Although this is likely to change with a greater adoption of Free Software, it is a problem we face in relation with the FP6.

The “Funding by size” paradigm is one that is likely to fail for Free Software, because in the current situation it would usually further the least competent parties.

These problems should be addressed and discussed to find a solution that will allow Europe to capitalize on the advantages of Free Software in the best and most efficient way.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of LAFIS are finding and completing powerful solutions for fundamental technical and technological problems, fill strategically important gaps in Free Software and to promote it along with the ethical principles that underlie its production towards mass adoption in every information technology field as the preferable solution.

Some current gaps, needs and problems are:

1. Finalizing a full Free-Software based, simplified client-end platform suitable for mass replacement of current proprietary client technologies.
2. Create and extend complete Free Software support of thematic areas; for instance: Multimedia; Secure Email; Small/medium/large size company automation; including CRM, ERP, Workflow-Management. Where applicable: Create “Drop-In-Solutions” for these areas.
3. Extend usability through creation of: More and better documentation; Better, easier, more intuitive and user-friendly documentation tools; Better, more complete databases of Free Software applications and supported hardware; Usability schemes and ergonomics studies.
4. Extended hardware support.
5. Maintenance of crucial “orphaned” applications.⁴
6. Development, maintenance and support of Free, patent unencumbered formats and protocols.
7. Identification and solution of other problems and needs that may arise.

1.3 General approach to achieve the objectives

LAFIS approaches the objectives by assembling a consortium of the most knowledgeable and strongest European players in the Free Software field to coordinate multiple sub-projects to research and development in the fields touched by the problems listed in section 1.2 and tasks/projects necessary for their success.

The purpose of this approach is to give the European Free Software community an active and efficient way of getting involved in essential solutions to current problems of strategic interest.

⁴“Orphaned” applications are Free Software programs which have been abandoned, for various reasons, by their maintainer(s). Some of them are key elements and their maintenance can be considered a crucial strategic necessity.

2 Need and Relevance

Software has not only become a seminal economic and cultural property, it also provides the grounds upon which the information society and economy will be built.

Those who depend on foreign interests to uphold their own economy, communication, education and research will most likely not become key players in the information age. Becoming and remaining independent from foreign hardware and software oligopolies is a crucial step towards a sustainable and lasting approach.

As laid out in the recommendation referenced on page 1 in section 1, Free Software offers protection from foreign and internal hardware and software monopolies, encourages freedom of markets, protects privacy and therefore trust in information technologies, furthers research and education and empowers all Europeans to become active participants in the information society.

Through LAFIS, Europe will not only gain the necessary foundations for the desired knowledge economy, it will also make a leap towards becoming the global leader and region of competence for these technologies.

3 Scale of Ambition and Critical Mass

The main objective of LAFIS is to find optimal answers for the needs arising out of the shift towards a knowledge society as described in section 1.2. Many of these solutions have not yet been found, nor can they be found in the current development trend of Free Software. Finding them requires fundamented research and development, which would best be done within a the organization of an integrated project of the size and partnership as outlined in the 6th EC Framework Programme. As such, the ambitions of LAFIS are:

1. push the technical solutions in Free Software beyond the final threshold to allow addressing any problem with the advantages of Free Software. Achieving this result would bring enormous benefits in terms of
 - a) macro-economic benefit: most of the economics related to software (which are nowadays lead by countries outside the EC) would turn back into European Countries, with an increase of investments and jobs in Europe;
 - b) macro-economic benefit: currently, the whole European IT industry is utterly dependent on foreign oligopolies that can shut down parts or all of the European IT industry should this seem politically or economically useful. Free Software will eliminate this dependency;
 - c) economic benefit: the efficiency of the economic model of Free Software would provide societies with a greater wealth of services at a fraction of the total costs involved today;
 - d) economic benefit: because of the freedoms granted, Free Software is the most secure IT investment possible today. Bringing companies security in their IT investments will allow them to invest more heavily in other areas;
 - e) social benefit: Free Software secures the capability of every European citizen to participate and get active in the information society;
 - f) social benefit: through its principles of cooperation, transparency and ethics, Free Software helps creating an overall computer-literacy that will benefit a climate of democracy and cooperation;
 - g) social benefit: a shift towards Free Software would raise consciousness for the issues raised by the information age.
2. give Europe a head-start into and leadership in the information society; as stated elsewhere, Europe is in a uniquely favorable position to achive this position: an Integrated Project like LAFIS seems like the best way of building the foundations for this role.

More details can be found in the recommendation referenced on page 1 in section 1.

4 Integration

The objectives stated in section 1.2 on page 2 will best be reached through the following activities:

1. horizontal and interdisciplinary research (research and development will be conducted in parallel on several aspects, leading to synergetic effects and communication exchange between several sub-projects)
2. creation of template solutions for special industries
3. dissemination and training activities (including specialised and non-specialised training)
4. demonstration activities to show Free Software in action in different contexts, in particular in large companies and institutions
5. global coordination and management of these activities

In order to reach these objectives and to set up these activities, a consortium of the most knowledgeable and most experienced Free Software players in Europe will be constituted, including

	Organisation Area of Excellence Role in Project	Country	Web page
1	FSF Europe Competence center; Partner “AGNULA” (IST-2001-34879); Co-maintainer of GPL/LGPL and GNU Project Coordination, Community-interaction, Competence, Vision, Integration, Business-models, Legal Aspects	Germany	http://fsfeurope.org
2	ABUL Free Software association furthering Education; Organizer Libre Software Meeting Events, Education, Community-interaction & local competence	France	http://www.abul.org
3	ANSOL Free Software association furthering Free Software in Portugal Community-interaction & local competence	Portugal	http://www.ansol.org
4	AFFS Free Software association furthering Free Software in the UK Community-interaction & local competence	United Kingdom	http://www.affs.org.uk
5	APRIL Free Software association furthering Free Software in France Community-interaction & local competence	France	http://www.april.org
6	Centro Tempo Reale Center devoted to music research, production and education. Coordinator AGNULA project (IST-2001-34879) Audio & Multimedia, development	Italy	http://www.centrotemporeale.it
7	DIST-Università Multimedia lab, EC projects: MEGA, CARE-HERE, MoSART Multimedia and expressive/emotional software, development	Italy	http://infomus.dist.unige.it
8	Easter-Eggs Company for Free Software & GNU/Linux Business integration, development	France	http://www.easter-eggs.com
9	GET Consortium of the seven major French Graduate Schools for Information Technology Communcation technology & research, development	France	http://www.get-telecom.fr
10	g10 Code GmbH Home of GnuPG, only supported major OpenPGP implementation; Project partner “Egypt” (BSI) Cryptography & Security, Business integration, development	Germany	http://www.g10code.de
11	Intevation GmbH Geographic Information Systems, Strategic Free Software consulting; Project partner “Egypt” (BSI)	Germany	http://www.intevation.de

	GIS, Business integration, usability design, development
12	LinuxTag e.V. Germany http://www.linuxtag.org Largest Free Software event organizer; Organizer of LinuxTag Events & Conferences, development
13	MandrakeSoft France http://www.mandrakesoft.com Producer and publisher of "Mandrake" GNU/Linux distribution End-user interaction, packaging, business integration, development
14	Prosa Italy http://www.prosa.it Services around GNU/Linux and Free Software Business integration, development
15	FFS Austria http://www.ffi.or.at Free Software association furthering Free Software in Austria Community-interaction & local competence
16	ffis Germany http://www.ffis.de Free Software association furthering Free Software in Germany Community-interaction & local competence
17	V2 Netherlands http://www.v2.nl Free Software in art, culture, engineering Multimedia, art, communication, development
18	VIPS Lab Italy http://vips.sci.univr.it Coordinator SOb project IST-2000-25287; Partner ARROV; Organizer COST-G6 Conference in 2000 Computer vision, pattern recognition, image and sound processing, development
19	[wearlab]@TZi Germany http://www.wearlab.de Center for mobile/wearable computing at University of Bremen Mobile/wearable computing, development
20	werk21 Germany http://www.werk21.de Agency for communication & design, organizer "Bundestux" Publications, material, end-user integration