Building Equitable Free Software Communities for All!

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Free Software communities, you say?

➔ **What does that even mean?**

➔ **Why should you care about it?**

➔ **Why do I care about it?**

➔ **Community pain points**

➔ **What should we do?**

➔ **Next Steps**

➔ **Questions?**

What does it mean, free software community?

"The free software community is a worldwide movement dedicated to the goal of freedom in the use of technology. This diverse community is made up of programmers, designers, writers and everyday advocates who contribute to make and promote software that respects our freedoms."

https://www.fsf.org/working-together/profiles/meet-the-free-software-community#:~:text=The%20free%20software%20community%20is,software%20that%20respects%20our%20freedoms.

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Free software communities are:

➔   **Generally formed to solve problems**
➔   **This can mean bug-fixes or innovating new solutions**
➔   **Collaborative participation**
➔   **Populated by diverse community members**
➔   **Participation can be technical or non-technical**

THE APACHE® SOFTWARE FOUNDATION
20TH ANNIVERSARY

COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT "THE APACHE WAY"

Projects ▾   People ▾   Community ▾   Partner ▾   Sponsors ▾

THE WORLD'S LARGEST OPEN SOURCE FOUNDATION

- All volunteer community
- 227M+ lines of code in stewardship
- 4.2B+ lines of code changed
- 34M+ code commits
- 813 individual ASF Members
- 8,000+ Apache Committers
- 39,000+ code contributors
- 100,000+ people involved in our communities

- 350+ Projects and Initiatives
- 300+ Top-Level Projects
- 45 podlings in the Apache Incubator
- +2 Petabytes source code downloads from Apache mirrors
- 24M+ emails across 1400+ mailing lists
- Web requests received from every Internet-connected country on the planet
- 35M+ weekly page views across apache.org

20B+ worth of Apache Open Source software products are made available to the public-at-large at 100% no cost, and benefit billions of users around the world.

Make a one-time or recurring donation | Corporate Support and ASF Sponsorship

Why Drupal?   Build   Solutions   Services   Community   Resources

Come for the Software, Stay for the Community

Drupal is used, built, taught, documented, and marketed by the Drupal community world, with a shared set of values, collaborating together in a respectful manner.

You are welcome to use the software and read the documentation as a visitor, but join in, find people who share your interests, and grow your skills!

Trisquel Community Guidelines

Values

Trisquel is free. We mean "free" in the freedom sense. Our u part of Trisquel, or even all of it:

1. run
2. study / audit / modify
3. copy / distribute,
4. distribute modified versions

system 🛡

If you are a user or develo
The Jitsi developer team
more helpful. We have mo
posting questions easy.
The first paragraph of this
homepage. It's important!

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This talk can apply to:

➔   **Many different sizes of communities:**
   ◆   *I am one person doing this on the side, and I could use some help!*
   ◆   *We are a small group of folks working together, and it feels like a lot of work for not a lot of people*
   ◆   *We are a volunteer run community with built in processes and categories of work*

Why are free software communities important?

Why are these communities so important?

➔ Our communities keep free software alive, aligned with user needs, and providing for end users
➔ Free software is in support of us, the people living in communities around the world.
➔ Our software communities should listen to and represent the people they support.
➔ When we create freedom respecting software, we do it because we think everyone should have access to it.
➔ We build using a model of community support and participation

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Why am I here talking about this today?

I owe my career to free software communities!

➔ https://github.com/id-Software/DOOM/blob/master/README.TXT
➔ https://www.dosbox.com/
➔ https://www.freebsd.org/
➔ https://archlinux.org/
➔ https://www.debian.org/
➔ https://www.transformativeworks.org/
➔ https://www.drupal.org/

Why is equity important?

EQUITY MATTERS:

➔ *Diversity* - who participates in our communities
➔ ***Equity* - what structures we create and how they impact members of our communities**
➔ *Inclusion* - what opportunities are available, championed, and supported by the community for all community members

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Why isn't everyone part of a free software community?

Common Community Pain Points:

1. Difficulty getting involved
2. No training
3. Limited time to support new community members
4. Bootstrap mentality
5. Unclear goals
6. Community toxicity

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Community pain points:

1. Difficulty getting involved:

➔   **No website or readme text showing how to get involved**
➔   **Community site/docs are difficult to find and navigate**
➔   **Communication method implies a particular existing skillset**
➔   **Bugs not sorted or tagged by "newbie appropriate"**

Community pain points:

2. No training:

➜ **Documentation is nonexistent, difficult to find, stale, or lacking**
➜ **No clear onboarding process**
➜ **No or little support from existing community members**

Community pain points:

3. Bootstrap/RTFM Mentality:

➜   **Nobody ever held my hand!**
➜   **No space for beginner questions**
➜   **Impatience with new community members**

Community pain points:

4. No time to support:

➔ **Information is siloed**
➔ **Community depends on "rockstars"**
➔ **Onboarding is difficult and lengthy**

Community pain points:

5. Unclear Goals:

➔ **Community doesn't have a clear mission or goal**

➔ **No consensus on direction**

➔ **Infighting about major technology choices, etc.**

Community pain points:

6. Community Toxicity:

➔ **Community is not diverse**
➔ **Community is not equitable**
➔ **Community is not inclusive or welcoming**
➔ **Interactions leave you feeling not great**

How you might see these show up:

- ➔ *"I could have done this better myself."*
- ➔ *"I don't have time to explain everything to you."*
- ➔ *"These volunteers don't know what they're doing/they're useless."*
- ➔ *"There's no way to get rid of people who aren't helping."*
- ➔ *"Nobody ever volunteers to fix things."*
- ➔ *"Tons of people use my software but nobody contributes."*

Let's fix 'em!

First, why fix this?

➔ We are free software ambassadors and we can help others join our communities and movements to support our vision of free software for all
➔ We'll create more tested, vetted, patched, creative solutions when we invite more folks into our communities. The output of this is better code!

Mentality Changes

➔ Decide how to spend your time - is it on doing everything yourself, or training others to do it?

➔ Make choices based on inclusion and sustainability

➔ Constantly return to the purpose of your community and ask if your decisions align with that goal

Mentality Changes

→ Be agile!

Processes

➔ Clear process for participating

➔ Well documented revision control and code review processes

➔ Automate, automate, automate!

➔ Be clear about who has decision-making authority

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Processes

➔ Limit access to more complex or mission critical tasks until folks have a proven track record. This includes new community "rockstars."

➔ Separate and label "new ideas" or "nice to haves" as opposed to bugs or core functionality

➔ Have a clear vision, and share it

➔ Always be willing to share the "why."

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Well, that sounds like a lot of work

This sounds hard

➔ You have to decide where to put in time and work

➔ What will create the best software?

➔ What will grow free software communities and help them become the norm?

This sounds hard

➔ Also, it's worth it!

Next Steps

Next steps/Ideas

➜ Why is your project/community important to you? What do you hope it will accomplish? Share that!

➜ Consider your blind spots

➜ Expand your volunteer or applicant pool

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Next steps/Ideas

➔ Consider a rolling call for participation
➔ Think about what processes you can automate. How can you make least-effort documentation that is easy to keep current? What practices around comments in code and in revision control can also act as documentation?

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Next steps/Ideas

➔ Audit your community processes to account for time-zones, accessibility needs, language barriers, etc.
➔ Use your expertise to help community members leverage their participation on their resumes
   ◆ This gives back to the greater free software community and helps us build the free software world of our future

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Tips for community members:

Community member tips

➔ Remember your beginner's mindset
➔ Think collaboratively
➔ Build communities, not just individual legacies
➔ Find the community that can support you

Thank You.

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Questions?

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