



# FOSDEM 2024 Lightning Talk

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Mind the gap

Building a cultural  
commitment to  
maintaining open source  
documentation





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Communicate

Minimize friction

Engage



# Communicate

## What's worked

### Clarity

- Tell the community what you need
- Clearly communicate documentation expectations with guidelines
- Provide examples
- Evolve guidelines as contributor questions arise

vs

## What didn't

### Barriers

- Assuming contribution areas are obvious to the community
- Outdated READMEs
- Unclear or absent contributor guidelines
- Being rigid with guidelines



# Minimize friction

## What's worked

### Docs-as-code

- Meet engineers where they are
- Documentation tooling that's well understood minimizes cognitive load
- Empower async contribution

vs

## What didn't

### Separation

- Documentation tooling that creates cognitive load for engineering contributors



# Engage

## What's worked

### Welcome

- Welcome *every* contribution
  - Documentation updates are often the starting point for contributors
- Celebrate contributors

vs

## What didn't

### Being unresponsive



# Determining the "No"

- One of the hardest decisions
  - Not all contributions are useful
- If the work is greater than the reward
  - Poor quality, technical inaccuracies, or non-responsive contributors
- If the contribution doesn't truly help the project
  - Dialog with the contributor about their intent
  - Be respectful, but don't let the contribution linger





# Data

- Helps determine the "No"
- Valuable inputs
  - Visitors to a topic
  - Time on page
  - Date of last update
  - Accessibility scores



# 7 Lessons learned

- 1 One big swing will only get you so far
- 2 A good starting point is contributions that help users get started
- 3 Maintenance is easier when documentation is part of the code
- 4 Linting is your friend
- 5 Guidelines increase contributions
- 6 ...but guidelines need to evolve, too
- 7 It's fine to say "No"





Thank you

