

**Transparent,
asynchronous, efficient
communication**

**Chat that addresses the needs of
open-source and research
communities**



Lauryn Menard

Software Engineer @ [Kandra Labs](#)

Benefits of chat

 Provides a place to communicate

 Generates community

 Encourages collaboration

 Lightweight

 Informal

 Interactive

“Zulip is the heart of our community, and nearly everyone who participates absolutely loves it.”

- project lead Dan Allen, from [case study of Asciidoctor open-source community](#)

Challenges of chat

- Time zones and schedules



- Lots of things to discuss and figure out



- Community members with different needs



What do **project leaders** need?

- Review and prioritize chat conversations
- Collaborative decision making
- Connect with the community
- Not miss key discussions

What do **core contributors / moderators** need?

- Catch up on relevant chat messages
- Focused and detailed discussions
- Identify where their participation is helpful
- Find previous messages and discussions
- Have focused time to work

What do **casual contributors** need?

- Find relevant information for their interests
- Read chat when they have time
- Have focused discussions related to their contributions
- Understand what decisions were made and why

What do **new community members** need?

- Comfortable asking for help and support
- Feel a sense of community
- Learn more about the project

What do **end users** need?

- Access to information
- Space to ask questions
- Get clear answers
- Give focused and constructive feedback

An ideal chat application



Asynchronous



Efficient








Transparent

**“I have never seen this kind of
collaboration before.”**

- Kevin Buzzard, Professor of Pure
Mathematics at Imperial College London,
from case study of Lean theorem prover
community


The Zulip open-source project

-  Open-source modern team chat application
-  Over 1000 contributors from all over the world
-  Organizations can self-host or be hosted on Zulip Cloud
-  Commitment to strong documentation
-  Consistent participation in outreach programs

Zulip's unique topic-based threading model

- Each message in a stream has a topic, like an email subject.
- Topics hold the conversation together, providing focus and context for participants and readers.
- Reading messages by topic allows users to focus on what's relevant to them.
- With topics, the pace of the stream's chat is distributed and more manageable.

STREAMS



# annual summit	78
name tags	14
tuesday night catering	4
oprah keynote	12
bouncy castle	48
new registration links	
more topics	
# design	5
# engineering	23
...	

Topics make asynchronous chat work

   Everyone can take part no matter when they are online.

 Core contributors don't miss important conversations.

 End users' voices aren't lost in a sea of messages.

 New folks feel comfortable engaging without interrupting.

Tools to accommodate natural patterns of conversation

- Messages can be moved:
 - new ideas
 - digressions
 - messages in the wrong place
- Topics can be resolved:
 - questions answered
 - conclusions reached
 - issues tracked
- Conversations can be connected:
 - breadcrumb messages
 - internal links

“If someone accidentally posts to the wrong stream or topic, Zulip allows me to move those messages around so they land in the right spot... Moving messages also sends a subtle hint to the person posting about where to post the next time.”

- project lead Dan Allen, from [case study of Asciidoctor open-source community](#)

Organized conversations are more efficient

 Leaders and casual contributors more easily prioritize their time.

 Moderators and core contributors have tools to move conversations forward.

 New community members and end users have more agency.

 Chat conversations become a repository of knowledge.

Public access removes sign-up and log-in barriers

- Zulip web-public streams:
 - available to anyone on the internet
 - provide stable URLs for external linking
 - can be searched without an account

“Zulip’s public access feature makes past user questions and feedback accessible to the whole web, which is perfect for linking to them from other platforms ... It’s much more convenient than having those threads locked behind a login page.”

- Yoann Rodière senior engineer at Hibernite,
quote from [Zulip blog post on public access option](#)

Public access creates transparency and accessibility

 Core contributors discuss and make decisions in the open.

 New community members start learning without signing up.

 End users have access to prior help discussions.

 Chat is relevant beyond the community space.

Zulip's support for FOSS and open research projects

Over 1000 open-source projects, non-profits, educational institutions, and academic research groups are sponsored for free on Zulip Cloud Standard.

“Zulip lets us have focused conversations at scale.”

- Rust compiler team co-lead Felix Klock

“Zulip has been a game changer for our community.”

- AsciiDoctor project lead Dan Allen

“I can't imagine the Lean community without Zulip.”

- Robert Y. Lewis, Brown University lecturer and mathlib maintainer



- [Communities directory](#)
- [Zulip development community](#)
- Case studies:
 - [Asciidoctor](#)
 - [Rust language](#)
 - [Lean theorem prover](#)
- [Code](#)
- [Documentation](#) and [help center](#)