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

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- Outdated READMEs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**

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

**Docs-as-code**

**What didn't**

- Documentation tooling that creates cognitive load for engineering contributors

**Separation**
Engage

What's worked
Welcome

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

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