

FOSDEM 2024 Lightning Talk

February 2024

Mind the gap

Building a cultural commitment to maintaining open source documentation





Fiona Artiaga

Director, Documentation and Technical Writing



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- Outdated READMEs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

Docs-as-code

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



What didn't

Separation

 Documentation tooling that creates cognitive load for engineering contributors



Engage

What's worked

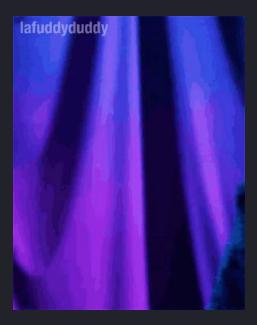
Welcome

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



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
 - o 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
 - o Time on page
 - o Date of last update
 - Accessibility scores



7 Lessons learned

- One big swing will only get you so far
- 2 A good starting point is contributions that help users get started
- 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

Grafana Labs