How to run a successful ~~open source project~~ JSR

(Tips for Spec leads)

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Who am I and why I’m talking about this?

- CTO at TeamSparq - Optimisation for Technical Teams

- Speak regularly on running OSS projects
  - Karl Fogel’s ‘bible’ --> producingoss.com

- Lead the JUG ‘Adopt a JSR’ program

- Back-up rep for the London Java Community seat on the JCP EC

- Very much want JSR-348 to have a positive impact on Spec Leads lives

Convincing the Stakeholders (The EG)

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- Every person that can contribute easily to the JSR
  - Is a potential volunteer
  - Is a cheerleader
  - Can share the burden, you don’t to do all of the work alone
- JSR-348 - Requiring openness and transparency
  - Standards have massive impact
- The ecosystem at large needs to be involved in the JSR
  - Adoption of the JSR will fail otherwise
  - Your work will have been wasted

60 seconds to reel the community in

Make the JSR available

- Website/Wiki
  - The friendly gateway to get volunteers in!
  - **Please** get a Ux/UI person do design this

- Downloads
  - Both Source and binary downloads should be available (TCK/RI)

- Version Control
  - Vital to have version control in place early on
  - Anonymous read access a must

- Canned Hosting
  - Java.net, Google Code, GitHub, BitBucket etc

Make the JSR accessible

- Public Communications Channel
  - A public Mailing List/Forum should be opened immediately
  - IRC
  - Social Networks

- Public Issue Tracker
  - A place to record issues is a mandatory requirement
  - Choose a _user friendly one_

- Developer Guidelines
  - How development is done
  - How to provide patches
  - Code reviews should be public

Documentation

- Biggest complaint about most open source projects is poor documentation
- Clear “How To” for installation, otherwise people will give up
- Have a FAQ and “Common Task” tutorials
- Label the areas where the documentation is known to be incomplete
- Documentation should be available online and offline
- Screenshots and sample output, a picture tells a thousand words

Some extra specifics to unlock the Gate

Setting the tone

- Open source projects are very social, failures tend to occur due to social rather than technical reasons
- Avoid private discussions! Make it a project policy (JSR-348)
- Nip rudeness in the bud
- Kathy Sierra's “Creating Passionate Users”
  - Javaranch’s “Be Nice” policy
- Be sensitive if opening a formerly closed project

You are what you write

- You are judged on your communication
  - Good communicators achieve more than good programmers
- Structure And Formatting
  - Plain text, 80 character wide emails are preferred
  - Spelling and Grammar are important, don't neglect them!
- Remember that there are usually many more readers than writers
  - Avoid hyperbole
  - Over time terseness will creep in, this is OK, as long as it remains polite!
  - Edit before you send
  - Don’t assume English is their first language

Recognising rudeness

- When you respond, try to respond properly and with full effort
- Remember there are no visual cues
- Try to use real names
- Trim replies and disclaimers
- Rude people waste other people's valuable time
  - Encourage community members to self-police
  - Be wary of the vocal minority

Soft topics last longer

- It’s always the non-technical discussions that last the longest
  - These don’t happen anywhere near as often if all discussions are public

- Don’t waste time on the "Bike Shed“

- Try to avoid Holy wars

Handling growth

- Number of Inexperienced users rises rapidly
- Number of experienced users rise much more slowly
- Good publicly available documentation is vital
- Produce specialised forums/lists
- Make archives available
- Keep conversations out of the issue tracker

Publicity

- Your Website front page is seen more than any other part of the project
  - Important news should be posted there

- Also have a "News" or "Press Releases" area of the web site

- If your project has an RSS feed utilise that as well

Adopt a JSR program

- Brand new program started by Java User Groups
- Here to help Spec leads get quality JSRs delivered
- A potentially massive workforce
- See http://java.net/projects/jugs/pages/AdoptAJSR for details

Getting the most out of volunteers

- Volunteers often start with the project due to a technical reason
  - e.g. Fixing a minor bug
- Will stay for many, many different reasons
- You need to ascertain what makes each individual tick
  - Helps you pick up on disruptive members early
- Always maximise contact with a new user who has reported something.
- Try to get user involved in the fix.
- Remember to be patient with new volunteers, educate them!

Delegation

- Is a public declaration of trust
- Draws people further into the project
- Need to give people a graceful out
- Differentiate asking someone to investigate something vs. asking them to take ownership
  - Don't blindly assign!
- Follow up after you delegate!
- Notice which people are interested in a particular area

Praise and Criticism

- Two sides of the same 'attention' coin

- Praise is often the only payment volunteers get
  - Use it wisely, don't undervalue it

- Criticism must be delivered dispassionately with detail
  - "It was sloppy.“

  vs.
  - "Could you review that and apply std project guideline X please?"

Delegate Again

- Often management tasks are as time consuming as technical ones
  - e.g. Board of Directors on PCGen consist of management 'Team Leads‘.

- Common roles are:
  - Patch Manager
  - Release Manager
  - Translation Manager
  - Documentation/FAQ Manager
  - Issue Manager
  - ‘Keeping PMO informed’ Manager
  - Social Media Lead

Managing Volunteers – Transitions

- Volunteers won't stay in same role forever
  - RL == 'Real Life' often gets in the way!

- Time management is a vital skill
  - Encourage new volunteers to start with a small commitment
  - Monitor signs of tiredness
  - Don’t expect unpaid volunteers to “Do it right now”

- Very occasionally a volunteer is inappropriate for a position
  - Get private project consensus before privately discussing a transition to a new role

Committers

- Committers are seen as the core of a project team
  - They typically form quality control
  - They typically have a 'vote‘
  - Choose them on their judgement more than anything else!
- Can use partial commit access to entice people in
- Avoid mystery committers
  - They should be accessible to the rest of the team

Summary

- In Short a JSR is like an Open Source project

- The most successful OSS projects:
  - Make it trivial for a user to contribute (low barrier to entry)
  - Have a path for a user to become a volunteer
  - Value clear/polite communication
  - Reduce FUD by working in the open
  - Are self policing
  - Celebrate success

- JSR-349 - Bean Validation is a great example
  - http://beanvalidation.org/

open source™

Thanks for Listening

Contact me for any questions, comments or the JUG ‘Adopt a JSR’ Program!

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