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 have 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/
Thanks for Listening

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

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