

The Couchers.org Contributor Guide

Welcome to the Couchers.org core team! Thank you for offering your time and skills to this project. We're so excited to start working with you!

We're sure that through your involvement with the project you'll meet a number of passionate and skilled people, find fulfilment in working towards improving our shared community and the experience of individuals, and be able to further develop your skills whether technically or in organisation and leadership.

Couchers.org is built by a global team of skilled volunteers like you in their spare time, so we have structures in place to make sure this model is efficient and successful. We want to make sure:

1. The platform is built to a high standard
2. The platform is built quickly and we are able to iterate fast
3. Momentum is maintained
4. You can rely on other parts of the project to be built effectively, and that your hard work will come to fruition in a completed platform. We don't want to waste your time.

Code of conduct

The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to make sure everyone feels safe, comfortable, and valued as they contribute to the project.

As a contributor, we expect you to approach your work and other team members professionally. This means treating other contributors with respect and upholding any commitments you make.

Part of approaching others with respect means not subjecting them to uninvited or unwelcome behaviours. An example of unwelcome behaviour is flirting with another team member inappropriately, which often makes the other person feel uncomfortable. Please keep in mind that the Couchers.org team, nor our platform, is a dating site!

Project structure

Our teams

The project is led by Aapeli and Itsi, they are always happy to chat and hear your thoughts.

There are four teams, each one with specific **goals** and **Team Leads** to execute those goals. Team Leads are the first point of contact and interaction. Each team will have a specific contributor guide that contains team-specific information.

The Team Lead should be your first point of contact, and they will be able to get you up and running. They are responsible for scheduling a regular meeting for the team to convene and discuss past progress, future plans, and the direction of the team.

Development

- **Team Lead:** Aapeli
- **Goals:** to develop the frontend: the UI for the web and phone apps; and to develop the backend: the API, algorithms, databases, server management and deployment.

Design

- **Team Lead:** Keni
- **Goals:** to create the graphic design and branding relevant to the platform and other areas of the project, and to design elements relevant to the User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX).

Marketing

- **Team Leads:** Donna & Trenton
- **Goals:** to create the overall messaging, written content, and strategy relevant to publications, advertising, and communications with the users.

Community

- **Team Lead:** Itsi
- **Goals:** to expand the user and volunteer base via community networks, to create feedback channels between the community and the core team, and to guide the creation and continued support of local communities via the platform.

Our collaboration tools

[Freedcamp](#) is our main collaboration tool. We use it to keep track of tasks amongst the different teams. Tasks include extra information such as the priority of the task, who it's assigned to, and deadlines. **It is everyone's duty to maintain it and keep Freedcamp up to date.** Feel free to create new tasks in the relevant team board. When creating a task, make sure that the task includes:

- a general description,
- a definition of what needs to be done,
- an assignment to someone (if not yourself, please talk to them first), and
- a due date.

If you only have a few free hours of time a week to work on the project, this is where to look for what you can be doing.

[Slack](#) is our communication tool. Download the app on your computer and/or phone. You can expect that everyone will regularly check Slack. We use it to:

- Give updates to members of the core team
- Organise and discuss tasks
- Meet, discuss ideas, and hang out with others in the team (it's a social place too!)

[GitHub](#) hosts our code repository. This is the central place where development happens. If you are a software engineer, you should receive access from Aapeli. The [developer contributor guide](#) explains how and why we use GitHub in detail.

[Google Drive](#) is our tool for keeping and editing documents and tables.

[Spacetime](#) is our tool for organising times for meetings across timezones. Make sure you only enter the times you are free to work on the project.

Onboarding tasks

To get started, do the following tasks:

1. Fill in the [Contributor Information Form](#)
2. Setup Slack: download the app on your computer or phone, upload a photo to your account (optional but strongly encouraged!), add a short description to your profile (View profile > Edit profile > "What I do"), and go to the #introduce-yourself channel: say "hi" and write a description about yourself and anything else you want to add.
3. Log onto Freedcamp and upload a photo (optional but encouraged). Have a look around (If you haven't got access to Freedcamp, please ask Marlies)
4. Send a message to your team lead to introduce yourself (if they haven't already). Please contact Itsi or Aapeli if you don't know who you should contact. Your team lead will give you the relevant team document that explains how that team functions.
5. Join the next team meeting where you can meet your new team!

The Contributor Assignment Agreement

If you work on stuff that's for the exclusive use of Couchers.org, for example logos or designs, we ask that you sign the Contributor Assignment Agreement to transfer ownership of such intellectual property to the non-profit foundation. This allows us to build a solid brand and make sure we have the legal right to use work that everyone contributes.

The [Contributor Assignment Agreement \(CAA\)](#) clarifies what happens to intellectual property that you contribute and produce while working on Couchers.org. This is explained in more depth in the "Legal Stuff" section.

Please download the form from <https://couchers.org/contributors/caa.pdf>, sign it, and return to Marlies!

Expectations

What you can expect from us

- Your work will contribute directly to Couchers.org, and as such we will always remain non-profit and committed to our vision
- We'll be accessible. There will always be a channel open for communicating with the team and someone to respond to you in a timely manner
- We will maintain structure and momentum in the project, so that you can rely on other teams to work productively in order to bring the project — and your work — to fruition
- As a team member, you will be treated equally

What we expect from you

- We expect you to update your tasks on Freedcamp regularly to ensure transparency and communication amongst the team
- We expect you to regularly check and engage with others on Slack (though you are not required to keep up to date on all chit-chat on Slack)
- We expect you to uphold any commitments you make (e.g. completing tasks)
- We expect you to treat all other members with professionalism and respect, and adhere to the Code of Conduct

Representation Outside of Couchers.org

As active volunteers with Couchers.org it is in our shared best interest to promote the project when the opportunity arises.

- You are encouraged to create awareness of our new couch-surfing platform in person and on social media.
- Do not troll or start unhealthy debates, or argument.
- Use your personal experience to talk with others, but in a healthy way.
- Guide like-minded people to our forums where there are dedicated discussions in creating the best couch-surfing experiences.
- When expressing opinions about the project, be sure to clarify that they are your opinions and not the opinions of the project.

We will inevitably be compared frequently to other hospex platforms, or asked why we are not working directly with them. These are our main points of differentiation:

- We are combining the best parts of various platforms, aiming to launch all of the features that everyone loves; including hosting, surfing, hangouts, events, communities, and more
- We are specifically focussing time and energy on features that ensure strong Trust and Safety. Specific features include our overhauled reference and verification systems
- The platform focuses on communities as well as users, distributing power in communities such as moderation
- Couchers.org is free and not-for-profit, respecting the true essence of couch-surfing
- Our platform is modern, well-built, and aims for new innovations that improves the couch-surfing experience for individuals and communities

Legal stuff

Short version

The Couchers.org project is legally a not-for-profit that guards its assets and gives team members protection from legal issues.

We ask you to sign a Contributor Assignment Agreement (CAA) to assign your work to the foundation if you're contributing something that's for the sole use of Couchers.org. That's most things apart from source code. The purpose is to protect the foundation and you from legal issues.

The source code for the project is licensed under the MIT license, a permissive license that basically grants anyone the right to use, copy, modify, publish, distribute, and sell copies of our software. The only requirement is that they keep a notice on all copies and portions of used software. If you contribute code to the project, you contribute it under the MIT license also, which allows us to use it too. This guarantees that the project continues in an open and transparent way and that others are able to use the work we've put into to do other cool, awesome stuff.

Long version

The Couchers.org project is owned and supported by the “Cross-Cultural Exchange and Communities Foundation Limited” (the foundation). This is a public not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, formed in Australia specifically for the Couchers.org project.

The constitution is [available online](#), and includes a not-for-profit clause, meaning that the foundation can't sell its surplus assets to a for-profit company. The foundation is run as transparently as possible.

The foundation legally owns the intellectual property of the project, such as the brand, the user database, the domain, and all these documents. This structure limits the liability of team members, so no one is personally liable if anything goes wrong on the platform.

It's important that the foundation legally owns or has a license to use the work that we all put in. This stops, for example, past team members from suing the foundation if they become disgruntled, and it clarifies the ownership of the intellectual property. To this end, we have a Contributor Assignment Agreement (CAA) that we ask contributors to sign. The CAA gives the foundation ownership of your contributions, and its purpose is to apply to work that's for the “exclusive use” of the project, such as the brand, and the marketing material.

These agreements are for your protection as a Contributor as well as the protection of the Foundation and its users, so please read them carefully and return a signed copy to us.