

Executive Summary

The Contribution Ladder is a foundational framework designed to enhance the Cardano ecosystem by providing a structured general pathway for contributors to progress from newcomers to core maintainers. This framework fosters skill development, ensures high-quality contributions, and supports community engagement while promoting the decentralized and collaborative ethos of Cardano. Each project is welcome to utilize this approach to streamline general pathways to advancing contributions and contributors themselves to their distinct use cases.



(Note: This framework is a general process and projects are welcome to adapt to their specified use cases, projects under Intersect are advised to inform the Open Source Committee of the made adaptations for record keeping)

Key Highlights:

- **Four Progression Stages:** New Contributor, Committer, Trusted Committer, and Core Maintainer, each with distinct responsibilities and milestones.
- **Support and Recognition:** Contributors are guided through mentorship, rewarded for their efforts, and recognized for their impact.
- **Ecosystem Benefits:** Encourages participation, fosters leadership, and sustains the ecosystem through community-driven growth and governance.

The Contribution Ladder aims to provide transparency and clarity, ensuring contributors are empowered to succeed while aligning their growth with the long-term vision of the Cardano ecosystem.

Resource References:

-  Contribution Ladder
- [Contribution Ladder Research - Google Docs](#)
-  Maintainer Trial Program v.2.docx

1. Introduction

Purpose of the Contribution Ladder

The Contribution Ladder is a structured framework designed to guide the progression of contributors within the Cardano ecosystem. Its primary goal is to provide clear pathways for individuals to grow from newcomers to core maintainers, aligning their personal development with the project's needs. By offering transparency, mentorship, and recognition, the Contribution Ladder ensures contributors have the support they need to succeed while fostering a vibrant and sustainable open-source community. The framework also emphasizes continuous learning and collaboration, enabling contributors to not only enhance their technical skills but also build meaningful relationships within the community.

The Contribution Ladder outlines four distinct roles—New Contributor, Committer, Trusted Committer, and Core Maintainer—each with its own set of responsibilities and expectations. This structured progression provides a roadmap for contributors, helping them navigate their journey while contributing meaningfully to Cardano's growth and innovation.

Benefits for the Cardano Ecosystem

The Cardano ecosystem thrives on collaboration, innovation, and decentralized governance. The Contribution Ladder supports these principles by:

- **Encouraging Participation:** Lowering barriers for new contributors through clear onboarding processes and accessible resources, fostering a welcoming environment for all skill levels.
- **Fostering Growth:** Providing pathways for skill development and deeper project involvement, ensuring contributors feel empowered to take on more significant roles as they progress.
- **Ensuring Sustainability:** Supporting leadership succession and community-driven development by identifying and nurturing future leaders within the ecosystem.
- **Promoting High-Quality Contributions:** Establishing guidelines and best practices to maintain project integrity and ensure that all contributions align with Cardano's technical and community standards.
- **Strengthening Community Bonds:** Facilitating collaboration through mentorship programs, regular community events, and open communication channels, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

By creating a transparent and supportive framework, the Contribution Ladder not only bolsters individual contributors but also ensures the long-term resilience and vitality of the Cardano ecosystem.

2. Framework Details

General Entry and Initial Integration

The journey for new contributors begins with a structured onboarding process that introduces them to the Cardano ecosystem's culture, tools, and initial responsibilities. This phase is crucial for setting the stage for successful contributions and includes access to training materials and introductory projects. To facilitate a smooth integration, if possible, each new contributor is paired with an experienced member of the project or developer advocate who provides mentorship and guidance. This mentor helps the newcomer select suitable initial tasks, such as minor bug fixes or documentation improvements, ensuring they are both achievable and educational.

Contribution Ladder for Intersect:

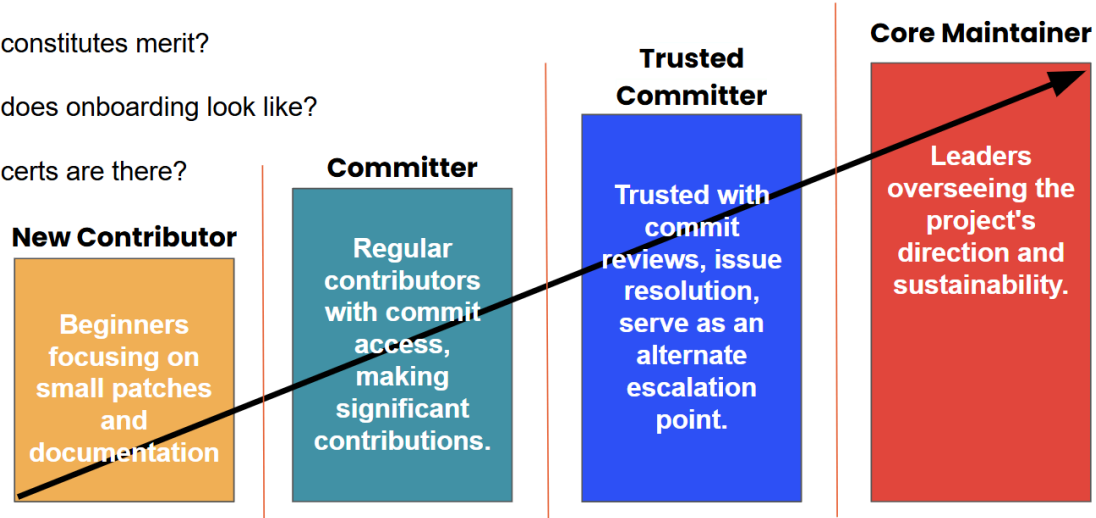
What is the Transition Criteria?

What Education are already available or should be required?

What constitutes merit?

What does onboarding look like?

What certs are there?



Progression Mechanics

As contributors become more familiar with the ecosystem, the criteria for advancement come into play, encompassing specific milestones such as the completion of a set number of contributions, active community engagement, and positive peer reviews. The evaluation process for moving from one stage to the next is formal and rigorous, conducted by higher-level contributors like Trusted Committers or Core Maintainers, who assess readiness for increased responsibility based on clear, predefined benchmarks.

Role-Specific Responsibilities and Expectations

Upon advancing to the Committer stage, contributors take on greater responsibilities, managing smaller projects or leading specific tasks within larger initiatives. Trusted Committers and Core Maintainers, meanwhile, assume critical roles in overseeing project development, strategic decision-making, and mentoring newer contributors. Their leadership ensures the project's alignment with Cardano's or the project's broader goals and the maintenance of its core values.

Support Structures

To support this progression, the framework includes comprehensive training and development opportunities such as webinars, workshops, and online courses highlighted from different ecosystem initiatives, not excluded to Intersect owned initiatives. Additionally, community support is emphasized through regular meetups, forums, and collaborative events that facilitate knowledge sharing and networking within the ecosystem. These resources are designed to help contributors continually enhance their skills and prepare for more significant roles.

Adaptability to Project Needs

Recognizing the diversity of projects within the Cardano ecosystem, the framework is designed to be adaptable. Projects can tailor the Contribution Ladder to better suit their specific goals and operational needs. This customization must be documented and reported to the Open Source Committee to ensure transparency and maintain coherence across the ecosystem, only for projects under Intersect.

Recognition and Rewards System

Each stage of the ladder offers tailored recognition and rewards to motivate contributors and acknowledge their efforts appropriately. From digital badges and certificates for early stages to more substantial incentives like exclusive access to events or special project roles for advanced stages, the system is designed to both recognize achievements and encourage ongoing contribution and involvement. Feedback mechanisms are also in place, providing contributors with constructive feedback that helps them understand their progress and areas for improvement.

3. Roles and Progression Stages

3.1 New Contributors

Who They Are

New Contributors are typically individuals who are new to the Cardano ecosystem, often with some foundational skills in blockchain technology or related fields but limited experience in open source projects. They are characterized by their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn and contribute. This role is designed to be accessible to people from diverse backgrounds, including those who may be transitioning from other industries or academic settings.

Key Responsibilities

- **Learning the Ecosystem:** New Contributors need to familiarize themselves with Cardano's technology, community norms, and contribution guidelines. This involves engaging with existing documentation, tutorials, and community channels.
- **Initial Contributions:** They are encouraged to start with manageable tasks that can include minor bug fixes, documentation improvements, or other small-scale enhancements. These tasks are selected to ensure they can be completed with minimal barriers to entry, providing a sense of achievement and immediate value to the project.
- **Community Engagement:** Participating in community discussions, attending workshops, and interacting with other members are crucial for New Contributors. This helps them build relationships and gain a deeper understanding of the community dynamics and project needs.

What Can Be Done to Stand Out

New Contributors can distinguish themselves by:

- **Proactivity:** Taking initiative to seek out tasks, ask questions, and submit work regularly.
- **Quality Contributions:** Ensuring that even small contributions are of high quality, well-documented, and adhere to the project's standards.
- **Active Participation:** Being active in community forums, workshops, and events to show commitment and build a network within the community.

Quantifiable Measures for Progression

- **Number of Contributions:** Completing a predefined number of tasks successfully, such as five bug fixes or documentation updates.
- **Community Involvement:** Actively participating in a certain number of community events or discussion threads.
- **Feedback from Peers or Mentors:** Receiving positive feedback on contributions and community engagement, which could be tracked through a mentorship program or community review system.

Support and Resources Available

- **Mentorship Programs:** Pairing with experienced contributors who provide guidance, answer questions, and help navigate the first contributions.
 - **Educational Materials:** Access to a curated list of resources specifically designed for new entrants, including tutorials on Cardano's technology, coding standards, and contribution procedures.
 - **Community Forums and Workshops:** Opportunities to learn from and interact with other community members, which are essential for building confidence and understanding the collaborative nature of open source projects.
-

3.2 Committer

Who They Are

Committers are contributors who have moved beyond the initial phase of learning and contributing minor fixes or documentation. They have shown reliable engagement with the project and have consistently delivered quality contributions. These individuals understand the project's codebase and community norms well and are looking to deepen their involvement.

Key Responsibilities

- **Managing Contributions:** Committers are responsible for managing more significant contributions, which could include developing new features, handling more complex bug fixes, or enhancing existing systems within the Cardano project.
- **Peer Review:** They are often involved in reviewing contributions from New Contributors, providing feedback, and helping maintain the quality of submissions.
- **Mentorship:** As they gain experience, Committers may start to mentor New Contributors, guiding them through the early stages of contributing and helping them integrate into the community.

What Can Be Done to Stand Out

Committers can distinguish themselves by:

- **Leadership in Projects:** Taking initiative to lead smaller projects or components of larger projects, demonstrating the ability to coordinate with others and drive progress.
- **Quality Assurance:** Ensuring that all contributions not only meet the technical requirements but also adhere to the best practices established by the community, thereby maintaining high standards.
- **Active Community Involvement:** Engaging more actively in community governance, discussions, and decision-making processes, contributing to the strategic direction of the project.

Quantifiable Measures for Progression

- **Project Leadership:** Successfully leading a project or significant task to completion, measured by project milestones or release targets.
- **Peer Reviews:** Completing a certain number of peer reviews or being recognized by peers for valuable feedback, enhancing the overall quality of contributions.
- **Mentorship Impact:** Effectively mentoring one or more New Contributors, as evidenced by the mentees' successful contributions and integration into the community.

Support and Resources Available

- **Advanced Training:** Access to more advanced workshops, training sessions, and possibly even conferences that can help deepen their technical skills and understanding of complex project issues.
- **Leadership Development:** Opportunities for leadership and project management training, preparing them for larger roles within the community.
- **Enhanced Access to Tools and Resources:** Greater access to development tools, testing environments, and other resources that can help them manage more significant contributions effectively.

3.3 Trusted Committer

Who They Are

Trusted Committers are highly experienced contributors who have proven their technical expertise, leadership, and commitment to the Cardano project. They are pivotal in shaping the project's direction and have a strong say in decision-making processes. Trusted Committers are recognized not just for their technical skills but also for their ability to mentor others and lead by example.

Key Responsibilities

- **Project Leadership and Oversight:** Trusted Committers take on significant responsibilities, including leading major projects or initiatives. They ensure that these projects align with the strategic goals of the Cardano ecosystem and are executed efficiently.
- **Code Review and Quality Assurance:** They play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of the project by conducting thorough reviews of significant contributions. Their expertise is vital in ensuring that the codebase remains robust, secure, and efficient.
- **Mentorship and Community Leadership:** Trusted Committers mentor both New Contributors and Committers, fostering talent and helping to maintain a strong, skilled community. They also facilitate discussions and consensus within the community, often mediating between different viewpoints.

What Can Be Done to Stand Out

Trusted Committers can excel by:

- **Driving Innovation:** Initiating and leading projects that introduce new capabilities or enhance the Cardano ecosystem's efficiency and scalability.
- **Enhancing Community Cohesion:** Actively working to strengthen the community, resolving conflicts, and ensuring a collaborative environment that welcomes diverse ideas and approaches.
- **Contributing to Governance:** Playing a significant role in governance forums, shaping policies, and making strategic decisions that affect the broader ecosystem.

Quantifiable Measures for Progression

- **Successful Project Completions:** Leading and successfully completing multiple key projects, measured by their impact on the ecosystem and user adoption.
- **Mentorship Success:** The success of mentees in progressing to higher roles within the community, reflecting effective mentorship.
- **Community Influence:** Contributions to community governance, including policy-making and strategic decision influence, as recognized by peers.

Support and Resources Available

- **Strategic Planning Resources:** Access to strategic planning sessions and tools that help in shaping the future direction of the project.
- **Advanced Technical Resources:** Availability of cutting-edge development tools, priority support, and advanced training sessions to tackle high-level challenges.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Opportunities to connect with other leaders in the blockchain space, enhancing personal development and bringing fresh insights to the Cardano ecosystem.

3.4 Core Maintainer

Who They Are

Core Maintainers are the leaders and visionaries of the Cardano project. They have a profound impact on the strategic direction and overall governance of the ecosystem. These individuals have demonstrated long-term commitment and have made significant contributions that shape the future of the project. Core Maintainers are trusted with the most critical decisions and are key to the project's sustainability and success.

Key Responsibilities

- **Strategic Leadership and Decision Making:** Core Maintainers set the strategic direction for the Cardano project and make critical decisions that affect its long-term success and alignment with its goals. They oversee major initiatives and ensure that the project remains at the forefront of technological innovation.
- **Governance and Policy Development:** They are heavily involved in developing the governance structures and policies that dictate how decisions are made and how the project evolves. This includes defining contribution standards, security protocols, and community guidelines.
- **Mentorship and Succession Planning:** Core Maintainers mentor top-tier contributors and help in developing the next generation of leaders. Succession planning is a critical aspect of their role, ensuring the project's continuity and resilience.

What Can Be Done to Stand Out

- **Innovative Leadership:** Driving the adoption of new technologies and methodologies that significantly enhance the project's capabilities and user experience.
- **Expanding Influence:** Extending the influence and reach of the Cardano ecosystem through partnerships, community engagement, and public representation.
- **Fostering an Inclusive Community Culture:** Cultivating a culture of openness, inclusivity, and cooperation that attracts diverse contributors and strengthens the community.

Quantifiable Measures for Progression

- **Impact of Strategic Initiatives:** The successful implementation of strategic initiatives that enhance the project's growth, stability, or community engagement.
- **Leadership Effectiveness:** The development and promotion of leaders within the community who continue to contribute to the project's goals.
- **Community and Ecosystem Health:** Metrics related to community growth, activity levels, and ecosystem partnerships that demonstrate the health and vibrancy of the Cardano ecosystem under their guidance.

Support and Resources Available

- **Exclusive Access to Resources:** Core Maintainers have access to top-tier resources, including advanced tools, strategic data, and exclusive industry insights that support high-level decision-making.
- **Global Networking:** Opportunities to represent Cardano at high-profile industry events, conferences, and meetings with key stakeholders, enhancing both personal and project visibility.
- **Direct Influence on Project Direction:** As part of the highest governance body, Core Maintainers directly influence the development and policy direction of the Cardano ecosystem.

4. Transition Criteria and Merit Evaluation

To ensure that the transition criteria are comprehensive, actionable, and transparent, it's crucial to establish specific, measurable, and relevant benchmarks that reflect the goals and values of the Cardano ecosystem. Here are suggested criteria that projects could evaluate when adopting this framework, broken down by each phase of the transition:

(The below are some general options for projects to consider as they evaluate transition criteria for their use case and are asked to make this transparent and documented somewhere within the project, it is recommended to ensure the OSC is aware of the evaluation criteria for Intersect projects)

General Transition Criteria

For all transitions within the Contribution Ladder, consider the following general criteria:

- **Contribution Count:** A minimum number of contributions to the project, which ensures sustained engagement.
- **Time in Role:** A mandatory period spent in the current role to ensure ample experience and exposure.
- **Community Endorsement:** Requires endorsements or recommendations from current role-holders at the next level or peers, to validate the candidate's readiness based on community interaction and contribution quality.
- **Training and Development:** Completion of required training modules or workshops relevant to their current role and the role they aspire to, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge.

Specific Transition Criteria

Each transition should have tailored criteria based on the responsibilities and expectations of the upcoming role:

New Contributor to Committer

- **Successful Task Completion:** Completion of at least 10-15 minor tasks or a combination of larger tasks approved by mentors or reviewers.
- **Skill Proficiency:** Demonstrated understanding of the basic tools and processes used within the project.
- **Active Community Participation:** Regular involvement in community forums, discussions, and events.

Committer to Trusted Committer

- **Leadership Initiatives:** Successfully leading a small project or significant tasks within a larger project.
- **Mentorship:** Demonstrated experience in mentoring at least one New Contributor, helping them successfully integrate into the project.
- **Quality Contributions:** High-quality contributions as evidenced by peer reviews and feedback, showing technical proficiency and adherence to project standards.

Trusted Committer to Core Maintainer

- **Strategic Impact:** Leading multiple high-impact projects that align with strategic goals of the Cardano ecosystem, with measurable success metrics.
- **Governance Participation:** Active participation in decision-making processes and policy development, demonstrating a deep understanding of the project's long-term vision.
- **Community Leadership:** Recognized leadership within the community, evidenced by endorsements from existing Core Maintainers and significant contributions to community growth and health.

Merit Evaluation Process

- **Peer Review:** Detail the peer review process involving evaluations by current Committers, Trusted Committers, or Core Maintainers, depending on the transition. Explain how feedback is collected and used to assess a contributor's readiness for the next level.
- **Performance Metrics:** Describe the specific metrics used to measure contributions and impact, such as the number of successful project completions, quality of code contributions, or effectiveness in community building and leadership.
- **Regular Assessment Intervals:** Specify how often evaluations occur (e.g., bi-annually or annually) and under what circumstances special reviews can be requested.

Tools and Support for Evaluation

- **Evaluation Tools:** Introduce tools or systems used to track contributions, gather feedback, and facilitate the evaluation process. This could include contribution tracking software, feedback forms, or regular performance review meetings.
- **Support for Candidates:** Outline the support available to contributors who are being evaluated for progression. This might include access to additional mentorship, training to close skill gaps, or opportunities to take on stretch assignments that demonstrate their capabilities.

Feedback and Appeals Process

- **Constructive Feedback:** Explain how contributors receive constructive feedback on their evaluations, including areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.
- **Appeals Process:** Detail the procedure for contributors to appeal their evaluation results if they believe the assessment was unfair or incorrect. Describe how appeals are reviewed and resolved to maintain trust in the evaluation process.

Continuous Improvement of Criteria

- **Review and Adjustment:** Discuss how the transition criteria and evaluation processes are regularly reviewed and updated based on feedback from the community and changes within the project or technology. This ensures that the criteria remain relevant and effective.
-

5. Supporting Programs and Resources

These resources are either currently available or can be provided by the Open Source Committee, the Open Source Office, or the projects themselves, depending on demand. If not already implemented, the provision of these resources will be considered based on the needs and feedback of the community. This approach ensures that the support structure remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving requirements of contributors within the Cardano ecosystem.

Mentorship and Development Programs

- **Mentorship Programs:** Access to guidance from experienced community members to help set professional goals and improve technical skills.
- **Peer Mentoring:** Opportunities for contributors to engage in peer support, sharing knowledge and solving problems collaboratively.

Educational Resources

- **Online Courses:** A range of courses from beginner to advanced levels to enhance understanding of blockchain and Cardano-specific technologies.
- **Workshops and Certification:** Hands-on workshops and certification programs to provide practical experiences and recognized qualifications.

Tools and Technical Resources

- **Development Tools:** Access to advanced tools and software essential for effective contribution to projects.
- **Resource Library:** Comprehensive documentation, code repositories, and project management tools available for efficient project management.

Community Engagement and Networking

- **Meetups and Conferences:** Regular community meetups and annual conferences for networking, learning, and community building.
- **Special Interest Groups:** Opportunities to join groups focusing on specific technological areas such as security, decentralization, or user experience.

Well-being and Recognition

- **Well-being Initiatives:** Programs that support the physical and mental health of contributors, promoting a healthy work-life balance.
- **Recognition Programs:** Regular recognition of contributions through awards, acknowledgments, and features in community updates.

Feedback Mechanisms

- **Feedback Channels:** Dedicated channels for contributors to provide feedback on support programs.
 - **Program Reviews:** Regular review and update of support programs based on contributor feedback to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
-

6. Governance and Role Integration

Overview of the OSC Governance Policy

The governance policy of the Open Source Committee (OSC) establishes the foundational rules and procedures for decision-making within the projects managed by Intersect. The OSC acts as the key arbiter of governance, overseeing and ensuring that all processes align with the broader goals of transparency, quality, sustainability, and community involvement. Governance is generally consensus-seeking, aimed at making decisions that reflect the collective agreement of involved stakeholders. When consensus cannot be reached, structured escalation methods, including formal voting and committee reviews, are employed to resolve issues.

Role of the OSC as Arbiters of Governance

The OSC plays a crucial role in arbitrating governance across Intersect initiatives. It provides strategic direction, evaluates the output of working groups, and manages overarching policies that affect multiple projects within the ecosystem. As the highest governance body within this framework, the OSC ensures that the governance practices across all projects remain consistent with the established standards and adapt as necessary to meet evolving challenges and opportunities.

Governance Policy: [Governance Policy | Open Source Committee](#)

Integration of Contribution Ladder Roles into Project-Level Decision-Making

The roles defined within the Contribution Ladder are intricately tied into the governance framework at various levels of project decision-making:

- **New Contributors** are introduced to the governance framework and encouraged to participate in community discussions and feedback mechanisms. This early involvement helps them understand the decision-making process and their potential impact within the project.
- **Committers** take on more significant roles by engaging in project-level governance tasks such as proposing changes, participating in peer reviews, and contributing to policy discussions. Their involvement is crucial in implementing governance policies at the project level.
- **Trusted Committers** are deeply involved in the governance process, often holding positions that allow them to shape project policies and make strategic decisions. They may also serve on various committees or working groups that directly influence governance at the project and organizational levels.
- **Core Maintainers** have the most substantial role in governance, often serving as leaders within project management committees or similar bodies. They make high-level strategic decisions that not only affect their specific projects but also align with the broader governance policies set by the OSC. They ensure that project goals are in sync with organizational objectives and compliance with OSC directives.

Continuous Improvement and Feedback Integration

The governance framework is designed to be dynamic, incorporating continuous feedback from contributors at all levels to refine and adapt governance practices. Regular assessments and revisions of policies ensure that governance remains effective and responsive to the needs of the community and the evolving technological landscape.

By integrating the Contribution Ladder roles into this comprehensive governance framework, the Cardano ecosystem ensures that all contributors have clear pathways to influence and participate in decision-making processes. This structured approach helps maintain the integrity, effectiveness, and sustainability of project governance under the oversight of the OSC, fostering a robust, collaborative, and innovative open-source community.