

I interviewed 4 project leads and 4 newcomers between 01/2016-02/2016. The interview took about 20- 35 minutes either at the Code for SF Hack Night or on the phone.

- Jaoyi

Goals

- To identify needs from both the project teams and new members in order to create better new member onboarding processes

Findings

Needs of the project teams (n=5)

- **Visions.** A knowledgeable person, possibly a project lead, to guide the direction of the project and to provide feedback.
- **Technical evaluation capabilities.** A senior technical person that is able to evaluate different technical approaches and possibilities of the project.
- **Project or project management.** A scrum master to define a collaboration pattern that works among team members (e.g. where and when to meet), to coordinate, and to facilitate communication.
- **Data access.** The team needs to have access to the data and relevant resources.
- **Thorough background research** on existing work.
 - To avoid double effort and potential conflict of interests
 - To adopt the same solutions or use the same code base
- **A well-defined problem & a clear mission statement & an impact statement**
 - Without these, projects can lose focus, have a hard time pitching the project, or onboard newcomers.
- **A consensus on target users.**
 - Without target users, it is harder for the project team to decide on the project direction and the UI.
- **Solutions.**
 - Teams ultimately need to have a clear sense of what the solution looks like. When it comes to software projects, this is the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), which helps teams prioritize and focus on what's truly important
- **A structured newcomer-onboarding process** both online and during hack night.
 - Teams generally deal with newcomers as they show up. Some seem overwhelmed and not sure if they can spare time to help newcomers.
 - It helps with a team has a structured newcomer-onboarding process both online and during hack night.
- **Better work vs. talk balance.** They want to be able to put in time for focus work, rather than talking for the entire night.
- **Proactive new members.** Due to limited time, project teams expect newcomers to be more proactive- be able to figure out a task for themselves, pick up the tasks they are assigned to, or dive into the code on their own.
- **Knowledge of the team members' skillsets.** So that they have a better idea of the team's collective potentials.
- **Some way to track progress.** So that they can achieve goals and help each other out when a subgroup is falling behind.

- **Some way to communicate and tackle problems together.** Sometimes one can get stuck, and others feedback help solve the difficult bug or problem.
- **Aligned goals.** Members' goals need to align with the project teams' goals.
- **More efficient hack night structure.** Better separation of the parts that are targeting newcomers (e.g. pitch) and let existing team members to go work on their projects. Or leave some nights for hack only.
- **Better separation of 'work' and 'networking' in terms of both time and space.**
- **Better instructions on new member policy.** Is it ok to not take new members? What if someone wants to just practice coding ?

Needs of the newcomers (n=9)

- **A list of project teams with clearly-defined problems and mission statements.**
- **Passion.** Newcomers need to feel excited about the project
- **Available roles with descriptions of skills and time commitment** from different teams. Newcomers want to know how they can participate with the "available time" and "skills" they have.
- **Know who to talk to.** Newcomers find it harder to approach well-established projects that are already up and running.
- **Know how they fit in.** They are not sure how they can fit in an existing team.
- **Clear indication when a team does not want to be disturbed.** Newcomers sometimes feel hesitant to approach a team that is very focused on their project.
- **A way to improve their skills.** A large percentage of people come here hoping to improve their coding skills.
- **A way to achieve their goals.** Most newcomers come with goals in mind (e.g. practice coding, helping the community, meeting people). The teams need to provide ways for the to achieve that.
- **A mentor system.** For inexperienced new members, some stated that an experienced mentor would help.
- **Be able to reach out to project teams w/o a Slack account.** Newcomers need an easy way to connect with the project team outside of Slack. Some did not like the extra step of setting up slacks.
- **Manageable tasks.** For experienced coders, they need to know what stacks the project teams are using. For Inexperienced coders, they may not have the ability to dive in and start contributing. They need to work on a smaller piece of the project, and potentially receive assistance from more experienced coders.
- **Better new-user orientation.** New members want to know which team they can fit in.
- **Be able to see results** on what they work on, or from other groups.

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