Tips for Successful Contributions

THE **LINUX** FOUNDATION

Identify Maintainers, Their Work and Methods

- There are projects that have one maintainer (perhaps the benevolent dictator) or subsystem maintainers (e.g. the Linux kernel community)

- The maintainers have to:

  - Understand and review all submissions
  - Make sure they add something other than complication and do not introduce bugs
  - Make sure they don't conflict with other patches
  - Complete their work in a timely manner
  - Do everything respectfully

- Have a good relationship with relevant maintainers; be respectful and patient; offer help reviewing other contributors' submissions, debugging new features or fixing bugs

Get Early Input and Work In the Open

- As a new member of the community you probably don't know the history - your bright new idea might actually be an old one (discussed and rejected/brought to life and petered out)

- This doesn't mean your idea is a bad one; maybe it couldn't have been done in the past, but is feasible now as software and hardware evolved

- Never just introduce an idea and suggest someone else do it

- Propose your ideas to the community before you go too far with it; get opinions, suggestions and input; take advantage of institutional memory

- If you are uncomfortable having other people look at your work often, OSS is not for you!

Contribute Incremental Bits, Not Large Code Dumps

- Large code dumps overload maintainers and mailing lists, and make it difficult to process the individual parts

- Code contributions are best digested in small, unit-sized bites; for example, you may have a separate patch for each file you are modifying (sequential patches)

- It is possible that your functionality will not work until all patches are included - that's fine

Leave Your Ego at the Door: Don't Be Thin-Skinned

- OSS projects tend to attract some rather interesting characters, some of them can be quite irritating, even offensive

- If that's the case, rely on community members with long history to try and calm things down and resolve issues (occasionally, contributors may be purged from a project); don't feed the trolls

- When making criticism or engaging in any discussion thread, be polite and respect other people opinions; maybe your approach is not the best one

- Learn when to yield if you want to get code upstream

Do Not Discriminate or Offend

- Do not engage in behaviors that involve discrimination and offensive conduct with respect to:

    - Race

    - Sex

    - Sexual preferences

    - Religion

    - National origin

    - Politics

    - etc.

- People from rather far sides of the spectrum often work together successfully

Be Patient, Develop Long-Term Relationships, Be Helpful

- Most projects do not appreciate drive by, one-time contributors, and look for long-term maintenance

- Sometimes good code gets rejected, unless someone offers long-term commitment (think about the future when doing submissions)

- Develop meaningful relationships in the community by offering help in areas that are not directly related to your main interests

- Be viewed as a good citizen and real member of the community, not just someone exploiting it; this is particularly important if you are contributing as part of a commercial organization