

LAB WEBSITE TEMPLATE

An easy, automatic, flexible website template for labs






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INTRODUCTION






Research laboratories need a professional and up-to-date website to showcase their work, attract collaborators, and establish a strong online presence, but developing and maintaining such a website can be challenging and time consuming. We present **Lab Website Template**, an open-source tool designed for the unique needs of labs. It **automates citation generation, repo configuration, and anything else it can**, allowing labs to focus more on research and less on web development and grunt work.

APPROACH

We spent significant time in *pre-release* (< v1.0), where we gathered observations and direct feedback that shaped our approach. **Some things we noticed:**

-  The most **common pain points were about the same things** (*Zipf's law*), like repo setup and configuring key options.
-  **Labs can't waste time** on basic tasks or low-level details, but still need a way to customize things when necessary.
-  Users want to see that software is **actively maintained**, greatly comforted and sold by good support.

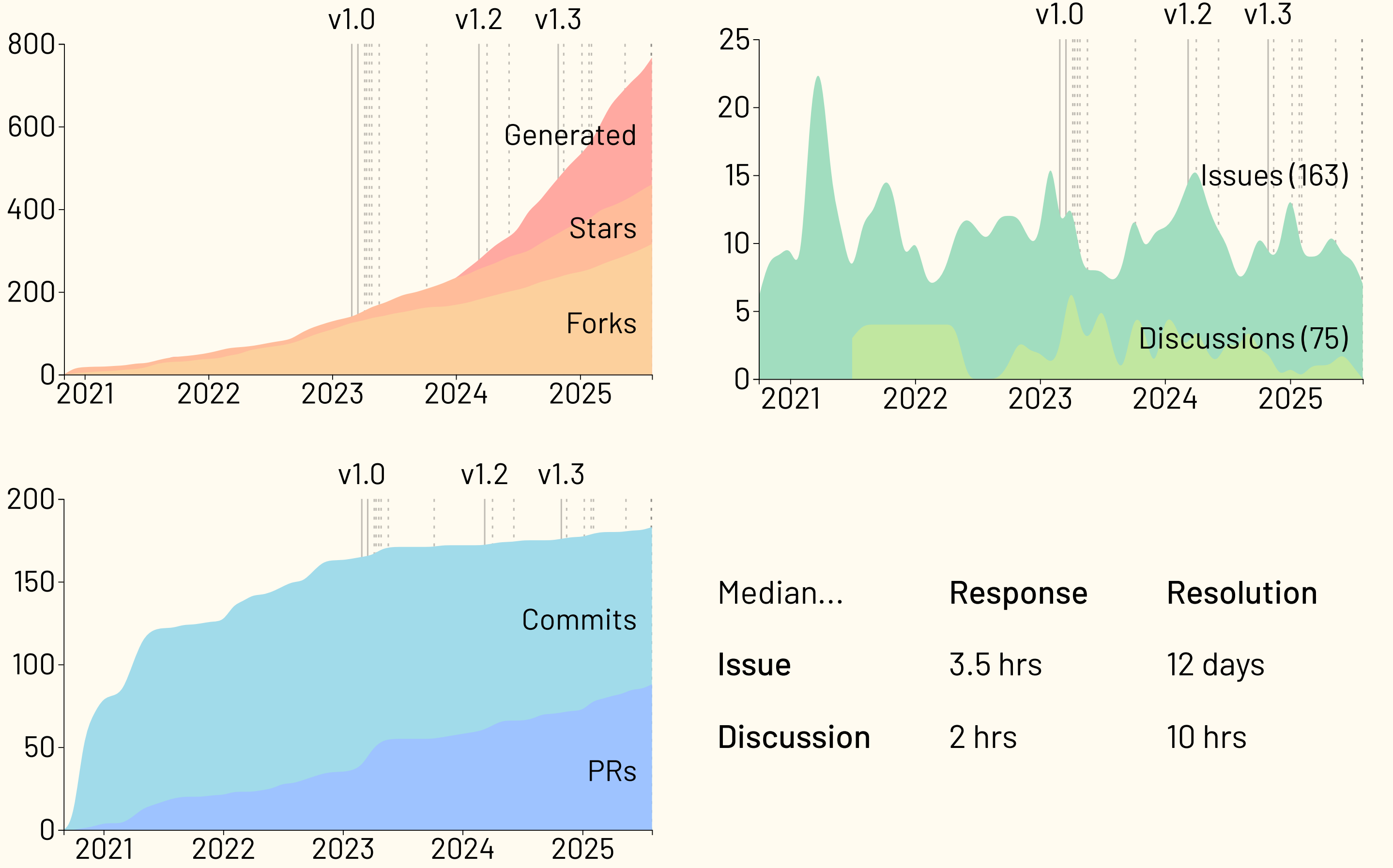
Some philosophies we adopted to address these needs:

-  **Doing is better than instructing.** Exhaustive experimentation with GitHub Actions and scripting showed we could automate much more setup/config/etc. than we thought.
-  **Don't let issues languish.** Respond quickly and discuss pros/cons of suggestions to make users feel heard, even if actual resolution takes longer.
-  **Keep it simple and focused.** Diligently consider all feedback, but also don't accept every suggestion at face value to avoid feature/config bloat (*inner-platform effect*).
-  **Documentation is essential.** Code/comments are not enough. Investing time in a full GitBook suite with examples, guides, diagrams, search, etc. lets users help themselves for common issues, saving us time for more novel work.
-  **Cleanly structure content.** Try to separate "under-the-hood content" from "user content" so users can focus on just what's important.

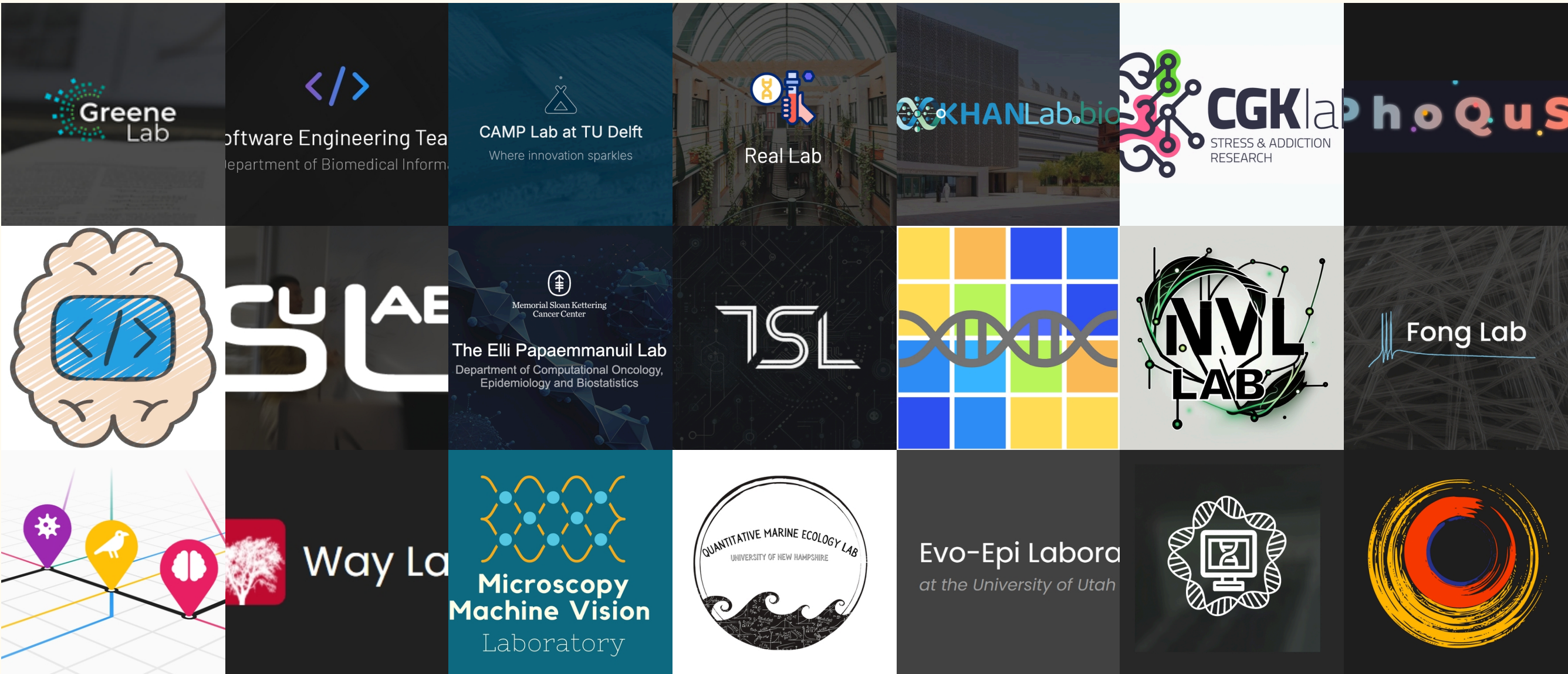
We feel our approach benefited our tool and could benefit other research software as well.

METHODS

OUTCOME



The success of this approach is evidenced by the template's widespread adoption, with considerable activity on GitHub and a growing gallery of active labs using it.



The template has likely saved a great deal of time and money for research labs and other groups alike. This work reflects not just a powerful tool, but an evolving community resource that effectively meets the needs of its users.

The next evolution of this template will seek to offer even more conveniences, simplicity, robustness, and flexibility. We will build it with a more modern and maintained site generator with type safety. We will aim to make upgrading your template version an automatic process, and make citations even more seamless to include.



Template home

