

# Taxonomy of open value exchanges

Defining value for contributors & users

## Project DNA

This project attempts to unpack, operationalize, and share the process of defining value exchanges with contributors and users in open projects. It draws on research from Mozilla's Open Innovation team, case studies in organizational learning and psychology, and Mozilla's experiences with working open in technical and non-technical communities.

The premise of this work is that “enhancing value exchanges” - one of the community interactions defined by Mozilla's research - is actually a meta-exchange present in all of the others. As such, it deserves more attention and examples of use.

Community interactions and value exchanges intersect with multiple parts of the [Open Leadership Framework](#), especially ***empowering for participation & inclusion***.

## Community interactions

Mozilla's community interactions are described in [this blog post](#). They are summarized below:

- ***Gifting*** - giving away something of value for others to use and adapt.
- ***Creating together*** - inviting others to contribute to a set objective or project.
- ***Soliciting ideas*** - asking a question or giving a challenge to either specific communities or “the crowd,” a.k.a. “crowdsourcing” or “crowdstorming.”
- ***Learning through use*** - studying usage patterns, and offering subsequent enhancements of products and services.
- ***Enhancing value exchanges*** - improving the value of interactions between project organizers, contributors, and users.
- ***Networking common interests*** - building mutually-reinforcing commercial relationships with the power to attract a passionate community.

## Value exchange braindump

### Questions to ask

The question that should follow each instance of a community interaction like those listed above goes something like this: in exchange for what?

Why does a project, organization, or community gift its content and information to others? They gift their project in exchange for what?

Why does a project invest in an open project management model to create something together with contributors? They solicit contributions in exchange for what?

Why does a project need to solicit ideas from contributors or users? What does it gain from others participation and in exchange for what?

What does a project want to learn through contributors and users' use of its product or service? They collect data and feedback in exchange for what?

Why does a project need to enhance its value exchanges? How does contributor and user feedback contribute to improving exchanges and in exchange for what?

What does a project gain by networking contributors and users with others who share an affinity, interest, or passion? Why connect these people, projects, and communities and in exchange for what?

## Why do value exchanges matter?

The clarity, transparency, and accountability of a value exchange are just as important as the exchange itself.

It's just as important that a contributor or user understand and be able to trust the value exchange in an open community interaction as it is that they understand the licensing at work in their contribution or use. A contributor or user expecting one thing and then getting something else or nothing else in exchange for their work or time will not trust the project, product, or service and is therefore unlikely to use it again, to contribute to it again, or to speak positively about it in other communities.

Having clear, dependable value exchanges defined for particular kinds of contributions and use cases can help an open project differentiate itself from muddier, messier, less mature and dependable projects in the same space. Being accountable to contributors and users by delivering on the promised value exchanges, however low- or high-cost they might be, also helps a project, organization, or community avoid the appearance of "open-washing" or being "fauxpen."

## Types of value exchanges

### Agency/empowerment

Contributors and users participate in return for ownership of a project and having a say in its governance, content sharing, and information sharing.

## Altruism

Contributors and users participate because they want to do good for the sake of doing good.

## Coaching

Contributors participate in return for time-bound guidance on using specific means to achieve specific ends. A coach tells them what to do and helps them do it.

## Compensation

Contributors and users participate in return for some kind of fiscal reward, such as a gift certificate.

## Delegation/promotion

Contributors participate in return for being given more responsibility for a project.

## Early access

Contributors and users participate in return for being able to use and test something of use to them before it's openly available to the public.

## Free/discounted access

Contributors and users participate in return for being able to use something for free or at a discounted rate while others pay for the same product or service.

## Feedback

Contributors participate in return for feedback on their work that helps them improve it.

## In-kind contributions

Contributors participate in return for others contributing back to their own projects or other projects they work on in the open ecosystem.

## Introductions/networking

Contributors participate in return for being introduced to and networked with others in the open ecosystem who share their affinities, interests, and passions and can help them reach their goals in the space.

## Membership/freemium models

Contributors participate in return for access to parts of a project that aren't freely available to the public.

## Mentorship

Contributors participate in return for long-term, open-ended, reflective guidance in setting and achieving their goals in the space.

## On-boarding

Contributors participate in return for being oriented to ways of being and working in a project, organization, or community in the open ecosystem.

## Pay it forward

Contributors participate in return for project leads contributing to or somehow supporting other projects, not necessarily the contributors' own.

## Professional advice

Contributors participate in return for 1:1s and office hours focused on professional advice for advancing their careers and skill sets.

## Professional development

Contributors participate in return for regular learning opportunities related to the work of the project, organization, or community.

## Public acknowledgement/recognition

Contributors participate in return for public recognition of their work.

## Reach

Contributors understand how many users they are likely to impact while working on a particular project.

## Reputation/social capital

Contributors and users participate in return for the reputation or social capital associated with a project, organization, or community or its brand.

## Resourcing

Contributors' content gets attention from design and production staffers or other volunteers, returning to them a more accessible and polished version of their work.

## Special consideration/opportunities

Contributors participate in return for special consideration for opportunities like stipended travel to conferences or special events or in return for things like fast-tracked interviews at organizations that run open projects.

## Storytelling

Contributors share specialized learning or knowledge in return for it being captured as a “durable asset” like a blog post, chapter, interview, podcast, or video.

## Swag

Contributors and users participate in return for branded merchandise (or access to make templates) they can use to signal their association with the work such as clothing, patches, badges, pins, stickers, or mugs.

## Avoid dishonest descriptions of value exchanges

The organizer of an open project and its core team are sometimes the main contributors and sustainers of a project, organization, or community. Not every project uses every kind of community interaction, nor does it offer every kind of value exchange.

The key thing is to use community interactions and value exchanges that you can be trusted to transact.

For example, if you do not have time to coach, mentor, on-board, or otherwise support a contributor, don't offer those value exchanges in exchange for creating content together. If you cannot introduce a contributor to a key player in the open ecosystem who consults on several in similar projects, don't pretend that you can.

Offer what you can be held accountable to deliver; set up community interactions you can manage within the scope of your work.

## Avoid inequitable value exchanges

Similarly, avoid offering inequitable value exchanges. For example, don't ask contributors to work on key elements of your project and then reward them with a laptop sticker (swag) and thanks for the altruism.

If you have nothing to offer in terms of concrete compensation, look for other ways to equitably reward people who make major contributions to your project. Consider delegating leadership positions to them or contributing in-kind back to a different project they manage or contribute to in the open ecosystem.

## Research what works best for your community

The best way to find out what seems equitable or inequitable to your contributors and users is to ask them. Think about preparing a kind of inventory or survey you could use to ask questions like these:

- What would you like to get from our project in return for contributing X?
- What benefit would you need from us in return for taking on more responsibility or leadership for X in our project, organization, or community?
- Which of these benefits seems like an equitable or fair way to compensate a contribution like X?

Once you complete a few rounds of research like that, you should be able to write honest descriptions of the community interactions you'd like to see in your project and the value exchanges you can offer people who undertake them. It's more important to be honest and fair than it is to promise things you can't deliver.

There will almost always be elements of altruism and passion in the contributions you receive and the users your work attracts; think about what else you can give community members that is concrete, deliverable, and meaningful in an open context.