Diversity in Open Source Software

Diversity and OSS

- The word "**Open**" that appears in OSS might be taken to indicate a friendly, welcoming environment; unfortunately, unless a proper atmosphere permeates a project, this may be a false promise

- **Diversity** in an OSS project can mean many different things:
  - Race and national origin
  - Sex and gender identity issues
  - Geographical/regional issues (including both language and cultural differences)
  - Religious beliefs and political views
  - Acceptance of different opinions and methods about how the project should take shape and develop in the future

- While it is just *the right thing to do* to accept contributors and reviewers from divergent backgrounds, diversity also leads to a better project due to unleashing more sources of new ideas, approaches, and contribution

Sex and Gender Identity

- In general, software engineering, system administration, and IT have been dominated by men

- Incidents of unwelcome behavior have long been a problem at some conferences
  - The Linux Foundation staff has very stringent policies regarding avoiding and dealing with any improper behavior

- Conference speakers should avoid marketing with sexual pictures, jokes and innuendos, and should try to use sex-neutral terms and pronouns, etc.

- Besides the fact that discrimination is wrong, it also shrinks the potential pool of contributors and users

- Any misogynistic and/or homophobic statements in mailing lists, discussion groups, chats, etc., should be promptly beaten down and criticized; don't contribute if a community accepts demeaning or unwelcoming behavior

Race, National Origin, Geography and Language

- Discrimination based on race and national origin is obviously wrong but is rarely explicit

- Geographical and language differences can lead to misunderstandings and insults
  - The vast majority of open source projects are primarily done in English and developers tend to have at least a working familiarity with it, but that is quite different than everyone being on the same page
  - Even among English speakers, words can have quite different meanings and usage in various countries
  - We can choose our words with sufficient care, try to be inoffensive and clear (e.g. be careful when using idioms and metaphors)

- Localization/internationalization - providing translated documents, using standard methods to provide help and error messages in multiple languages

Tone and Criticism

- Another aspect is tone; in some cultures cursing is rather routine and coarse and not offensive in the way it is in others

- It is important how criticism is offered; adopting the proper criticism methods is a two way street
  - Those used to a very direct approach should continue to do so but should avoid unnecessary nastiness
  - Those not used to such an approach need to develop a thicker skin and pay attention to the content as much as possible, not the wrapping it comes in

- The goal is to promote healthy and rapid development from as large a pool of contributors and users as possible, not just to behave nicely because it is good manners

Religion and Politics

- Discussion of religion is generally inappropriate (denigration of anyone's beliefs and proselytizing in favor of any religion) and has nothing to do with either technical or governance aspects of an open source project

- The same is true with political opinions extraneous to the project (e.g. national or international affairs)

- OSS is built on the concept of freely available intellectual product; once freedom is in the air, it becomes hard to avoid political discussions

- Once a discussion with political aspects veers away from direct bearing on the project it should be moved into other channels

- One should not dissuade anyone from participating in a project based on their political or religious views - this limits the potential pool of contributors and hurts a project

Differences of Opinion

- Collaboration involves:
    - Dividing work among more than one group or individual, to be merged later
    - Reviewing it, accepting as is, sending back for revisions, or changing and sending further along
    - Competition between differing approaches
- Besides the usual advice about being civil and respectful, it is also very important to keep in mind that different people do things in different ways
    - Accept someone else's contribution that has the same effect as yours even if you think yours is better; if you do not prevail in the discussions of which approach to merge, you may just have to accept your less desired outcome
    - Or you can think more of things your approach can take care of the other cannot and add increased functionality and try again
- With more debate and more opinions, often a better project can be built