



Anatomy of an open internship program: How we run Outreachy

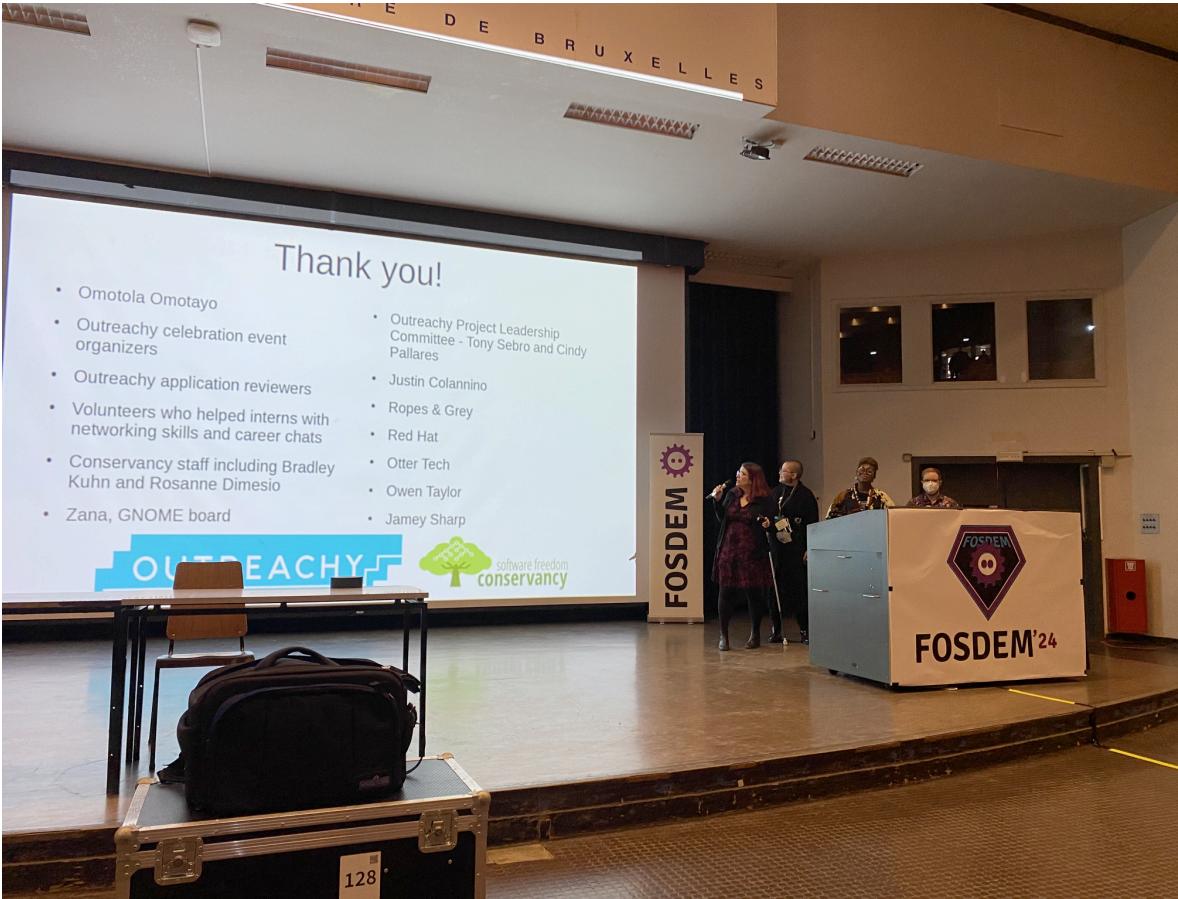
Anna e só (they/them), lead Outreachy organizer

♥ Outreachy is...



A Software Freedom Conservancy initiative

♥ Outreachy is...



A collective effort! (CC BY-SA Justin W. Wheeler)

Out of scope

Program history

-  **Watch:** Joint FOSDEM 2024 keynote: "[Outreachy: 1,000 interns](#)";
-  **Watch:** Marina Zhurakhinskaya's talk "[Outreach Program for Women: Lessons in collaboration](#)".

Some program details

-  **Watch:** [Initial applications] Our [livestream "Let's talk about initial applications"](#);
-  **Watch:** [Mentoring] Our [coffee chats with Outreachy mentors](#);
-  **Watch:** [Mentoring] Our [livestream series for mentoring communities](#);
-  **Watch:** [Website dev] Sage Sharp's talk "[Herding cats with Django](#)".

Views of Outreachy

External view

- Increasing diversity in FOSS;
- Offering 3-month internships;
- Paying a U\$7,000 stipend.

Internal view

- Running two cohorts a year;
- Managing both cohorts in parallel;
- Supporting thousands every year.

♥ We welcome an average of 30 mentoring organizations, 150 mentors, 60 coordinators, 5,000 applicants, and 80 interns per year.

Phases of Outreachy

What constitutes a program cycle?

- 1 month of preparation — determining cohort dates; reaching out to volunteers, communities, sponsors;
- 3 months of public "high traffic" processes: call for communities and projects; initial applications; contribution period; final applications; intern selection.
- 3 to 4 months of internships (including possible extensions).



Point of view: Applicants

1. Initial application

- i. Answering essay and eligibility questions

2. Contribution period

- i. Picking communities
- ii. Submitting & recording contributions

3. Final application

- i. Creating a project timeline
- ii. Answering community-specific questions
 - a. Following community-specific procedures



Point of view: Applicants

4. Internship period

- i. Signing an intern agreement
- ii. Submitting tax forms and payment information
- iii. Working with mentors, coordinators and their community!
- iv. Submitting feedback (n = 4)
- v. Writing blog posts (n = 6)
- vi. Participating in intern chats (n = 7)



Point of view: Participating communities

- 1. Call for participation**
 - i. Finding sponsorship leads
 - ii. Assessing mentorship capacity
- 2. Call for projects**
 - i. Submitting project proposals
- 3. Contribution period**
 - i. Interacting with applicants
 - ii. Reviewing and approving contributions
- 4. Intern selection**
 - i. Evaluating final applications
 - ii. Ranking applicants



Point of view: Participating communities

5. Internship period

- i. Signing a mentor agreement
- ii. Guiding and supporting our interns
- iii. Keeping track of our interns' public work
- iv. Submitting feedback (n = 4)
- v. Participating in intern chats (n = 6)
- vi. Authorizing stipend payments (n = 2)



Point of view: Program organizers

- 1. Call for initial applications**
 - i. Reviewing initial applications
- 2. Call for participation**
 - i. Vetting new communities
 - ii. Reaching out to past communities
- 3. Call for projects**
 - i. Reviewing projects
- 4. Contribution period**
 - i. Following up with sponsorship leads
- 5. Intern selection**
 - i. Reviewing and mediating selections

Point of view: Program organizers

6. Internship period

- i. Handling intern and mentor agreements
- ii. Monitoring and checking in with interns, mentors, coordinators 

 - a. Mediating issues and conflicts
 - b. Processing internship extensions

- iii. Mediating bi-weekly assignments (n = 7)
- iv. Facilitating bi-weekly intern chats (n = 7)
- v. Reviewing feedback submissions (n = 4)
- vi. Handling stipend payment authorizations 



But what makes Outreachy so special?



Ingredient #1: A systemic approach

“Outreachy provides internships to people subject to systemic bias and impacted by underrepresentation in the technical industry where they are living.”

“Outreachy provides internships to people subject to systemic bias and impacted by underrepresentation in the technical industry where they are living.”



Because our lives are **complex**

- Marginalization intersects and interweaves in many different ways;
- We focus on the *structural manifestations* of marginalization — the impact on our applicants' lives.

 **Outreachy internship projects include more than just programming!**



Because open source is also complex

- FOSS is much more than just programming!
- We train software engineers and architects, designers, community managers, security researchers, technical writers, scientists...



Ingredient #2: A structured intro to FOSS



A built-in exposition

- A structured contribution period with **beginner-friendly tasks**;
- Recording contributions is **mandatory** to move forward;
- Collaboration, not competition — **applicants are encouraged to help each other**.

 **We offer**

- Thematic bi-weekly assignments for mentors and interns;
- Thematic bi-weekly intern chats with interns, mentors, coordinators, and alums.

We tackle

- Working remotely and “in the open”;
- Struggles and the fear of failure;
- Open source conferences;
- Careers in open source;
- Informal chats with industry peers;
- Continuation of their journey in open source.

 **Paradigm shift: From passive usage to becoming an active agent of change!**



Ingredient #3: A human-centered design



We strive for personal growth over project completion

Mentors have heard us say "Outreachy is more like a fellowship" several times. Promoting it as an internship program, however, is still important to encourage newcomers to give it a try!

We facilitate success

- Full-time effort = putting in 30 hours/week;
- Internships have a built-in 1-week buffer — interns are required to work 12 out of the 13 weeks of the internship;
- We can arrange internship extensions of up to 5 weeks — to be used in the occurrence of emergencies or other life circumstances.
 - **We don't extend internships for the sole purpose of completing an internship project.**



Ingredient #4: A high-touch philosophy

We monitor and mediate

- Mentors and interns go through 4 cycles of evaluation (informally known as Feedback #1, #2, #3, and #4);
- Organizers mediate and facilitate conversations with and between mentors and mentees when issues arise.



Signs of trouble

- Missing meetings or other established contact points;
- No opportunities for private 1:1 communications;
- No opening to share struggles and work together towards a solution;
- No interest in introducing the intern to other community members;
- No interest in talking about career development or goals.

When does an internship fail?

- When interns are treated as mere independent contractors, and they aren't offered opportunities to learn and grow;
- When we witness a dramatic and significant decrease in communications between an intern and their mentors;
- When we notice a frequent and combative refusal to listen and incorporate feedback.



Ingredient #5: A deep meta understanding of the FOSS ecosystem

 **We have 15+ years of experience in supporting FOSS communities**

- We facilitate structural changes in the onboarding of new community members;
- We've developed a deep meta understanding of what a good mentorship entails.



We know that a good mentorship initiative...

- ... welcomes the perspective of newcomers, and recognizes that not everything may seem "obvious" from the start;
- ... transforms once restricted communal knowledge into something tangible, trackable, and shareable;
- ... creates, maintains, and promotes opportunities for growth — including a path to maintainership and leadership.

♥ So we're laying the groundwork to create an Open Mentorship Initiative—we will...

- ... document open mentorship practices across FOSS communities;
- ... create an Open Mentorship Handbook;
- ... help communities become "Outreachy ready";
- ... mentor mentors!
- First discussions to take place at DISC Unconference 2025 — stay tuned!
- Want to be part of it? Let's talk!

We love what we do

- All program organizers have mentored someone and/or been mentored in Outreachy or similar programs.
 - I'm a proud alum of Outreachy itself (December 2017 cohort with Wikimedia), Mozilla Open Leaders (Cohort 6), Google Season of Docs (August 2019 cohort with Open Collective) and Infuse (August 2024 cohort). 
- We believe that everyone should have an opportunity to actively participate in the development of FOSS, regardless of their background.



Our constraints



Constraint: Mentorship capacity

- Mentors may be laid off, burn out, change companies, focus, or careers;
- Mentors may not have the capacity to mentor prospect mentors;
- Mentoring communities may struggle to find successors.



Constraint: Program funding

- We're struggling to find funding for our core activities;
- Our ability to fund the participation of mentoring communities through our Outreachy general fund has decreased.

 Our ongoing struggle to find funding is a serious threat to our program.

An existential threat.

💔 If you'd like more insight into our funding situation, please read our blog post:

 **Outreachy needs your help!**

💔 **And talking about the elephant in the room—hostility towards programs like ours is on the rise.**



Our ceiling, or a provocation

 **I keep hearing talks about the “greying open source community”, and how FOSS struggles to engage with us, younger generations, to take on the work of those who came before us.**

 Well, *Outreachy* brings incredible young people to FOSS every year, but is FOSS supporting the permanence of my generation?

 **Where is the path to help us climb to leadership and/or maintainership?**

✨ **80% of Outreachy alumni continue to be involved with open source after their internship at some capacity (paid or volunteer).**

♥ Outreachy interns are everywhere!



(CC BY Outreachy)

 **Outreachy is a hidden dependency of the free software ecosystem.**

 **Outreachy is living proof that the Global Majority and younger generations are *very* enthusiastic about FOSS!**



**But free software culture is still homogeneous
and Global North-centered.**

★ **How much of the perceived lack of younger contributors isn't a rejection of diversity?**

★ How much of the perceived lack of younger contributors isn't a reflection of structural failures within FOSS?

 **Places that are too distant to reach. Visas that were denied. Required funds we can't spend. Recognition we don't get — even though we deserve it.**

✨ The new generation of FOSS leaders, contributors, and activists is already here.

♥ Outreachy has trained us.

 **FOSS communities need to stop reaching for mirrors. Bring us ladders. *Make room.***

♥ Help us continue our phenomenal work:

 Sponsor Outreachy!



Follow Outreachy

-  Our website: outreachy.org
-  In the fediverse: @outreachy@hachyderm.io

♥ Let's continue this conversation!

👋 Talk to me...

- ➡ ... in the hallways;
- ➡ ... in the fediverse: @anna@friend.camp;
- ➡ Old-fashioned? Send me an email:
anna@outreachy.org .