

“accomplished” KDE contributors are members, the KDE e.V.’s opinion weighs rather heavy. Also, it is the host of the annual Academy conference, which for most contributors is the only chance to meet and discuss things in person. It also raises funds, mostly donations and membership fees of sponsors, and thus has the ability to fund (or not fund, in very rare cases) developer activities such as sprints or targeted meetings. Still, the budget the organization spends annually is surprisingly small compared to the effects created by it. The developer meetings are where most of the coordination takes place, which does give the membership a lever. Still, the initiative of groups of contributors gets most things done, not a statement at the general assembly.

Akademy has become an institution that is well-known even outside the KDE community. It is where most of the coordination that really requires in-person meetings takes place. Since neither human resources nor funds can be directly assigned to any development activity, many discussions of broader scope are saved for the conference. It has become a routine to use this annual gathering for decision-making and to only loosely coordinate in the meantime. The conference takes place quite reliably around summer, and contributors to other Free Software projects use that opportunity to coordinate with KDE. One of the decisions made during the 2007 conference was to switch to six-month release cycles, which was suggested and championed by Marc Shuttleworth of Ubuntu.

Akademy is the only global conference KDE organizes. In addition to this large meeting, many small gatherings of subgroups and sprints take place. These meetings are usually more frequent, more local, and more focused, so whereas architectural issues are debated at Academy, design issues for certain modules or applications are discussed here. Some subgroups, such as the KOffice or Akonadi developers, usually meet at three-month intervals.

This reiterative process of coordinated high- and medium-level reviews has proven to be quite effective and also provides a good understanding of the goals and next actions among the developers. Most attendees express that the annual conference gives them a boost in motivation and in the effectiveness of their development work.

The organization and structure KDE shows today is not the brain child of a group of executives who asked themselves how a Free Software project should be organized. It is the result of an iterative process of trying to find a suitable structure for the main nontechnical goals—to remain free and to ensure the longevity of the project and sustainable growth of the community. Freedom is used here not only in the sense of being able to provide the software for free and as Free Software, but also to be free of dominating influences from third parties. External parties such as companies or governmental groups are regularly present at the conferences, and the project is interested in their findings, experiences, and contributions. However, these stakeholders must be prevented from investing enough resources to be able to determine the outcome of votes in the community. This may seem paranoid, but it actually happened to other projects, and the KDE community is aware of that. So staying active and healthy as a Free Software project is directly related to protecting the freedom of the project