

Creating Rules and Conditions for the work of your community members

(excerpt from the Handbook “How to be a leader of local
community”,

developed under the project “Local Community Leaders”)

Creating Rules and Conditions for the work of your community members is very important. You should spend dedicated time and effort in creating these rules because it will be the base ground for the realization of community group goals as well for attracting successfully new community members.

Here are some of the main rules that a team of University researchers from USA¹ have listed as a result of their works:

Rule 1: Be welcoming and make it easy for the newcomers to get started

One of the first but also never-ending efforts of the community leader is to create a welcoming atmosphere for the new joining community group members. Further to it there must be not only first good impression efforts from the side of the leader and his / her initial supporters but also the creation of kind and supportive atmosphere in the group in order to foster the long-term commitment of all group members.

¹ We have listed a short version of the rules. The full 10 rules version you can find here: Sholler D, Steinmacher I, Ford D, Averick M, Hoye M, Wilson G (2019) Ten simple rules for helping newcomers become contributors to open projects. PLoS Comput Biol 15(9): e1007296. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1007296>

The leader should embrace the responsibility for creating rules and group environment that makes every newcomer familiar with the goals and other group members, as well as facilitates the possibilities for them to start contributing as quickly as possible.

The best option is to have designated members to serve as a point of contact for the newcomers as well as for contact to address any internal communication issues.

Rule 2: Help potential contributors evaluate if the project is a good fit

People could contribute to many different projects; the first and most important step in being welcoming is to help them determine whether your project is a good fit for their interests and abilities. Their decision to contribute can be related to reputation or external needs but also to a desire to learn or give back to the community. In all of these cases, the more you help newcomers understand whether this is the right project for them, the more quickly they will either start contributing or look elsewhere.

To do this, the project should explicitly state what the different types of skills required are. This information should be easily accessible and guide new members to the tasks they may handle. LibreOffice, e.g., provides a way for developers to filter available tasks by required skills and difficulty. The project should also help developers evaluate their skills, since "basic Python skills" means very different things to different people.

People have different interests and abilities. They can contribute as newcomers at many different stages, activities and needs of the community group. An important task of the leader is to help them understand how to use their abilities and resources to achieve the goals of the community group. People's decision to join the community group or any of its projects may be related to their intrinsic motivation for power, achievement or social



contacts, but also to the desire to learn something new or to contribute to the community. In all these cases, the better guidance the community leader provides them the better results and the longer commitment can be achieved. Thus, the newcomers and the community group will benefit more.

In order to successfully motivate people, the leader must have explicitly identified what different skills are needed to achieve the group's goals. For example, you may need people who speak foreign languages to make international contacts, or those with good computer literacy to be active on social media and run email marketing campaigns.

Information about what skills are needed to achieve the goals of the community group must be clearly communicated so that people can find their way around more quickly and accurately before deciding to join the group.

Rule 3: Make governance explicit

The leader should make governance rules explicit for every group member. There are two main options: 1. The leader to have final decision on the important issues and 2. To have consensus-building process in which all community group members participate.

There are other more complex models possible, but the most important thing is to make clear what decision-making rules will be applied in the group.

Rule 4: Keep knowledge up to date and findable

When joining the community group, newcomers must get familiar with the activities and goals in order to start contributing. In order to do so they must be given access to most important and relevant information about the group topics, activities and database with

information. In order to deliver quick and easy access to newcomers as well as to other community members – the best way is to use up-to-date options as Google Docs, Dropbox, etc. Being equipped with the needed information, all the group members will be more confident and oriented. The leader or other designated group members have to make sure that all information shared and provided to be accessed is relevant, up-to-date and easy to use.

Rule 5: Have and enforce a code of conduct

The good practices show that community groups should create their model of norms and acceptable behaviour. This ensures that everyone, not just newcomers, will operate in an environment that is friendly and supportive. It also sends a signal that the community has clear standards for its work.

One way to establish norms is to adopt a Code of Conduct. It is a guarantee of the standards of work in the group.

It is good practice for the Code of Conduct to be audited by an independent party (i.e. an individual who is not employed by or otherwise associated with the group / project).

In addition, the Code of Conduct should contain rules for accountability. In case of irregularities, they must be investigated in a pre-established procedure by members of the group who did not perform the activity itself.

Rule 6: Acknowledge all contributions

Fairness should be one of your main leader's principles in the community group activities. In order to be fair, you should state clearly how group members' contributions



will be acknowledged, and how they will be used. How do you plan to share and distribute information about the members' contributions, who can benefit from it? Who will be the "licensed" owner of rights for the achievement of separate group members as well as of the group achievements?

As group leader, you must plan upfront the rules for contributions acknowledgement and communicate it clearly to all group members.

Rule 7: Recognize and learn from both success and failure

As Winston Churchill said: "Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

As Community leader you should keep in mind that it is your task to keep the enthusiasm of you group members and ensure the success of the group activities.

It is a fact that we learn much more from our failures than from success, so you have to make sure that all lessons are learnt and all the group members are motivated to move forward meeting the goals. The conversations with your team members should be confidential if possible, but making the conclusions and corrective actions public is the best possible way to signal that you are serious about building the best community you can.

Example of Community group rules

Below we provide you with some basic rule you can implement in your group work:

1. Any new member proposal should be placed at least 1 day before a scheduled group meeting. Proposals must include a brief description, any required background information, reasoning why it should be done and potentials benefits proof.
2. Once a person has delivered a proposal, they are responsible for it; the group may not discuss or vote on the issue unless this person is present.
3. After a proposal is presented, the members discuss it no longer than 30 minutes and vote for its acceptance or rejection.
4. The group can discuss not more than 3 proposals in a meeting (in addition to standard meeting's agenda).
5. The proposals are discussed in order of their submission.
6. The leader can make only changes in the discussion order only followed an explanation he provides to the meeting members.
7. After maximum 30 minutes of moderated discussion, the leader or meeting facilitator calls for a yes-or-no vote on adoption. If a majority vote "yes", the proposal is implemented. Otherwise, the proposal is either rejected or returned to the person for further work.
8. All decisions made in a group meeting will be written in a Meeting Minutes, shared to all group members. The Minutes should contain at least: info about who is present, the topics discussed, the decisions taken / proposals voted for, next steps with people assigned to each next step activity.

