







How to pay your contributors,
and get away with it

What we'll be talking about today

- Briefly about me and Discourse as an open source company
- The process of the “Encouragement Fund”
- What works and what doesn't

About me and Discourse

- Erlend Sogge Heggen
- 3 years at Discourse
- Co-lead of the Community Team
- 100% remote, 30+ people
- Hosting business

This made me think of you	 praise	1	Dec '13
Second partner in the bag - congrats!	 praise	2	Aug '13
Discourse first impressions (spoiler alert: it's amazing)	 praise	19	Jul '13
TIL: Discourse has smart @mentions	 praise	1	Jul '13

0:56

LOS ANGELES

-07:00



1:56

MERIDIAN

-06:00



3:56

KITCHENER

-04:00



5:56

SAO PAULO

-02:00



8:56

LONDON

+01:00



9:56

PARIS

+02:00



10:56

RIYADH

+03:00



13:26

CALCUTTA

+05:30



15:56

HONG KONG

+08:00



18:56

SYDNEY

+11:00



20:56

AUCKLAND

+13:00



32 people in 28 cities across 11 timezones

"It's obvious that the software itself is good, but the quick and accurate support from the team and users is what makes it great."

[Read more customer testimonials](#)

STANDARD

\$100_{/mo}

[Full Discourse feature set](#)

FREE 14 day trial

100k monthly [page views](#)

10GB storage

Unlimited members

5 staff users

BUSINESS

\$300_{/mo}

[Full Discourse feature set](#)

FREE 14 day trial

500k monthly [page views](#)

50GB storage

Unlimited members

15 staff users

ENTERPRISE

Contact us

[Full Discourse feature set](#)

FREE 14 day trial

3M+ monthly [page views](#)

200GB+ storage

Unlimited members

Unlimited staff users

Why is Discourse open source?

Pragmatically speaking...

- Great for recruiting
- Polished product
- Keeps us honest

Why does anyone contribute to Discourse?

Intrinsic motivation:

- Working with high profile OSS
- Scratch an itch
- Interact with Jeff!

Extrinsic motivation:

- Feature necessary for own community
- Sponsored work
- Accommodate custom plugin

all categories ▸

pr-welcome ▸

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Topic List Sort By Votes in voting plugin

pr-welcome

voting



11

1.9k

4h

Liberapay integration

pr-welcome

feature



7

186

6d

Creating Active Users via the API gem

pr-welcome

support



36

4.8k

6d

Admins changing user's name (not username) should be logged

pr-welcome, starter-task

feature



1

120

7d

Easier logo changes for site admins

pr-welcome

ux



7

908

12d

Warn staff when action will override site restriction

pr-welcome

feature



6

748

15d

Tooltips for “topic admin actions”

pr-welcome

Support merging of 2 topics with voting

pr-welcome

The inconvenient ones

An Encouragement Fund formed

- Discourse got a MOSS grant by Mozilla
- Email is hard so we ended up paying ourselves to do the work
- We paid it forward by paying contributors

The process

1. **Define a rough spec**



Ben Word

Aug '15

There's [still major issues](#) ²⁹ in the plugin that need to be addressed.

Users can install the plugin, configure it incorrectly, and get stuck. There are not error messages that can help them figure out how to fix their settings, and there's not functionality in place to prevent someone from putting in bad settings (eg URL validation).

The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. **Make it bite-sized**

Interested in doing some WordPress work?



Erlend Sogge Heggen erlend_sh team

Apr '16

Hey. So I saw on your website that apparently you do

all things WordPress

...which is something we could really use a hand with.

The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. Make it bite-sized
3. **No hourly rate**

The scope of this is pretty expansive, but we figured we could start you off with \$1000 and leave it to you to fit a reasonable amount of work into that. We're hoping it'll be enough to get the plugin to a proper v1.0 state, finally making it stable enough for publishing on [WordPress Plugins](#)



Simon Cossar team

Apr '16

Sure, that sounds great! I've been using the wp-discourse plugin and I'm very interested in anything to do with integrating Discourse with WordPress. I'm finishing up a job right now. I'll look at this more closely on Thursday.

The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. Make it bite-sized
3. No hourly rate
4. **We choose who, what and when**

Hello Erlend,

I have done some research about the API. However, I am afraid I cannot deliver it on time because this weeks I am busy writing proposals for PhD studies.

I am sorry, I am still ready to help others and I will keep watching the thread.

The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. Make it bite-sized
3. No hourly rate
4. We choose who, what and when
5. **Tasks are *mostly* strategic**

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The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. Make it bite-sized
3. No hourly rate
4. We choose who, what and when
5. Tasks are *mostly* strategic
6. **Tasks are *mostly* time-insensitive and free of dependencies**

Interested in some paid work on Patreon integration?



Erlend Sogge Heggen erlend_sh team

Apr '16

Hey Falco!

As I understand it, you only have a few more days off work, but this isn't an urgent task so hopefully there might still be room for it on your plate, as I was wondering if you might be interested in doing a little freelance gig with us.

It's a two-part job. The first part pays \$350, while the second part pays that or more, depending on the scope we end up with. So if you do both that's a total of \$700++

Part 1: Patreon login + research

Part 2: Integrate Patreon with Discourse groups

The process

1. Define a rough spec
2. Make it bite-sized
3. No hourly rate
4. We choose who, what and when
5. Tasks are *mostly* strategic
6. Tasks are *mostly* time-insensitive and free of dependencies
7. **Spread it out!**

So why do this?

- Builds early relationship for hiring pipeline.
- Improves the niche features of your product.
- Strengthens the ecosystem

IMPROVE



ALL THE THINGS

Reduce friction



Friction



Let the robot help you!

Boston Dynamics

Delegate



“This came in from somewhere. Could you send it somewhere else?”

Better with a marketplace



Increasing open source output

1. Figure out how to pay contributors
2. Ask for time to work on general open source
3. Don't be shy about asking for money!

Thanks for your time!

Some further reading:

- Fly and contributor equity
<https://changelog.com/podcast/303>
- Blockstack's funding programs
<https://blockstack.org/blog/blockstack-community-rewards-program/>
<https://blockstack.org/funding/>
- Nadia Eghbal analysis of funding programs by crypto projects
<https://nadiaeghbal.com/grant-programs>



OPEN SOURCE SUMMIT

EUROPE

THE LINUX FOUNDATION