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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This made me think of you</td>
<td>praise</td>
<td>Dec '13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second partner in the bag - congrats!</td>
<td>praise</td>
<td>Aug '13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse first impressions (spoiler alert: it’s amazing)</td>
<td>praise</td>
<td>Jul '13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIL: Discourse has smart @mentions</td>
<td>praise</td>
<td>Jul '13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

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**STANDARD**

$100/mo

- Full Discourse feature set
- FREE 14 day trial
- 100k monthly page views
- 10GB storage
- Unlimited members
- 5 staff users

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**BUSINESS**

$300/mo

- Full Discourse feature set
- FREE 14 day trial
- 500k monthly page views
- 50GB storage
- Unlimited members
- 15 staff users

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**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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic List Sort By Votes in voting plugin</td>
<td>voting</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.9k</td>
<td>4h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberapay integration</td>
<td>feature</td>
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<td>Creating Active Users via the API gem</td>
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<td>4.8k</td>
<td>6d</td>
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<td>Admins changing user’s name (not username) should be logged</td>
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<td>120</td>
<td>7d</td>
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<td>Easier logo changes for site admins</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>12d</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warn staff when action will override site restriction</td>
<td>feature</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>15d</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tooltips for “topic admin actions”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support merging of 2 topics with voting</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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
There’s still major issues 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?

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
The inconvenient ones
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
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!
“This came in from somewhere. Could you send it somewhere else?”
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