

# Breaking Barriers

## Open Source Community Onboarding

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Raimund Hook



# Tragedy of the commons

Once upon a time...



Sheep were happily  
grazing the Town  
Commons.

Everyone is happy...





Until more sheep  
got added, land  
got depleted....



**An imbalance was discovered, arguments were had.**

Should land be privatised?

Should consumption be regulated?

Who maintains the land?





“

What is common to many  
is taken least care of, for  
all men have greater regard  
for what is their own than  
for what they possess in  
common with others.

– Aristotle





# 3.5x

amount of money farmers would need to spend  
on maintaining & creating grasslands than they  
currently do if the Town Commons did not exist.



# 3.5x

amount of money firms would need to spend  
on maintaining & creating software than they  
currently do if OSS did not exist.

# We are Makers



The difference between Makers and Takers is not always 100% clear, but as a rule of thumb, Makers directly invest in growing both their business and the open source project. Takers are solely focused on growing their business and let others take care of the open source project they rely on.

**– Dries Buytaert**  
Drupal Project Founder

# Pop Quiz







**Used an open source  
project successfully?**



Tried to use an open  
source project but given  
up after x hours/days?



**Contributed to an open  
source project  
successfully?**





**Tried to contribute, but  
couldn't get it working  
locally and gave up?**



**Tried to contribute, but  
your contribution  
wasn't accepted?**



**Got frustrated with an  
open source project?**



# Open source project maintainers

You are the makers that are cultivating new fields.





So, how & where do I  
start? 🤔

# So, where do I start? 🤔

How do I build my open source project's community?

## **Know** where you are now

Understand what your community looks like today by adding some measurements that make sense for you

## **Decide** where you want to be

Set an attainable goal that you can achieve using those measurements

## **Break** it down

Don't try to solve it all at once, plan small attainable actions that will help you move the needle

## **Iterate!**

Work through your actions, continuing to measure along the way. Don't be afraid to try something that doesn't work.

# Anything else I need to know? 🙋

## Knowing your contributors

### **Why** do contributors contribute

Learning, "scratching itches", swag

### **What** do contributors need

Tools, resources, documentation

### **How** can they get involved

Multiple entry points for wider accessibility

### **When** do they do their work

Work time? Part time? Spare time?  
Your timezone or another?

We followed **10 people** on their journey as **first-time contributors** to GitLab

**Jan. 2025**

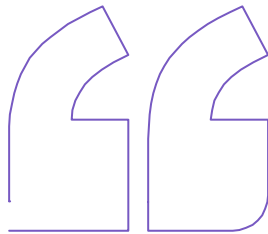
**14** people invited

**10** completed study

**10** merged to GitLab

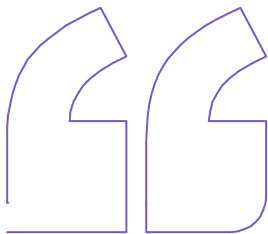
**100% success**

*...just a year ago, this was not even 50%...*



This was a **great experience**.  
Super fun and rewarding.  
Thanks for all the work you've  
put in to make contributing to  
GitLab fun :)

Quote from a participant



I became a real contributor  
faster than I thought possible.  
That was really nice."

Quote from a participant

## 🌟 Welcome to your GitLab contribution journey! 🌟

### 👋 Welcome to the GitLab Community! 🤖

Hey @airada! We're thrilled to have you join our amazing community of contributors! 🥰

This issue will guide you through your journey to becoming a GitLab contributor. Our experienced maintainers (@gitlab-community/maintainers) will review your community forks access request and help you get started.

### 🚀 Your contribution adventure

Welcome to your GitLab contribution quest! You've already taken the first step by requesting access - now let's explore what's next on your path to becoming a contributor!

### 📺 First steps

- ☒ Request access to the community forks
  - Our maintainers will reach out if they need more info to [approve your request](#)
  - Watch for the [access-request](#) [approved](#) label once your request has been approved
- ☒ Say hello in the community Discord [#contribute](#) channel 🙋
  - ☒ Add your Discord ID to your GitLab profile and earn points for your posts and replies!
- ☐ Experience the power of GitLab Duo - our AI suite including Code Suggestions, Chat, and more! 🤖
  - You'll receive your GitLab Duo Enterprise license welcome email after your access is approved

### 📖 Master the basics


- ☐ Follow our Tutorial: Make a GitLab Contribution
- ☒ Join a community pairing session to learn from others 🧑🏫

### 🔍 Find your first issue

- ☐ Choose your first issue:
  - First-time contributor issues 🌱
  - Quick wins
  - [quick win](#) docs 📄
  - [quick win](#) frontend 🖥️
  - [quick win](#) backend ⚙️

# Everyone can contribute


- Personal onboarding issues
- Community maintainer support
- Guidance to get started



**Rishu Mehra** @rishumehra  
· 2 months ago

Developer 😊 ↩️ ✎ ⋮

This is awesome [@Taucher2003](#) Thanks for approving my request and making me part of the community. Finally I've found my tribe! 😊



**Jasmine Irada** · 1 month ago

Developer 😊 ✎ ⋮

Wow, thank you [@daniel-murphy](#) ! From the quick response to the lovely resources (and free Duo license!), I feel more confident getting started, I appreciate it 😊 I'll go ahead and continue following the onboarding before diving right in 💪



# Tools of the Trade

Making our tools accessible to all



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Image by Gemini Pro

# Try & try again

Our "Co-create" has gained enterprise traction

Lesson: don't be afraid to invest in developing new, high value contributors




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Google Gemini Pro



# Level up in the community

 **b310-jannik**

Unlock the next achievement!

Level 2 in 267 points ?



[Explore issues to contribute](#)

<https://contributors.gitlab.com>

## Contribute to GitLab

Join 4,000+ contributors in GitLab's open source community and co-create the platform millions of people use to deliver software faster.

### Login

Please login to help us tailor your experience.



Login

### Start onboarding

Start onboarding to contribute to GitLab and get access to GitLab Duo AI.



Start onboarding

### AI powered

GitLab Duo is included for all contributors to help boost your efficiency and effectiveness. Code Suggestions, Chat, Root Cause Analysis and more!



Unlock AI

### Connect with the community

Team members and community members hangout in the [#contribute](#) channel on the GitLab Discord server.



Join Discord

### Read the guide

Our contribution guide will help you learn the different ways you can contribute, choose a development environment, find issues to work on, make changes, and open a merge request.



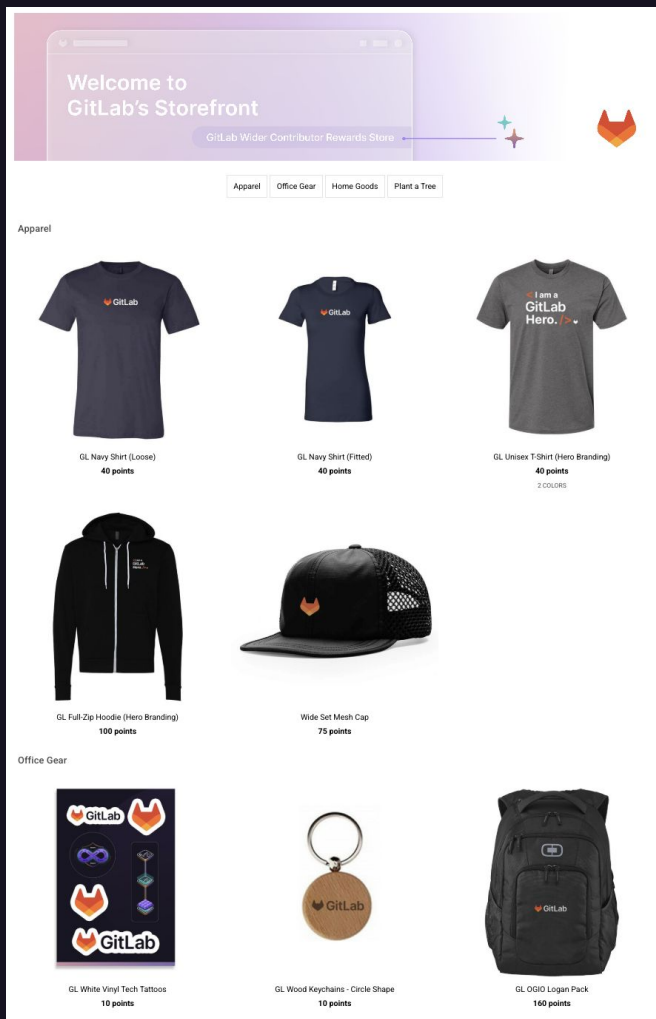
Read the guide

### Join an event


Register for an upcoming hackathon, pairing session, or office hour session on Meetup.com.





View events





# Leaderboard & Rewards


Contributors


Leaderboard


Organizations

Rewards

Hackathon

Notable Contributors

User Guide

Login

Name

Search

Period

Past 3 months

From date

05/03/2025













To date

dd/mm/yyyy

Community only

☒

Filter

Username	Level	Code	Plan	Engage	Discuss	Translate	Other	Score
<a href="#">heidi.berry</a>		16,540	492	0	0	0	0	17,032
<a href="#">karras</a>		6,540	553	500	192	0	0	7,785
<a href="#">network-charles</a>		7,540	243	0	0	0	0	7,783
<a href="#">gerardo-navarro</a>		4,340	505	500	2	0	0	5,347
<a href="#">abutkeev</a>		1,150	57	0	0	3,898	0	5,105
<a href="#">PatrickRice</a>		2,950	642	0	0	0	0	3,592
<a href="#">syedzubeen</a>		2,590	78	0	16	644	0	3,328
<a href="#">Taucher2003</a>		2,500	296	0	274	0	0	3,070
<a href="#">zakaria-fatahi</a>		2,220	272	0	1	61	0	2,554
<a href="#">sabinadevellis</a>		0	0	0	0	2,547	0	2,547
<a href="#">aindriu80</a>		0	0	0	0	2,431	0	2,431
<a href="#">benmurel</a>		2,220	58	0	0	0	0	2,278

# Ways to contribute



## Merge requests

- Code
  - Backend
  - Frontend
- Code review
- Documentation
- Handbook



## Design



## Translations



## Issues

Get started at [contributors.gitlab.com/](https://contributors.gitlab.com/)!



**And the best part of all  
I didn't tell you yet...**



Contributing to open source could make you up to **2X more productive** compared to competing firms <sup>1</sup>.

1. Nagle, Frank, Learning by Contributing: Gaining Competitive Advantage Through Contribution to Crowdsourced Public Goods (December 21, 2017). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3091831>

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***So, What will you do to  
break your barriers to  
contribution?***

# Thank you!