

Introduction

One core goal of the Ubuntu Developer Advisory Team is to reach out to new contributors. Over the course of the 12.04 development cycle, the team contacted many first time contributors offering our thanks for their work which helps to make Ubuntu better for millions of users. We also seek to identify stumbling blocks that might make participating in Ubuntu development be harder than it should.

To that end, as we contacted the new contributors, we also solicited feedback on their experience with Ubuntu development. We asked three open ended question:

- What was your general experience with Ubuntu development like?
- What did you like about it?
- What do you feel could be improved?

The responses we received fell into five broad categories:

- Tools & Infrastructure
- Processes
- Documentation
- Outreach
- People

This feedback, which is analysed in more detail below, showed that **the vast majority had a very positive experience**. The most positive response, by far, surrounded the friendly and helpful nature of our developers. Creating a welcoming community continues to be one of Ubuntu's largest assets. As one contributor replied:

"I think the most positive part of the experience to date has been the realization that the Ubuntu community cares enough to engage in this kind of feedback solicitation. That is simply unparalleled in other projects, and a testament to the many solid reasons so many prefer Ubuntu."

We also found places where we are coming up short. The largest set of responses showing where we can improve was around our developer documentation. This feedback will help us target our work in the coming development cycle.

Statistics & Methodology

We reached out to 76 new contributors in total. Of these, 48 gave us their feedback on Ubuntu development, giving us a 63.16% response rate. We identified a number of topics that were mentioned repeatedly by respondents:

| Topics | Total Mentions | Positive | Improvement Needed/Criticism |
|------------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Tools & Infrastructure | 20 | 9 | 11 |
| Processes | 17 | 9 | 8 |
| Documentation | 24 | 7 | 17 |
| Outreach | 12 | 5 | 7 |
| People | 19 | 17 | 2 |

This was not a survey. The open ended questions we asked allowed respondents to give answers that prioritized their own experience. The summary below aims to provide a general overview of the responses we received, highlighting some of the important insights for a broader audience. We will continue to consult these responses (and others as they come in) as we plan for developer outreach related activities over the next cycle.

Report

Tools & Infrastructure

Feedback surrounding our existing tools and development infrastructure was decidedly mixed. Nine contributors made specific mention of their positive experience with Launchpad and/or Bazaar. One reoccurring theme among these contributors is the convenience of an integrated workflow centralized on Launchpad. As one noted, “branching a project to fix a bug and getting that visible to the project's developers is effortless and lets me concentrate on the actual work.” Though for every contributor that found this workflow appealing, there was one that had complaints.

Nine contributors also made specific mention of a complaint with Launchpad and/or

Bazaar. While three contributors would rather be using git, these criticisms were much more varied than the positive responses. Some complaints, like the large amount of email generated by Launchpad, are well known and [being worked on by the Launchpad Team](#). Some comments were feature requests. As one contributor noted, being able to comment on specific lines of a code review would be a welcome addition (LP: [#609297](#)). Others were simply bugs, like the issues surrounding Ubuntu package searches on Launchpad (LP: [#816870](#)).

While the choice of development tools tends to be hotly debated, it seems clear from the feedback that we've received that most new contributors are generally happy with their experience dealing with our infrastructure.

Processes

Continuing efforts to make the sponsorship process more responsive seems to have paid off. A number of contributors praised the process. One "had heard about reviews taking a long time, but didn't find it to be the case." Another found it to be a "surprisingly painless process."

One place in our process that received some concerns was when contributors are directed to Debian. Some remarked that in isolated cases waiting times were increased due to pending code reviews in the Debian bug tracker. The general awareness of collaboration with Debian is notable and a very positive sign.

Over all, despite having room for improvement, our developer processes seem to be efficiently shepherding contributions into the archive. One contributor summed it up well by noting that it was "exciting to realize that a bug fix (simple, but there nonetheless) could go from a proposed fix to being available for installation in just over 24 hrs."

Documentation

The area where we received the most feedback was documentation. While our existing documentation was quite helpful for some, we heard from even more contributors who found it wanting. As one goal of the process was to find stumbling blocks for new contributors, this was unsurprising.

One contributor noted that they were "overwhelmed at all the information" that is provided. This was not an uncommon view. Often the problem was that "there is some redundancy with documentation" and that there is "contradictory information on how to do things." While we have been working on consolidating our developer documentation on

developer.ubuntu.com, we've left a sometimes confusing situation for new contributors who find information both there and on the wiki.

We also heard advise that we should take into consideration as we continue working on our new consolidated documentation. One concern raised by a contributor was that the documentation is "difficult to follow in a logical manner." Another contributor echoed this requesting a "more cohesive introduction" that would "walk someone through the entire lifecycle of a bug, from discovery to fix released."

Outreach

The development updates posted to Planet Ubuntu and OMG!Ubuntu as well as the Fix-It Friday initiative were both mentioned as things that helped motivate new contributors. The desire to give back to the community was also a strong motivation. As one contributor said, "Contributing to free and open source projects makes me excited. It is great that I can participate and improve Ubuntu. I feel awesome when my work is released. "

Another reoccurring theme was that it can sometimes be "hard to find things to work on initially." Another contributor mentioned that they would have fixed bugs in the past if they "had realized just how easy it is." We obviously have more work to do when it comes to outreach. Specifically, it seems we need to do a better job at highlighting some of the existing tools we have that expose opportunities to contribute like [Harvest](#).

People

The most resounding piece of feedback we received was about the amazing help our existing developers provide. Over half of the respondents specifically mentioned the welcoming and helpful nature of our developers. "It's an amazing community of bright and enthusiastic people who are very appreciative of each other's work," said one contributor.

It is also clear that the #ubuntu-motu IRC channel remains as an indispensable resource for new contributors. Like one contributor said, "Whenever I got stuck with the process or did not know how to approach the problem, help was always at hand on #ubuntu-motu." Creating a friendly and open environment for contributors has always been an important goal for the Ubuntu community, and we are glad to see that we are living up to that.

Though as one contributor mentioned, relying on asking people in the community for help when our documentation fails "doesn't scale very well and might be too big a hurdle to get started for some folks." As our community continues to grow, we need to take efforts to ensure that we remain as welcoming as we've been in the past.

Highlights

Among many others, we loved reading the following comments and thought you would enjoy them too. Ubuntu is a great place to be involved in, also thanks to YOUR great work!

- Developers always respond very friendly.
- I'm also very much impressed by the smoothness of online collaboration through launchpad and bazaar (wow, would not have thought I'd be praising bazaar at some point). Branching a project to fix a bug and getting that visible to the project's developers is effortless and lets me concentrate on the actual work.
- Had heard about reviews taking a long time, but didn't find it to be the case.
- I really enjoyed getting to see my contributions go through the whole cycle from inclusion to available update. Seeing the process was interesting, as I had not known the different stages previously, and it was exciting to realize that a bug fix (simple, but there nonetheless) could go from a proposed fix to being available for installation in just over 24 hrs.
- Developers always respond very friendly.
- Much easier than I had expected. I had always assumed that one had to be an official packager to apply a patch to a package and submit it. Overall, it was a surprisingly painless process.
- I think the most positive part of the experience to date has been the realization that the Ubuntu community cares enough to engage in this kind of feedback solicitation. That is simply unparalleled in other projects, and a testament to the many solid reasons so many prefer Ubuntu.
- Overall, the entire was quite enriching and engaging. To be frank, I was desperately waiting for an opportunity to fix an easy bug for quite some time. And, so when I eventually found one, I was overly joyed. Given another opportunity, I will surely contribute again to Ubuntu development.
- The people. Good response from other people, great impression about the whole community.
- Contributing to free and open source projects makes me excited. It is great that I can participate and improve Ubuntu. I feel awesome when my work is released. Also I was glad when people found out their problem doesn't exist in new release.

Conclusions

Overall, we are enthused to report that the Ubuntu community continues to be incredibly welcoming. It's important that new contributors have a positive first experience, and the Developer Advisory Team is committed to doing all we can in order to improve this aspect of our community.

Our outreach has also shown us places where we can still improve. Specifically, we need to continue to improve our developer documentation and work on making it easier for people to find opportunities to contribute.

As we begin planning our work for the next cycle, we will continue reaching out for feedback on our development processes. If you have anything you would like to share about your experience working on Ubuntu, feel free to get in touch with us.