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# Turn Contributors into Maintainers with TAG Contributor Strategy

**Catherine Paganini**, Head of Marketing & Community @ Buoyant

**Josh Berkus**, Community Architect @ Red Hat

# Introductions




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## Catherine Paganini

Head of Marketing & Community @ Buoyant (Linkerd)  
Co-chair of CNCF Business Value Subcommittee  
Maintainer of CNCF Cloud Native Glossary  
Co-author of CNCF Landscape Guide  
 @CathPaga



## Josh Berkus

Community Architect @ Red Hat  
Co-chair of TAG Contributor Strategy  
 @fuzzychef



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## OUR GOAL

To help **you** figure out  
how to **up-level**  
the contributors  
to your project

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# Agenda



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- Intro to TAG Contributor Strategy
- Maintainer tools and docs
- Recognition and promotion
- Governance
- Evolution with project maturity

# TAG Contributor Strategy

## What?

- A CNCF group that aims at *helping* CNCF projects be successful

## How?

- Providing *guidance, best practices*, and *tools* that projects can easily apply

## Why should *you* care?

- No need to reinvent the wheel. *Learn* from other projects — avoid their mistakes and do what has proven successful

# Contributor Strategy Tools



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1. Templates
2. Guidance docs

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Check them out at  
**[contribute.cncf.io/maintainers](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers)**

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**It all starts with contributors. So,  
where do they come from and  
how do you keep them?**

[\[contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/community/contributor-growth-framework\]](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/community/contributor-growth-framework)

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# What Motivates Contributors?

Initial motivations vary (little control)

- ◆ Need a feature for work
- ◆ Want to learn or up their CV
- ◆ ....vary as much as people themselves

What you *can* control: **Keep them motivated**



Honest & clear  
communication

Lowering  
contribution  
barriers

The human  
factor

# Honest & Clear Communication



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- Level of effort
- Clear and descriptive instructions (issues, docs)
- Progression path (contributor ladder)
- Shared ownership and governance
- Roadmap

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# Lower Contribution Barriers

- Intuitive and easy contribution path
- Docs that set right expectations
- Minimize steps as much as possible

Doing it right should be the  
easiest path!

# The Human Factor




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A large, brown, plush teddy bear is sitting on a light-colored wooden surface. The bear has a friendly expression with small black eyes and a brown nose. The background is a blurred wooden wall.

**The **personal touch**...the most important yet often overlooked factor.**

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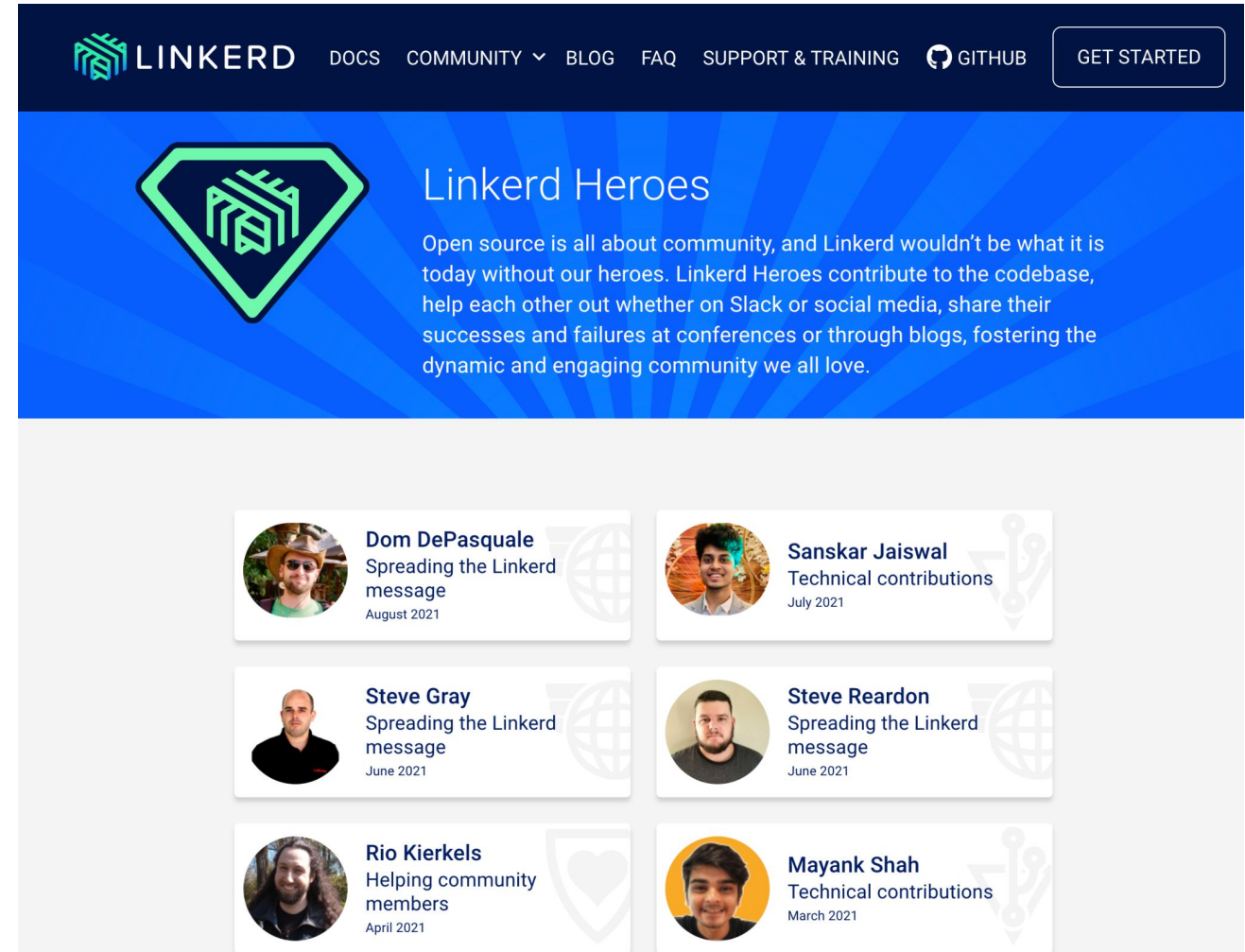
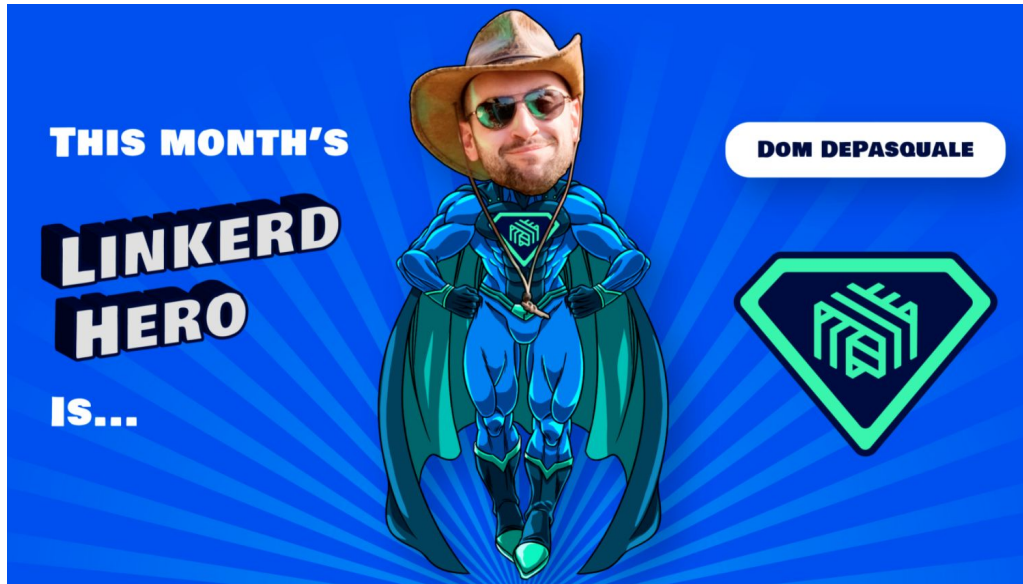
# Recognizing Contributors


Aside from the contributor ladder:

- Thank every single contributor publicly (especially new ones!)
- Deliberately create a welcoming community
- Recognition programs
- Event opportunities
- Mentoring opportunities
- Swag






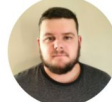

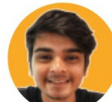
# Linkerd's Recognition Program



**LINKERD** DOCS COMMUNITY ▾ BLOG FAQ SUPPORT & TRAINING  GITHUB GET STARTED

## Linkerd Heroes

Open source is all about community, and Linkerd wouldn't be what it is today without our heroes. Linkerd Heroes contribute to the codebase, help each other out whether on Slack or social media, share their successes and failures at conferences or through blogs, fostering the dynamic and engaging community we all love.

 <b>Dom DePasquale</b> Spreading the Linkerd message August 2021	 <b>Sanskar Jaiswal</b> Technical contributions July 2021
 <b>Steve Gray</b> Spreading the Linkerd message June 2021	 <b>Steve Reardon</b> Spreading the Linkerd message June 2021
 <b>Rio Kierkels</b> Helping community members April 2021	 <b>Mayank Shah</b> Technical contributions March 2021

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All too often the focus is on code contributions. But **equally important** are non-code contributions

Sharing their story

Helping others on  
Slack

Writing &  
maintaining  
docs

Community  
managers

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# A Pivot is Needed



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Maintainers, **it's up to YOU** (us) to change  
that perception!

Recognize **your own bias** and reflect on the  
many ways non-code contributions benefit  
your project.

How can **you incentivize** and recognize them?



# Contributor Ladder



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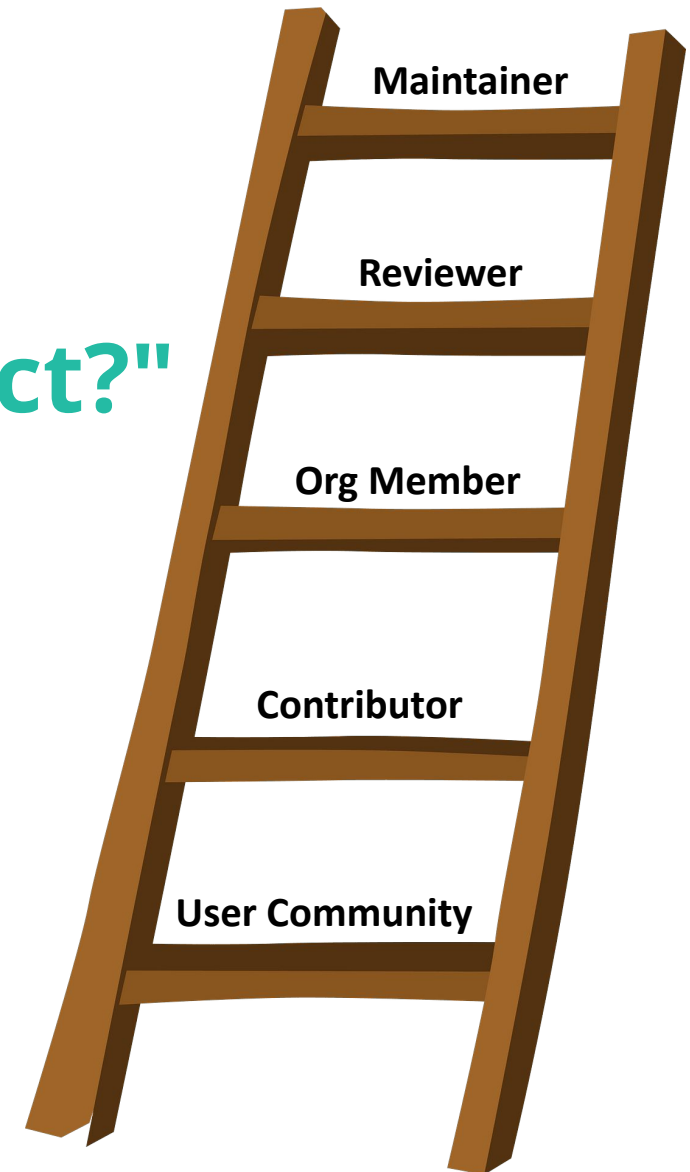


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A "contributor ladder" answers the question  
**"How do I advance in this project?"**

It attaches  
measurable requirements  
to each level of responsibility.



# Why a contributor ladder?



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1. Contributors know that they'll be "rewarded" with greater authority/responsibility
2. Contributors know exactly what they have to do to "move up" which makes it attainable
3. Reduces playing favorites and forgetting people

[https://github.com/cncf/project-template/blob/main/CONTRIBUTOR\\_LADDER.md](https://github.com/cncf/project-template/blob/main/CONTRIBUTOR_LADDER.md)



## Membership

# Role of Governance

- Independent contributors:
  - ◆ Formal governance shows fairness and respect
  - ◆ People contribute much more to a project that they "own"
- Corporate contributors:
  - ◆ Formal governance shows you won't railroad them
  - ◆ Increased investment means increased influence

# Evolution with Project Maturity



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<b>SANDBOX</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3-level Contributor Ladder</li><li>• 1-page contributing.md</li><li>• Code of Conduct</li></ul>
<b>INCUBATING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4-level Contributor Ladder</li><li>• Maintainer Council Governance</li><li>• contributing.md plus build guide and notes</li><li>• Code of Conduct</li></ul>
<b>GRADUATED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4-level Contributor Ladder</li><li>• Steering Committee with Elections</li><li>• Special Roles with Handbooks</li><li>• New Contributor Handbook</li><li>• Code of Conduct Committee</li></ul>

# Conclusions



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- You need to keep your contributors motivated through communication, lowered barriers, and recognition
  - ◆ Consider a recognition program
  - ◆ Cultivate non-code contributors
- Formal governance and contributor rules lower the risk of contributing
  - ◆ and should evolve with the project

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**Visit [contribute.cncf.io/maintainers](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers) to  
view all resources.**

**Need a resource but can't find it?  
Join our TAG and we'll help you create it.**

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