Collaborative Commons

Designing Open-Source Orgs for Longevity

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1. Two friends with an idea

Two friends

Spend your free time making something, underestimate the work involved, don't care.

It's still ok to give up.

Don't be alone.

Don't optimize anything.

Don't pay for anything.

Setup branch protection.

2. A core team forms.

Core Team

Collaborative problem solving is a great way to forge friendships that last, and find out early who you can't work with.

Use light consensus.

The DOER's Decide.

Leverage CODEOWNERS.

Choose a license.

Chart a vision.

3. Working groups evolve

Working Groups

Specialized knowledge collects around interest groups with appropriate skills and drive.

Schedule regular office hours.

The DOERs are empowered.

Recruit contributors.

Introduce accountability.

Reduce bus-factor.

Watch mental health.

4. An entity

In the shadows

Just do whatever you need to do to keep on working.

Open Collective for donations.

GitHub for Project Management.

Discord for communication.

A non-profit

Aligns very closely with the spirit of open source. Just a paper tiger.

Tenant in a Foundation.

Or a pure foundation.

Own the moral rights to code.

Own trademarks.

A company

If you need to evolve and want to raise Venture Capital, being a company has its benefits.

Start small.

Get advice.

Ship.

5. Where’s the money

Bootstrap

This is probably what you are already doing. Not paying yourself and working too hard.

This is not sustainable.

Set a timeout.

Make a plan to get paid.

Donations

You will never get as much cash as you hope for, but will always get enough for stickers.

Open Collective

Github Sponsors

Friends and Family (implicit)

Sponsorships

Leverage open source programs from companies who care.

Digital Ocean / Netlify

Cal.com

GitHub Open Source Program

Grants

Probably more work than they are worth, however if you just need to focus for a few months could be a good idea.

NGI

NLNET

Sovereign Tech Fund

Funding Box

https://sploro.eu/cascade-funding

OSS Tip / Revshare

Convince people buying your services to optionally pay more for the open source you use.

Humble Bundle

Like carbon offsets

scalar

Bounties

A way to spend your donations to grow the community (and potentially recruit).

Has a management burden.

algora.io

Angels

You need to have some kind of early corporate structure, at the very least accounting and a legal entity.

SAFE

Office sponsorship

Coaching

Venture

The risk of a rugpull is even becoming a meme. What license model can stick? Protect the source.

OSS Capital

Lightning Ventures

Speed Invest

awesome-oss-investors

6. Risks

Burn Out

Not taking time for yourself, loosing the vision, infighting, too much bureaucracy.

Pay attention to your health

Watch for warning signs

Talk to people regularly

Alienation

Becoming a company can alienate a certain section of the OSS community.

Communicate what you do.

Entitlement

Stay calm, be firm. Flip their anger into understanding.

OSS is free.

Downstream must disclose.

Have Community Guidelines.

Reach out privately.

Regulations

If you haven't heard about the Cyber Resilience Act, its like GDPR but for software - even open source.

DSA

DMA

CRA

PLD

DORA

CE

...

Good luck.

You got this.