

How to launch an open source project

Launching a new open source project is an exciting, yet complex, process. Use this checklist to guide your team through a successful project launch.

Project goals and market positioning

Establish a strategy for your open source project before you launch it. See "[Developing a strategy for your open source project](#)" for more detail.

- **Outline technical problems the project solves**

Describe the project's purpose. Will this project help people do something new? How will it improve their lives and work?

- **Define the project's target users and value proposition**

Identify the type of user you imagine will benefit from using this project. What role does that person play in an organization? What challenges does that person face? How will this project help someone overcome those challenges?

- **Survey the landscape and articulate the project's key differentiators**

Your project will likely join an ecosystem of similar open source projects. Why would users choose your project over others? Why will potential contributors want to work on your project rather than others? Your project will also likely rely on (and integrate with) others. Document your relationships with those projects. Why launch a new project rather than join another one in this ecosystem?

- **Establish an initial roadmap (with tentative milestones)**

Successful projects begin with a sense of direction. What features will you prioritize at launch? How often will you release new versions of the project? How quickly do you want to grow a contributor base? What are your community milestones?

Project identity and brand

Think about your project name and logo before launch.

- **Compile and vet a list of candidates**

Gather key stakeholders and brainstorm a list of qualities your project's name should have. Then develop a list of possible names. Identify your top choices. Determine if any of your favorites are already in use.

- **Design a logo**

Your project will need a visual identity. Follow a process similar to the one you followed when developing a name. Sketch some ideas. Seek stakeholder input.

- **Examine prior art**

Your project's name and logo should not infringe on existing trademarks. Do your homework to avoid confusion.

- **Reserve your assets**

Register a domain for your project's website. Determine which tools, platforms, and services your project will require, then reserve appropriate accounts on those services.



Licensing and legal

No open source project can completely avoid legal considerations. Do not skip this part.

- **Determine license criteria**

Your project's license will determine how others can use and engage with it. Gather key stakeholders to determine how they would like to use the project. What can users expect to do with the project? Under what conditions will you accept contributions?

- **Choose a license**

Compile the research you conducted in the previous step, then choose an open source license that satisfies all stakeholders. Document that decision. Ensure that all project materials clearly communicate licensing conditions.

- **Register your trademarks**

This step varies by project, so consult your legal counsel.

Governance

Before launching an open source project, you will want to consider how it (and its community) will operate. See "[A guide to open source project governance models](#)" for additional details.

- **Outline community roles and responsibilities**

Record the various functions contributors can perform in your project and community. What rights and responsibilities will people in these roles have? How do they become eligible for these roles?

- **Define governance model and processes**

Describe your project's governance model and sketch preliminary governance processes. For example, how will your project select leaders, and how often will project leadership change? Who can influence project decisions? Who can commit code to the project, and how does a person acquire (and retain) this privilege? How can community members amend the governance processes?

- **Set provisions for subprojects and life-cycle management**

If your project is likely to feature many subcomponents (or have smaller projects join it), you will want to consider how to oversee the maturation of project components and manage required dependencies.

- **Create a privacy policy**

This document helps contributors understand if the project requires the use of personal data, and if so, how it is handled.

- **Establish a code of conduct**

Outline norms and expectations for participation in the project and community. Be sure to outline consequences for infractions.

- **Explore foundation memberships (if necessary)**

If you plan to donate your project to a foundation, you will need to ensure your project meets the foundation's requirements for acceptance.

Infrastructure and financing

Open source projects require significant infrastructure—even from the start. Follow these steps to ensure your project has what it needs to succeed.

- **Establish funding provisions**

How will the project acquire and manage funding for infrastructure, events, and other critical resources? Identify sources of project funding and discuss key funding processes. Stipulate who will have access to funding (and under what conditions).

- **Select administrators for web domains and social media accounts**

Determine who will register your project's domains and who will serve as primary contact with the registrar (projects may nominate several members to share these duties). Also determine who will control access to key social media accounts.

- **Identify trademark holders**

Who will hold and protect trademarks like your project's name and logo?

- **Implement essential tooling**

Consider the following common components of open source project infrastructure. Who will provide (and fund) them? Who will have access to them (and under what conditions)?

- Code repositories and issue trackers
- Development and testing tools
- Email and mailing list servers
- Project documentation platform
- Web conferencing platform
- Community forum
- Community chat tools
- Community calendar

Metrics and sustainability

Successful projects feature successful communities. Consider how you will support your community.

- **Establish a diversity and inclusion plan**

The most successful open source projects welcome a diverse set of contributors. How will your project attract participants with different backgrounds and skills?

- **Outline a vision for community health and metrics**

How will you know if your project has been successful? What signs will indicate your strategy is working as you expected it to? See "[Measuring open source project health](#)" for tips on building a sustainable community.

North America
1888 REDHAT1
www.redhat.com

**Europe, Middle East,
and Africa**
00800 7334 2835
europe@redhat.com

Asia Pacific
+65 6490 4200
apac@redhat.com

Latin America
+54 11 4329 7300
info-latam@redhat.com



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\[linkedin.com/company/red-hat\]\(http://linkedin.com/company/red-hat\)](http://facebook.com/redhatinc)

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