







# Contributor Growth Strategies for OSS Projects

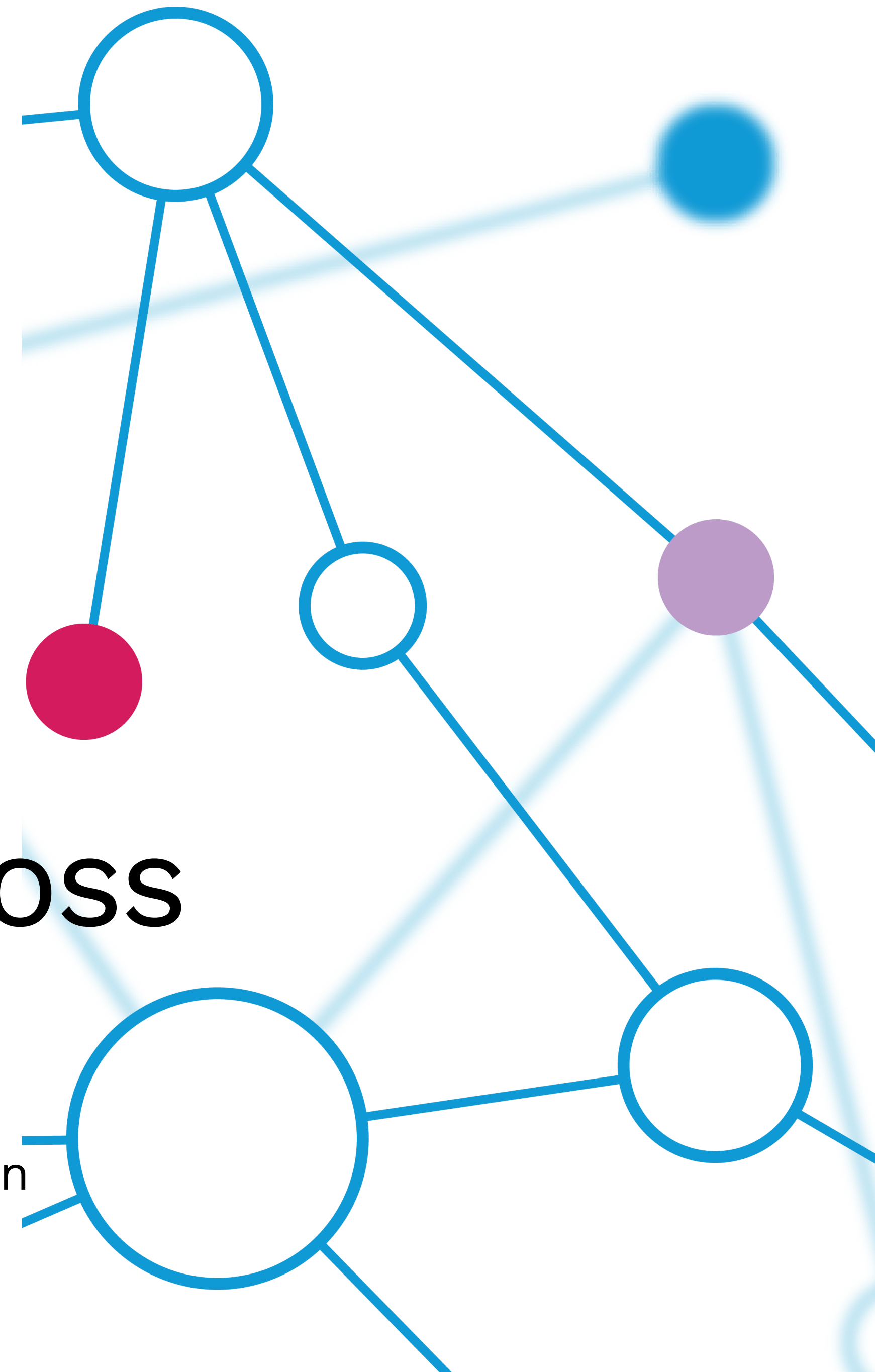
FOSSY Portland July 2023

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Director of Data Science for CHAOSS

 <https://chaoss.community/>  
 <https://github.com/chaoss>  
 @CHAOSSproj

 <https://fastwonderblog.com/>  
 <https://github.com/geekygirldawn>  
 @geekygirldawn



**Thank you for the grant that funds my work**



**ALFRED P. SLOAN  
FOUNDATION**



# Whoami



- Geek, traveler, reader
- 20+ yr tech career focused on community & open source (VMware, Intel, Puppet, ...)
- OpenUK Board
- CHAOSS Board and Maintainer
- CNCF TAG Contrib Strategy co-chair
- PhD from the University of Greenwich focused on Linux kernel collaboration

Photos by Mom, Josh Bancroft, Don Park



# The Problem is Hard

Humans are squishy.  
We have feelings  
and bad days.





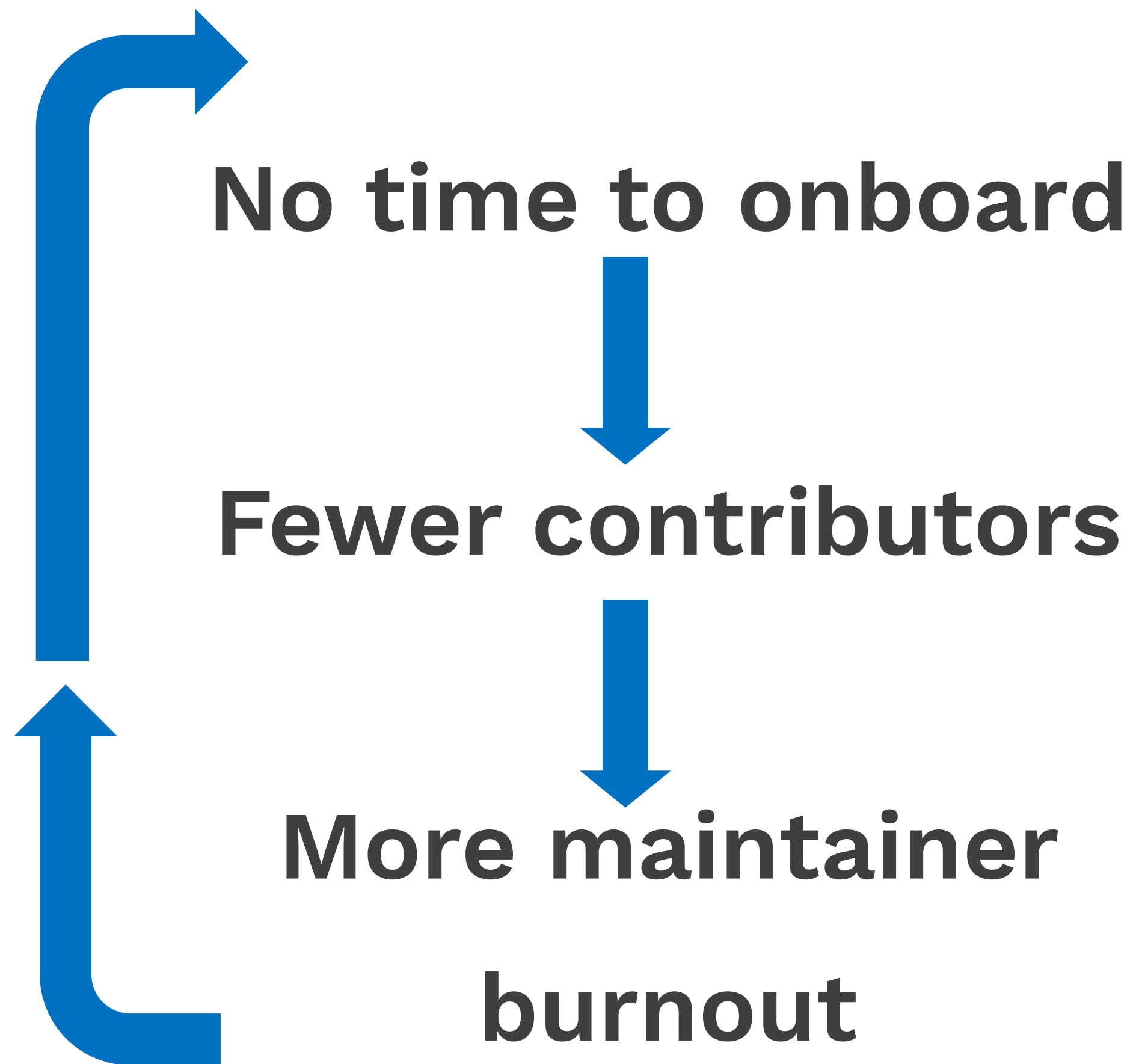
# The Problem is Hard

**Action: Be proactive  
and encourage people  
to participate.**





# Vicious Cycle





# Agenda

- **Factors that Impact Contributor Growth**
- **Contributor Growth Strategies**
- **Contributor Ladders and Leadership**
- **Metrics for Measuring Project Sustainability**
- **Resources and Final Thoughts**

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# **Developing and Executing on Contributor Growth Strategies**



# Motivation

**Squishy humans have  
complex motivations.  
We want to feel useful  
and appreciated.**

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





# Motivation

**Action: Be proactive  
and ask specific people  
for help on  
individual tasks.**



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



# Governance is all about the Humans

Set expectations for how people collaborate & make decisions

👉 [contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/governance-intro](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/governance-intro)





# Governance is all about the Humans

Action: Clearly document project governance (templates avail)

👉 [contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/governance-intro](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/governance-intro)





# Be Explicit

**Explicit, documented  
governance makes it  
easier for the humans  
to contribute.**



Photo by Andrew Watson - CC BY 2.0



# Onboarding Docs

**Good docs for  
onboarding new  
contributors is step #1  
toward scaling maintainers.**



[contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/contributing/](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/contributing/)





# Onboarding Docs

**Action: Make sure to include dev env setup, running tests, and other requirements (template available).**



[contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/contributing/](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/templates/contributing/)



# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Build a welcoming  
and  
inclusive community.

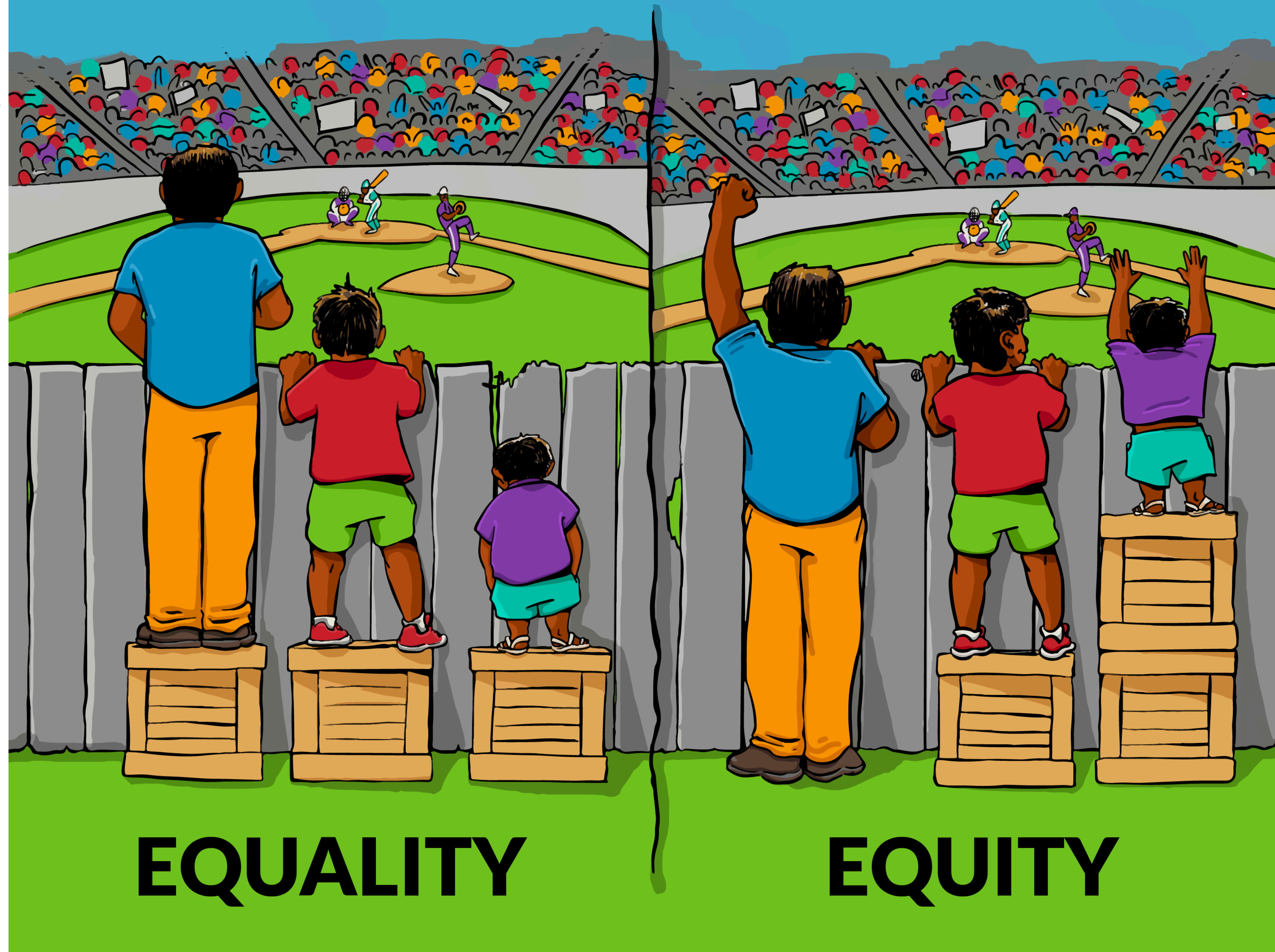


Image courtesy of the [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#) | Artist: [Angus Maguire](#).



# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Action: Be proactive about including people and moving them into leadership roles.

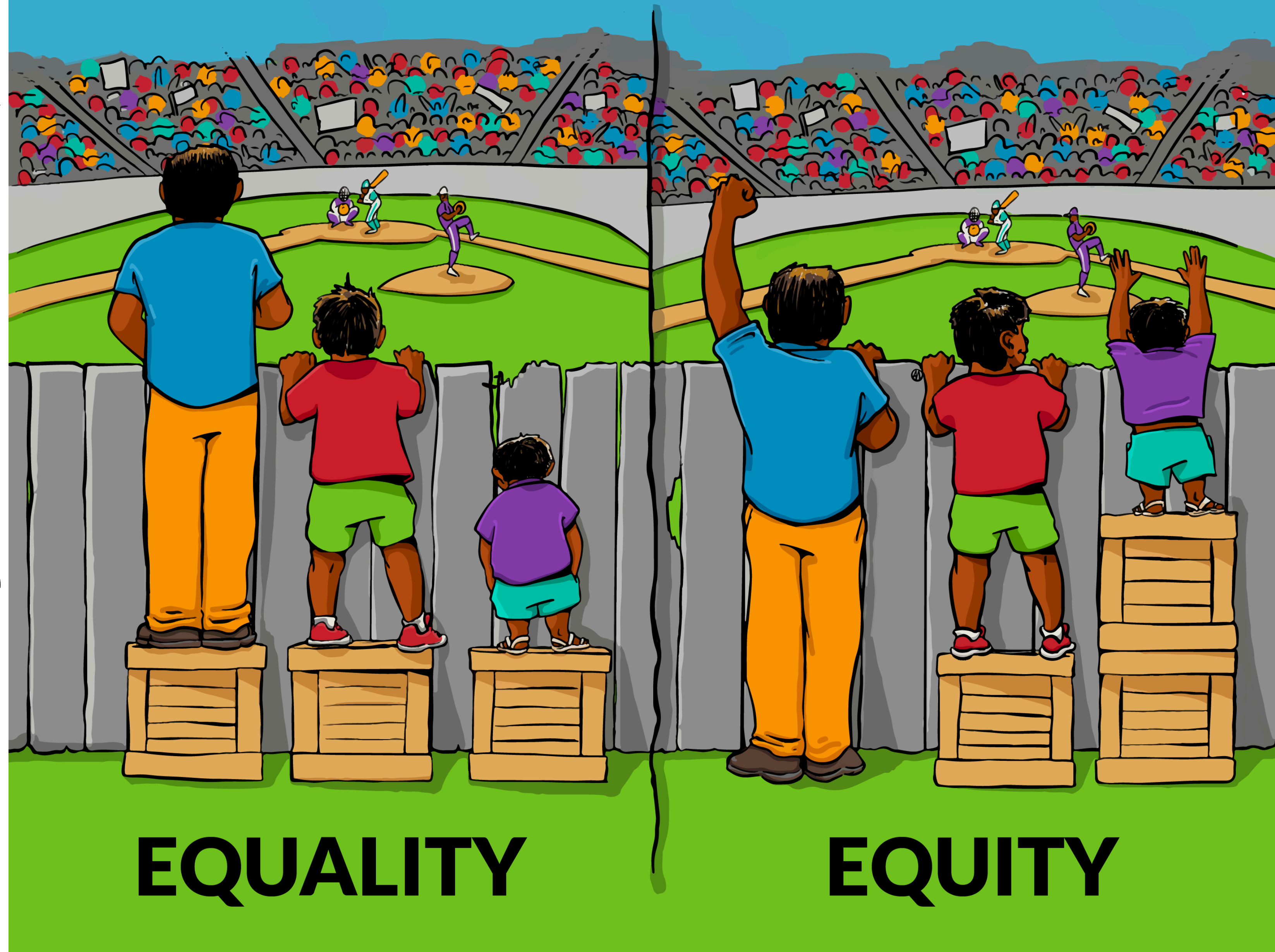


Image courtesy of the [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#) | Artist: [Angus Maguire](#).



# Contributor Ladders and Leadership

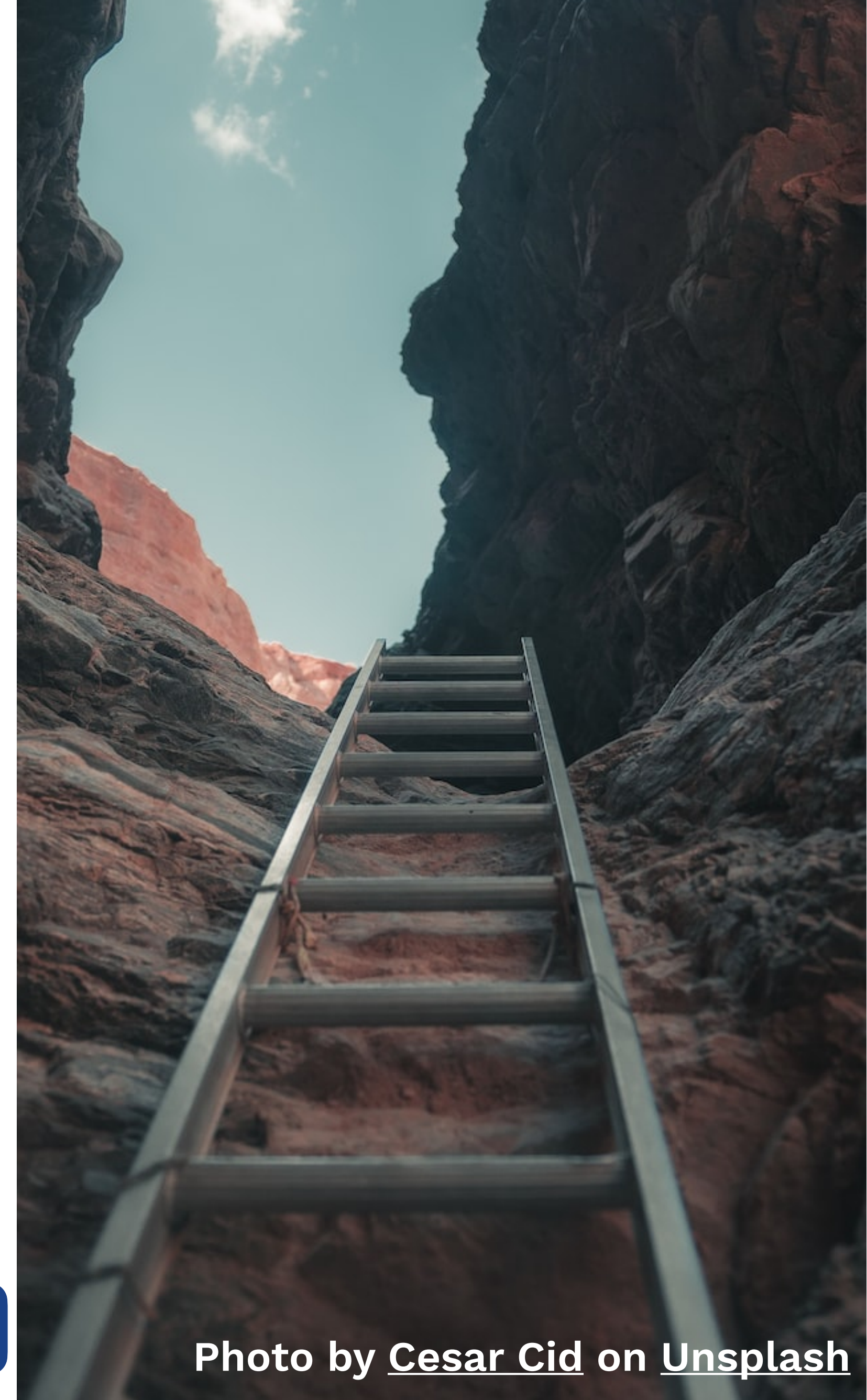




# Contributor Ladders

Defining a ladder of leadership roles  
helps recruit new humans  
to reduce maintainer workload.

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





# Contributor Ladders

**Action: proactively recruit new humans to move up the ladder into leadership roles (template available).**

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

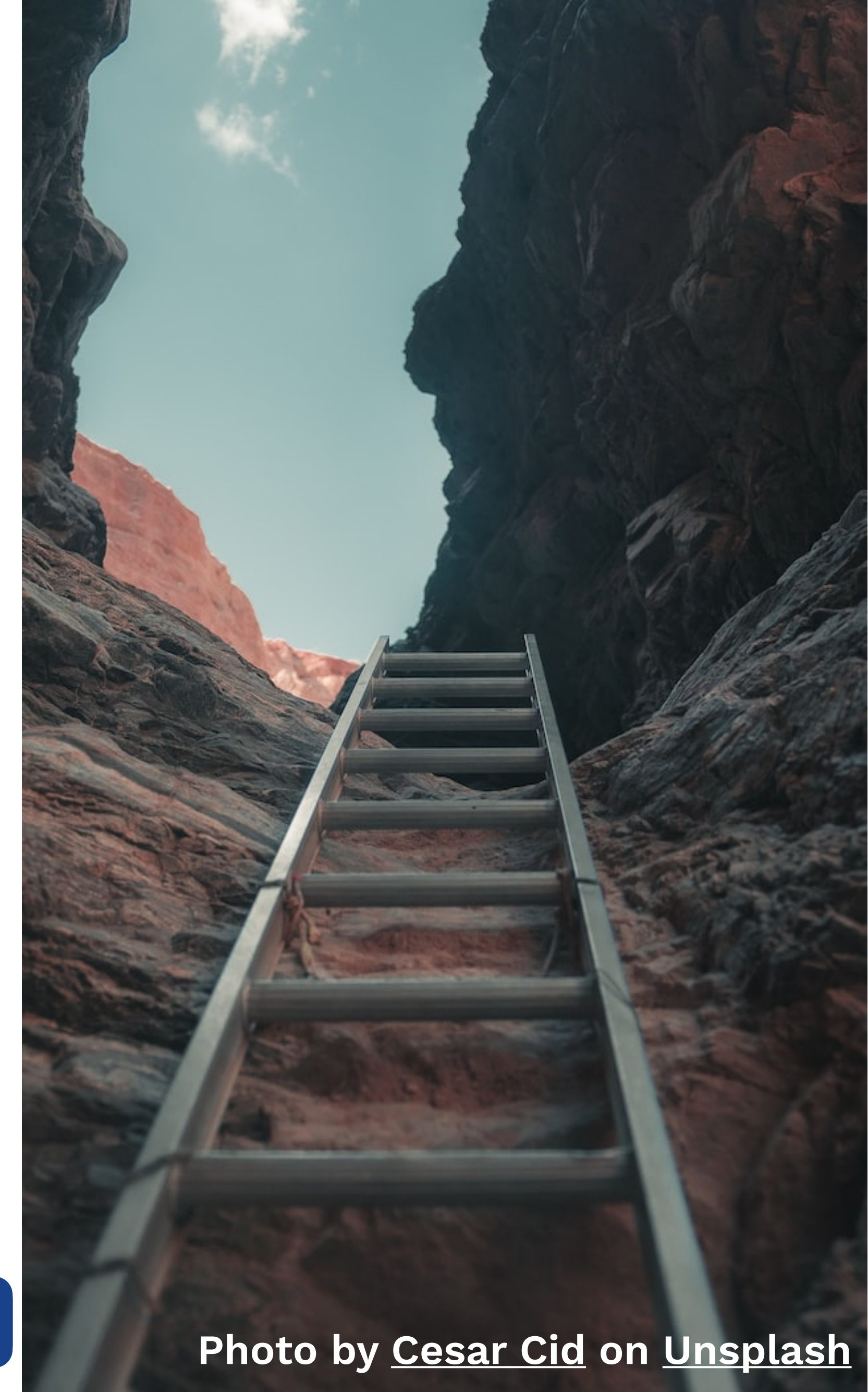


Photo by [Cesar Cid](#) on [Unsplash](#)

@geekygirl dawn



# Leadership

Humans can  
climb the ladder into  
leadership to reduce  
maintainer burden.



 [contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/governance/leadership-selection](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/governance/leadership-selection)



# Leadership

**Action: Define  
a fair and transparent  
process for how new  
leaders are selected.**



[👉 contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/governance/leadership-selection](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/governance/leadership-selection)



# Mentoring

Help the humans  
become more  
productive  
contributors.

 [github.com/cncf/mentoring](https://github.com/cncf/mentoring)

CHA<sup>CO</sup>SS



Image by the [CNCF](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

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# Mentoring

**Action: Carve out time for mentoring, shadowing or 1:1 time with another human.**

 [github.com/cncf/mentoring](https://github.com/cncf/mentoring)

CHAOSS



Image by the [CNCF](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

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# Emeritus as a Goal

**Set your project  
up for success after  
maintainers move on.**





# Emeritus as a Goal

**Action: Be proactive about promoting new humans so that maintainers can move into emeritus roles.**





# Be Strategic

Think about where you can  
best spend your time to  
grow your contributor base.

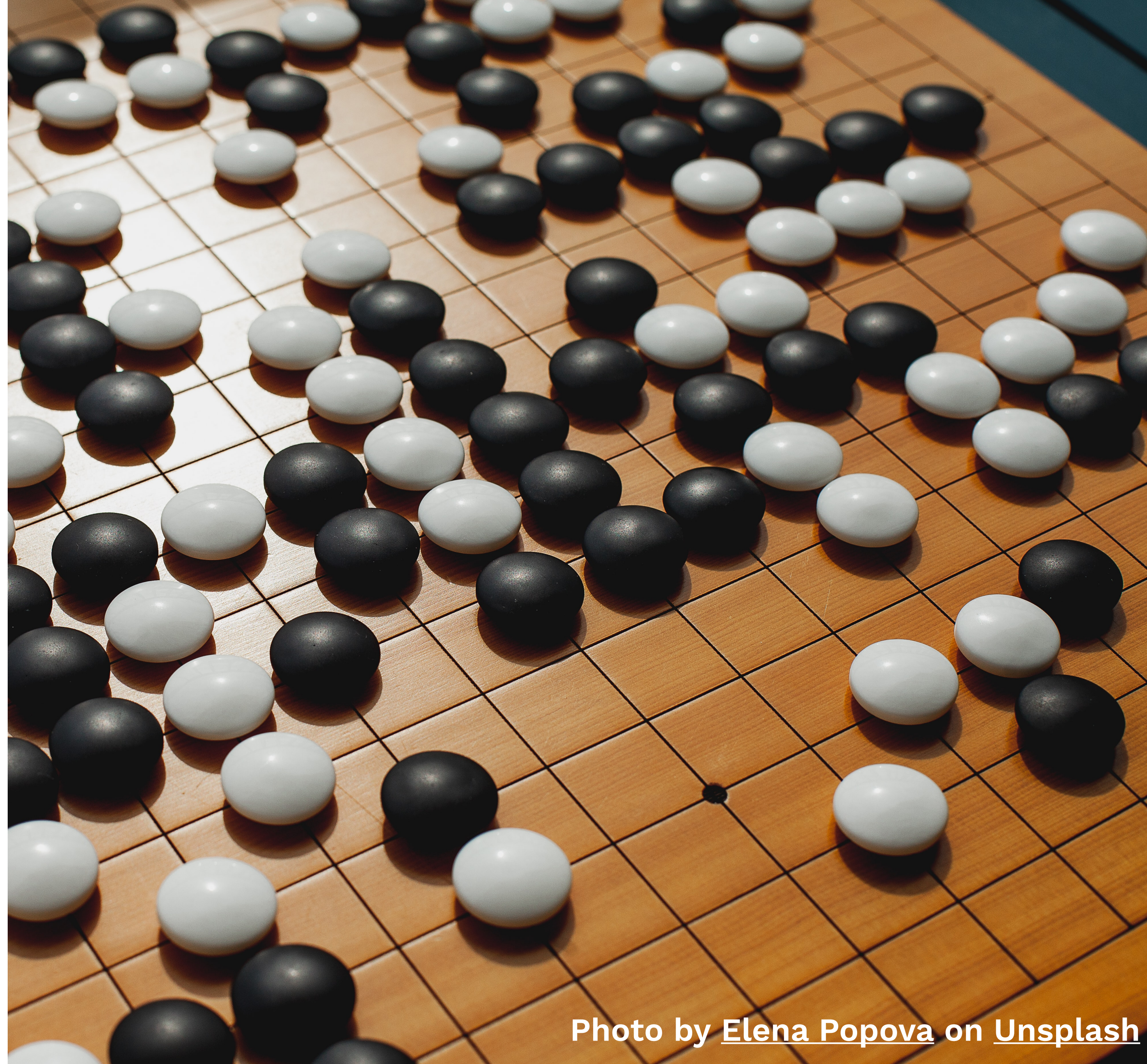


Photo by [Elena Popova](#) on [Unsplash](#)



# Be Strategic

**Action: Find people to help  
with documentation,  
marketing, community,  
and similar activities.**

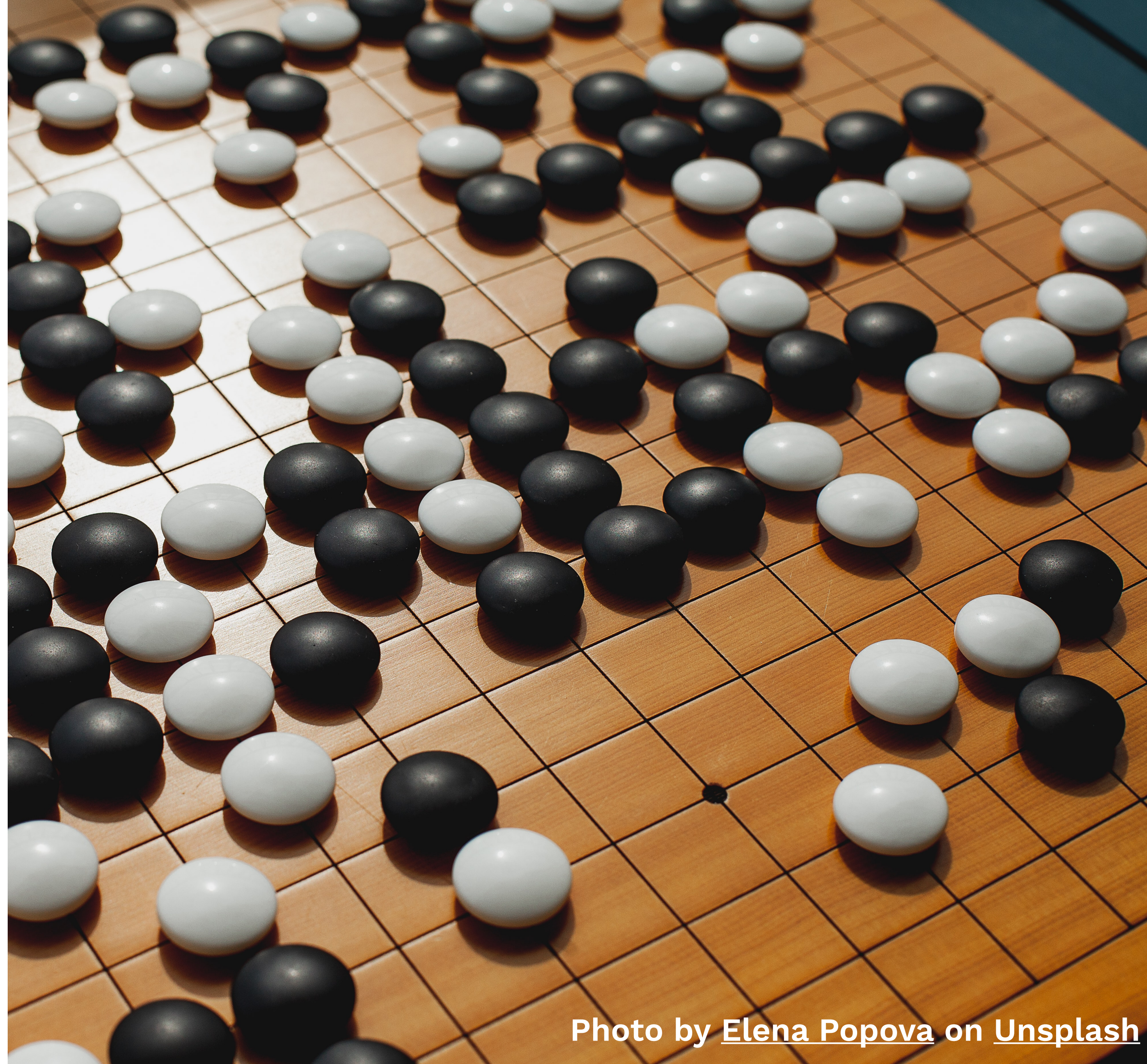
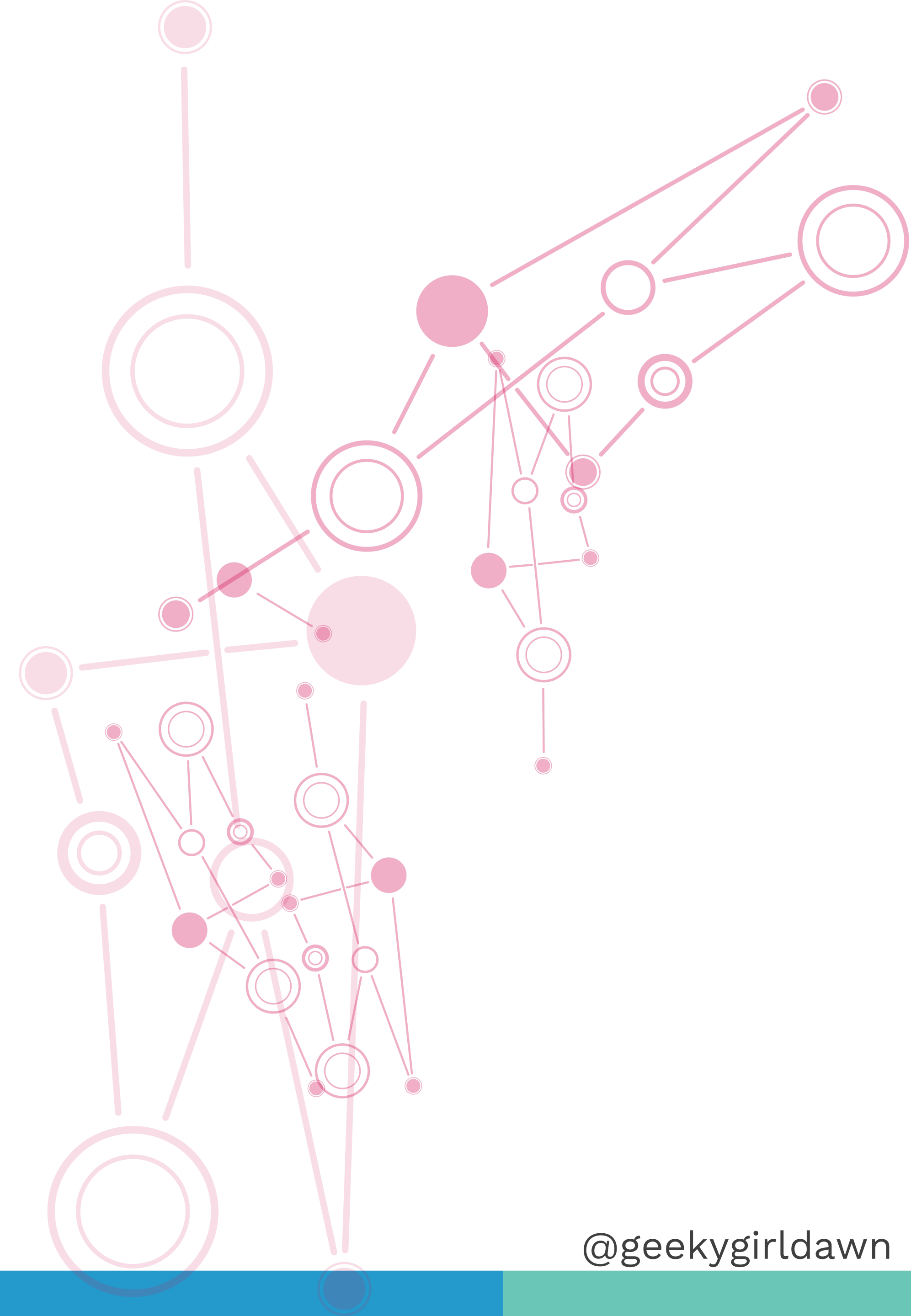


Photo by [Elena Popova](#) on [Unsplash](#)



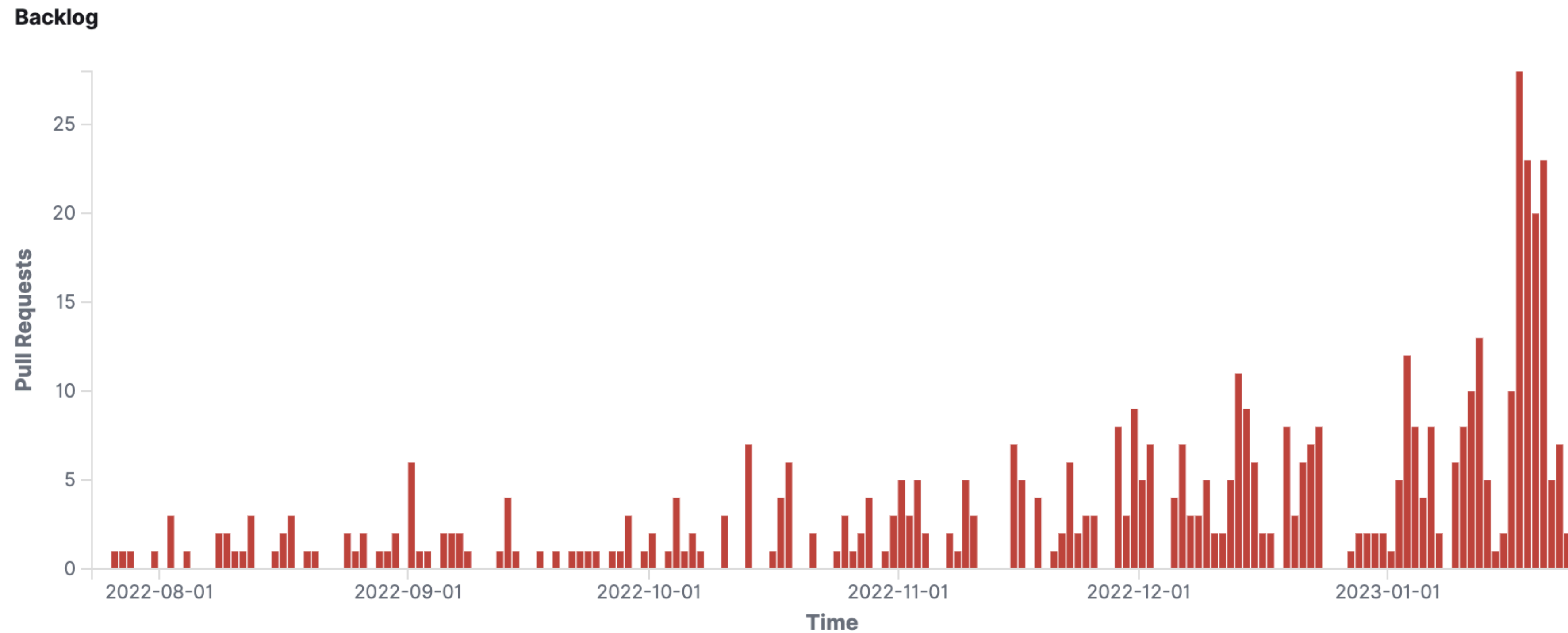
# Measuring Project Sustainability





# Responsiveness

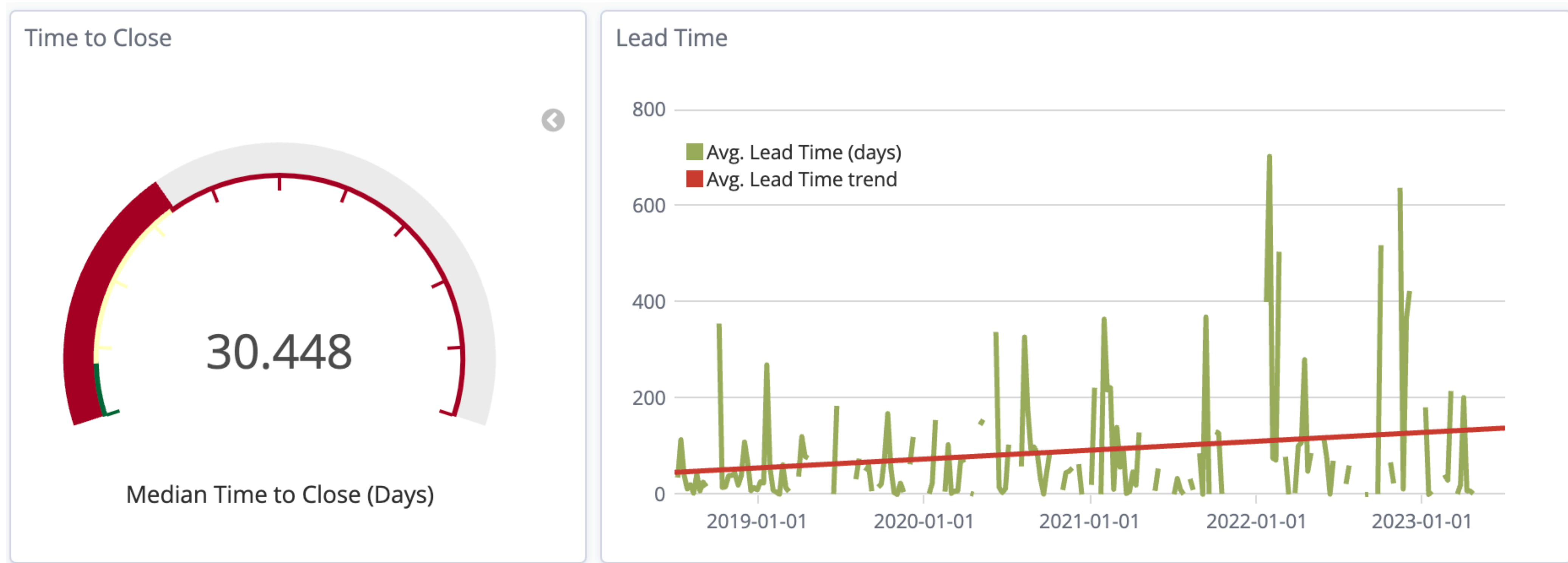
Contributors submitting PRs with no one to resolve / close them  
-> may need to move more people into leadership.





# Responsiveness

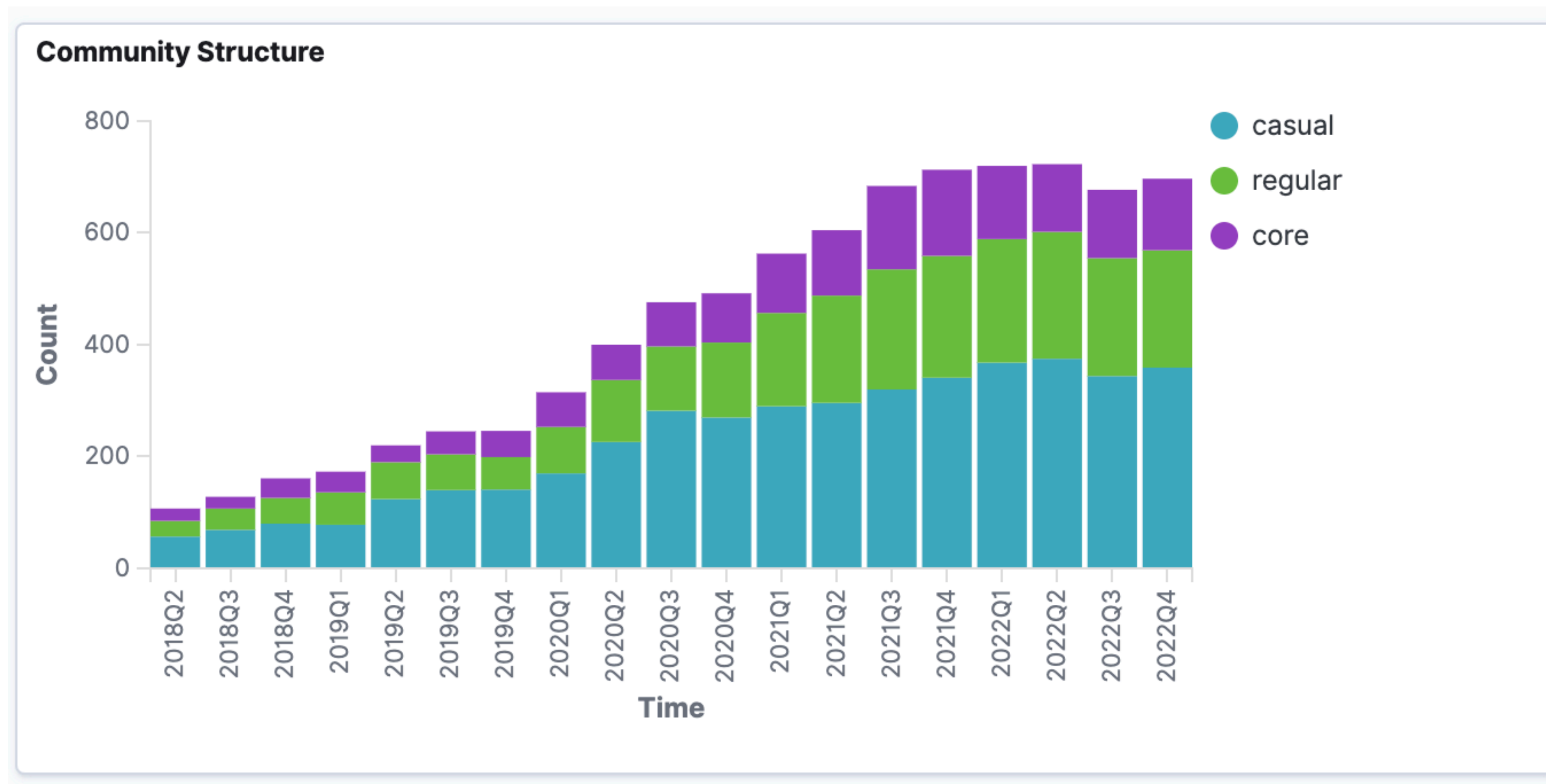
Time it takes for maintainers to close PRs / issues is increasing  
-> may need to move more people into leadership.





# Types of Contributors

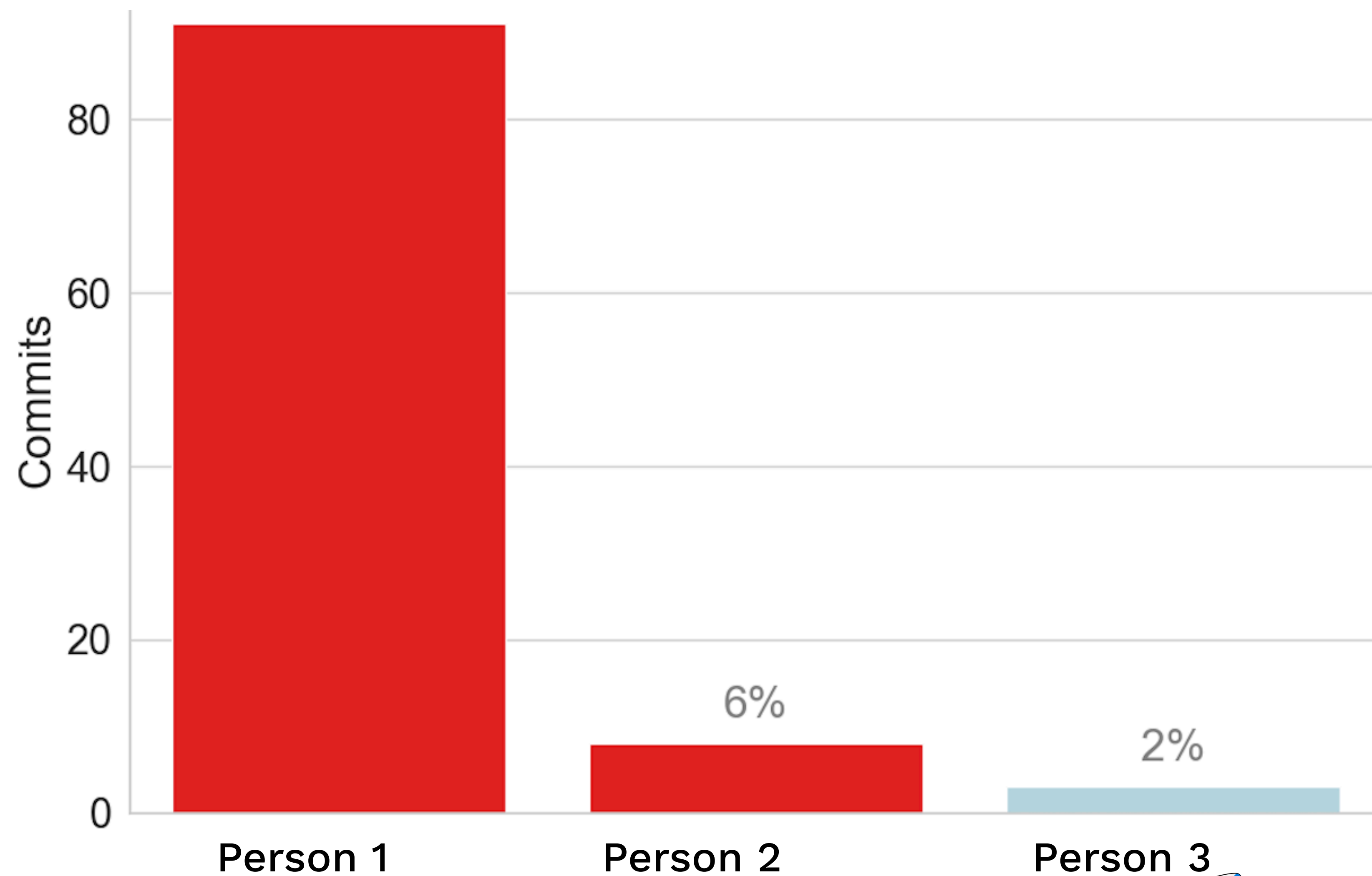
Few casual /regular contributors -> improve onboarding docs.





# Lottery Factor

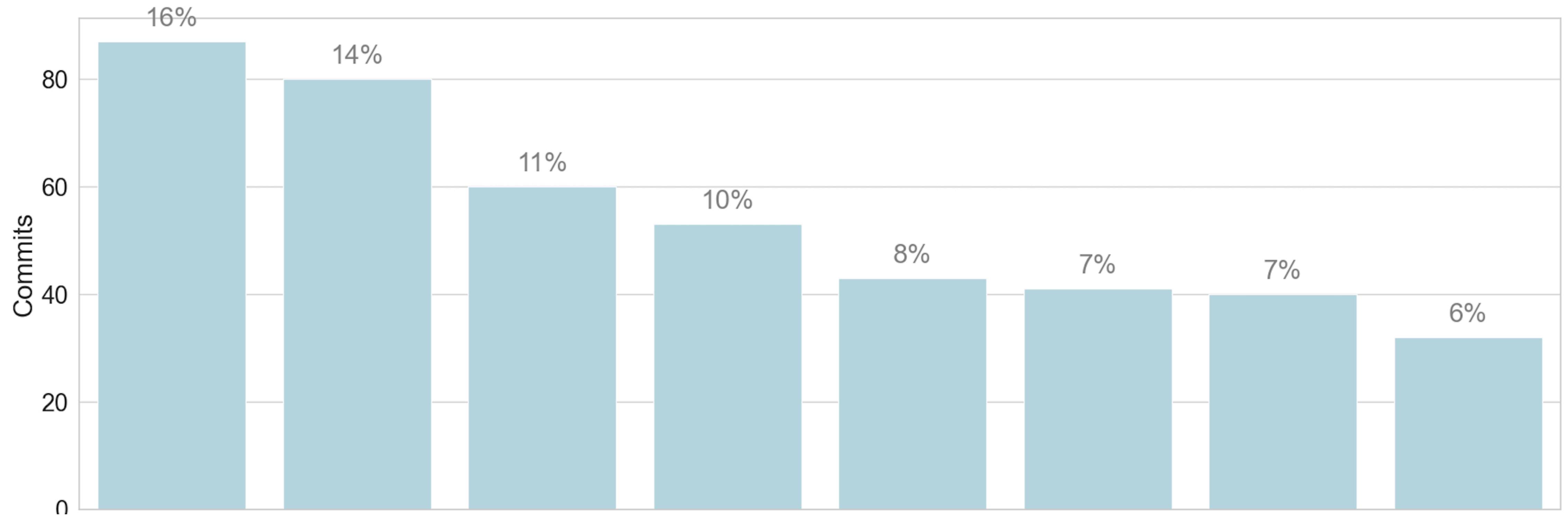
How big of an  
issue is it?





# Lottery Factor

Who might be ready to move into a leadership position?





# Resources

## **CNCF Contributor Strategy TAG Docs & Templates**

[contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/](https://contribute.cncf.io/maintainers/)

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

[github.com/cncf/project-template](https://github.com/cncf/project-template)

## **The Open Source Way Guidebook**

[github.com/theopensourceway/guidebook/](https://github.com/theopensourceway/guidebook/)

## **CHAOSS Metrics**

<https://chaoss.community/>



# CNCF TAG Contributor Strategy Needs more Humans

Join our **Slack channel**

#tag-contributor-strategy (CNCF Slack)

Sign up for our **mailing list** [lists.cncf.io/g/cncf-tag-contributor-strategy](https://lists.cncf.io/g/cncf-tag-contributor-strategy)

Drop in to our **meetings**

Go to [cncf.io/calendar/](https://cncf.io/calendar/) and search for contributor strategy!

Learn about the TAG and how to participate:

[cncf.io/contributor-strategy](https://cncf.io/contributor-strategy). 





# Final Thoughts

Humans can be difficult  
and growing your  
contributor base is hard.

It takes time now,  
but it is worth it later.





# Action Item




**Carve out 1 hour a week to  
improve contributor  
documentation or help  
someone learn something new.**








# THANK YOU!

## Any Questions?

 <https://chaoss.community/>  
 <https://github.com/chaoss>  
 @CHAOSSproj

 <https://fastwonderblog.com/>  
 <https://github.com/geekygirldawn>  
 @geekygirldawn

