Principles of Authentic Participation

Release 0.0.1

Justin W. Flory

Nov 09, 2021

PRINCIPLES:

This is the main page for the *Principles of Authentic Participation*. The purpose of these Principles are to **define a core set of principles of what authentic participation means in multiple contexts (e.g. corporate, individual, humanitarian/NGO, etc.).**

More information is available below. To find the Creative Commons-licensed source for these Principles, see the GitHub repo.

ONE

STARTS EARLY.

This came out of the discussions about organizations showing up with mature, fully baked contributions over which the community had no input.

TWO

PUTS THE COMMUNITY FIRST.

This reflected the general consensus that when an organization and the community want different things, the community needs to come first.

THREE

STARTS WITH LISTENING.

This was Duane's reflection of some comments about folks showing up to projects with no historical context and telling them everything they were doing wrong.

FOUR

HAS TRANSPARENT MOTIVATIONS.

Without a shared understanding of the motivations, it's impossible to resolve differences of opinion effectively. No hidden motives.

FIVE

ENFORCES RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR.

Participants agree to adhere to community-established codes of conduct. Organizations commit to holding their participants accountable for their behavior.

ENDS GRACEFULLY.

No sudden withdrawal of resources without notification and an exit plan. Clear documentation that would allow the community to pick up projects when a company decides to withdraw support.

ANNOTATED PRINCIPLES

An annotated version of the Principles of Authentic Participation with extra verbosity.

Coming soon. See sustainers/authentic-participation#7.

EIGHT

HOW DO THE PRINCIPLES HELP?

Or: What's the point?

This page explains the goals and intentions of the original authors of the Principles of Authentic Participation. There is a three-step approach to understand the goals of the Principles:

1. **Give** Language

2. **Take** Understanding

3. **Create** Knowledge

8.1 Give Language

The Principles of Authentic Participation *GIVE* a common language for sustainable and authentic participation in open source communities.

The Principles were never intended to be absolute or foolproof. It is a tool to use when we talk about what participation in open source means. The Working Group realized early on that when two different people think of participation in open source, they might have two different definitions of participation. So, the Principles are a tool to give others a common, accepted language specifically focused on authentic participation.

8.2 Take Understanding

The Principles of Authentic Participation helps others *TAKE* away a deeper understanding of community-accepted norms for participating in open source.

Once you have a common language, you need to speak it. While those who actively participate in open source communities may understand the nuances and complexities of their communities, these nuances are rarely documented. Speaking this common language about what authentic participation means allows us to better communicate what is important to the sustainability of software development communities. When we can better communicate our needs and help others better empathesize with open source best practices, the challenge becomes a little easier.

8.3 Create Knowledge

The Principles of Authentic Participation encourages others to *CREATE* new knowledge by using them as a reference point.

The Principles provide common language, but this language is needed in conversations that are typically private. When someone advocates for open source best practices in their organization, it is typically in private conversations. Someone who wishes to create an internal best practices document or expand on the original Principles should be able to do so. It is recognized by this Working Group that all derivative knowledge associated to these Principles may not ever be known to upstream, and that is okay!

STORIES

Stories, experiences, and other knowledge related to the Principles of Authentic Participation curated by the community.

This page is a community resource. Anyone is welcome to share stories, experiences, memories, or links to other content that are good examples of what is meant by each Principle. Please consider making a contribution on GitHub if you wish to share a story.

9.1 Starts Early.

TBD!

9.2 Puts the Community First.

TBD!

9.3 Starts With Listening.

TBD!

9.4 Has Transparent Motivations.

TBD!

9.5 Enforces Respectful Behavior.

TBD!

9.6 Ends Gracefully.

TBD!

TEN

WHY DID WE CREATE THESE PRINCIPLES?

This page describes the reasoning, intentions, and thoughts behind the Principles of Authentic Participation. While it does not talk about the Principles specifically, it adds background context and history for how the initial work on the Principles began.

10.1 History

The Principles of Authentic Participation were derived at the Sustain Summit 2020 event on 30 January 2020 in Brussels, Belgium. There, Duane O'Brien and others facilitated discussion groups loosely focused on corporate accountability in the context of open source. From these discussion groups, the following four goals emerged based on discussion topics from the day:

1. Set and publish a goal for open source contribution relative to value capture

2. Adhere to the Principles of Authentic Participation

3. Publish documentation of open source policies, processes, and project governance

4. Well-defined reporting process that is publicly available

From these four goals at Sustain Summit 2020, two went on to become focuses of an *Accountability & Transparency* Working Group affiliated with the Sustain Summit. What you are reading now are the deliverables created by the group focused on the Principles of Authentic Participation.

10.2 Common struggles

How did the discussion groups in Brussels agree that these Principles of Authentic Participation were important? First, consider that the original Sustain Summit 2020 discussion groups aimed to identify positive *and* negative characteristics of corporate participation in open source.

However, the Sustain Summit revealed a common pressure point. Folks with backgrounds in humanitarian, civic, and non-profit sectors also shared similar problems with their organizations exploring open source. Certain positive behaviors are modeled by some actors, and some extraordinarily bad behaviors are modeled by others. The best way to describe what happened at Sustain Summit 2020 was storytelling: stories about our organizations succeeding or failing at being accountable members of open source communities. The stories built an intersectional perspective including corporate open source veterans, leads of industry Open Source Program Offices, undergraduate students, academic researchers, and more.

10.3 Outcome

After the day of discussions, there was a need for common language about what "participation" means in different contexts. This Working Group, originally facilitated by Justin W. Flory, arose from post-event discussions focused on defining what it means to be an authentic contributor in open source communities. This definition should be flexible enough to apply to both individuals and organizations, broadly speaking.

The Principles of Authentic Participation, as defined here, are the product of the original discussions in Brussels along with three months of follow-up audio/video community discussions.

ELEVEN

CONTRIBUTE A STORY

The Principles of Authentic Participation are guidelines and best practices for participating in open source communities. However, it is just a loose framework. What gives these Principles a life is the stories we tell about them.

What does this mean? Stories are examples of how the Principles of Authentic Participation play out and apply to the real world. We encourage people who have stories, retrospectives, and learnings they can share publicly to do so here.

11.1 Submit a story

There are two ways to submit a story and get it published here:

1. Open an issue to share your story and a maintainer can commit it on your behalf

2. Open a pull request to add your story directly to the site

11.1.1 Open an issue

Fill out the Principle Story template to share your story with us. Using this template makes it easier for a maintainer to review your contribution. Please use it!

11.1.2 Open a pull request

Alternatively, if you are comfortable with git, you can add your story directly to the website through a pull request.

```
git clone https://github.com/sustainers/authentic-participation.git
cd authentic-participation/docs/advocate-kit/
# open stories.md in your preferred text editor
```

Consider using this basic template for adding a new story:

```
Coming soon!
```

HIGH-LEVEL RECAP

This discussion took place across two working sessions at Sustain 2020:

- Models for corporate accountability as open source community members (a.k.a. what does it mean to be a corporate member of open source communities?)
- Principles of Authentic Contribution (session notes)

Across the sessions, we talked about the following:

1. Organizational accountability
2. How to participate in open source transparency and authentically as an organization
3. Desire to create an inter-organizational resource to take back to our orgs to help explain what authentic participating in open source actually looks like
4. Explore ways to build social accountability into our workplaces

12.1 Themes from Sustain conversations

The session notes are annotated and color-coded according to the following themes:

- **Maintainer responsibility**: Open-sourcing your own projects or participating in existing communities
- **Guiding hand**: Navigating contribution intent with a hidden agenda that is not well-communicated
- **Participation**: Making key decisions while involving a community
- **Equalizing knowledge**: Understated value in documentation?
- **Undervaluation of open source**: Communicating less obvious perks for engaging authentically
- **You and corporation**: Relationship between individual contributors and the organization they represent in their contributions