

Learning From Open Source Communities to Combat Harassment

Research Question

This project is an oral history about the creation of codes of conduct (CoC) used throughout open source, namely JavaScript, communities. It collects and connects best practices, tips and tricks currently used throughout open source communities that focus on respect, inclusion and equity.

What can we learn from the history of JS Confs, Codes of Conduct and open source community meet ups to better understand how to respond to harassment at scale?

Methodology

Through on-site research and hours of interviews, this project documents the adoption and adaptation of codes of conduct in the JavaScript community and the community organizers' systems for mitigation. I conducted qualitative interviews with nearly 40 participants and researchers; contextualized the work through grounded theory, and used chain referral sampling to find people to interview. Additional research was conducted by an ethnographic dive into online communities (through Slack channels, blog posts, Twitter, and community Wikis).

Key findings

- **One CoC is used at a global scale:** Majority of code of conducts for the JS Conf events come one code of conduct: the Geek Feminism Guide
- **Knowledge loss:** Communities don't often share their best practices, their guidelines for how to respond to harassment or plan events with other friends, collaborators or other community organizers. Knowledge is getting lost.
- **Norm setting: Feminist values at a global scale:** JS Conf EU helped kick start the JsConf conferences (and the main cofounder's wife is a feminist academic, so the building of the tone, structure, theme, and existence of this conference came from a feminist place, and this tone and structure is now replicated across many meet ups globally).
- **Implementation is a problem:** Having a code of conduct doesn't mean someone know's how to implement the CoC, which can lead to dangerous situations, especially if a meet up or community doesn't know how to respond to harassment when it occurs.
- **Lack of formal training:** Most of these meet ups and conferences don't have formal training in implementing a CoC, planning events, or organizing, so they use their best judgement. This leads to problems in consistency in response to harassment, or a lack of clarity amongst community members as to what are the appropriate responses to harassment, and when.

Recommendations

- For OSS Conference Organizers, Funders, and "Big Institutions"
- An Emphasis on Community Health
 - Open source communities needs to share best practices on community health (including harassment) as often as they share technical talks. Through this, communities can learn how to help each other, and ensure best practices proliferate across communities, mitigate harm and allow for continuous learning.
 - Easier to Find Resources on Harassment Mitigation
 - The establishment of this report, for example!
 - Linking and maintaining resources (making sure there is SEO on websites, that links are indexable, etc).

For Smaller Meet Ups and Individuals

- Training themselves on harassment mitigation and CoC implementation
- Maintaining and yearly updating CoCs
- Having dedicated members to covering harassment in meet ups and having those members be consistent.

For All Communities

- Creating a Ladder of Consequences and outlining specific responses to different kinds of harassment

Call(s) to action

- A deeper commitment from funders to ask that above question-- who is responsible and how can we share findings better? Can we create a better change or structure for change?
- Helping communities share best practices, at scale, and receive sustainable support
- By collecting community best practices, knowledge, and pre-existing resources, this project aims to be a useful repository and library for communities to learn about codes of conduct, and how to respond to harassment and toxicity in their communities.
- A deeper commitment to community health- all communities should recognize that harassment and conflict research is a part of a community's health. In the same ways conferences and meetups have an emphasis on sharing cutting edge technology research, there should also be an emphasis and commitment to community health research, talks and best practices.