

# Successful Open Source Collaboration: The Mozilla Experience

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# Mozilla in a Nutshell

- Project began in 1998 with Netscape decision to release browser source code
- Cross-platform open source web browser, email/news client, HTML editor, etc.
- Currently at 0.9.2 release, moving to 1.0
- ~100 core developers, >1000 contributors
  - from Netscape, IBM, Sun, Red Hat, public

# Mozilla Project Characteristics

- Corporate-initiated and funded project
- Graphical client application
- Many contributors are *not* developers

# Aspects of Mozilla project

- Technical: code, documentation, design
- Procedural: bug reporting, code review, commit access approval, module ownership
- Infrastructure: code repository, bug system
- Political: governance, institutional influence
- Legal: licensing, IP ownership, etc.
- Social: peer recognition, offline meetings, contributor recruitment, project evangelism

# Success factors: Technical

- Ship something, get feedback, repeat
- Design for add-ons and customizability

# Success factors: Procedural

- Must approach from viewpoint of person trying to get work done on limited time budget

# Success factors: Infrastructure

- Key components are version control (code repository), issue tracking, discussion forums
- Use technology that is familiar to contributors
- Make sure accessible by everyone

# Success factors: Political

- Align authority with responsibility
- Acknowledge institutional interests, but first loyalty must be to project and contributors



# Success factors: Legal

- Keep licensing simple
- Decide up-front on IP ownership policies
- Use formal agreements where risk exists
  - E.g., for write access to repository

# Success factors: Social

- Promote inclusion
  - E.g., move off-line discussions on-line
- Specialize roles to increase opportunities
- Build “pyramid of participation”

# Summary

- Mozilla project initiated new phase in free software/open source development
- Rich source of “lessons learned”
- Created enabling technology for next generation of collaborative software development projects