

Mentorship in the Age of AI

A Repeatable Model for Sustaining Open Source



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Hello!



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OpenTelemetry | Open Source Community |
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Bloomberg OSPO

Open Source | Public Good |
Business Innovation | Rainbow Chaser



The OpenTelemetry Cohort | By the Numbers

48

Bloomberg engineers,
most new to open
source

7

OpenTelemetry
maintainers who
volunteered

10

Weeks of office hours

11

Repositories touched

118

Contributions submitted
upstream

70

PRs merged into
OpenTelemetry

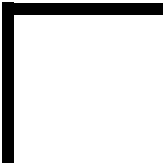
842

Volunteer hours logged

1

Signed Bloomberg /
CNCF agreement

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**The program ended.
The contribution continues.**

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What Outlived the Cohort

Measurable long-term impact and sustained open source contribution



A top contributor

One participant went from a first pull request to one of the most prolific contributors to the OpenTelemetry Demo, in a matter of weeks.

Key Outcome

Rapid progression from beginner to core demo maintainer level.



Code that stayed

Three teammates built a Collector extension together. It outlived the cohort and is still in the project.

Key Outcome

Production-grade architecture integrated into upstream codebase.

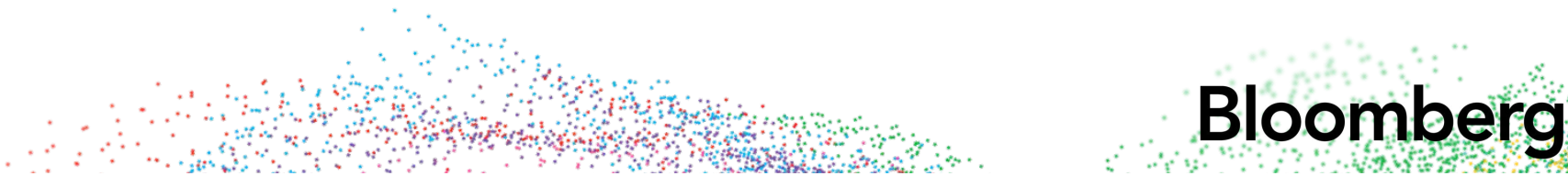


People who stayed

Participants are still contributing months after the program ended, with no company program telling them to.

Key Outcome

Organic, self-sustaining community engagement post-program.



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This Was Not Just Us

Six OTel maintainers gave 10 weeks of their own time. A Bloomberg & CNCF organizing team made the hours real.

OPENTELEMETRY MAINTAINERS WHO MENTORED



Juraci Paixão Kröhling



Kemal Akkoyun



Vitor Vasconcellos



Pierre Tessier



Chengzhong Wu
(Bloomberg)



Severin Neumann

ORGANIZING TEAM



Yoga Ramalingam
(Bloomberg)



Stephen Black
(Bloomberg)



Devpriya Dave
(Bloomberg)



Alyssa Wright
(Bloomberg)



Nate Waddington
(CNCF)

Special thanks to **Liudmila Molkova & Martin Thwaites**, who showed up to talk with the cohort, as well as to every other maintainer who helped without signing up!

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01

Why a company does this

Half this room is wondering how to sell it to their leadership.



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We are Not a Customer of this Project. **We are a Dependent.**

Consumer behavior

- “We need feature X”
- “Why isn’t this fixed yet?”
- “Someone should really look at that”
- Files the issue, waits, escalates
- Treats maintainer time as a free, infinite resource

Steward behavior

- “We will staff a cohort
- “We will reduce maintainer load, not add to it”
- “You set the priorities, we bring the hours”
- Shares responsibility without taking control
- Treats maintainer attention as the scarcest thing in the system

Consumer

“We need feature X”
“Why isn’t this fixed?”
“Someone should...”

vs

Steward

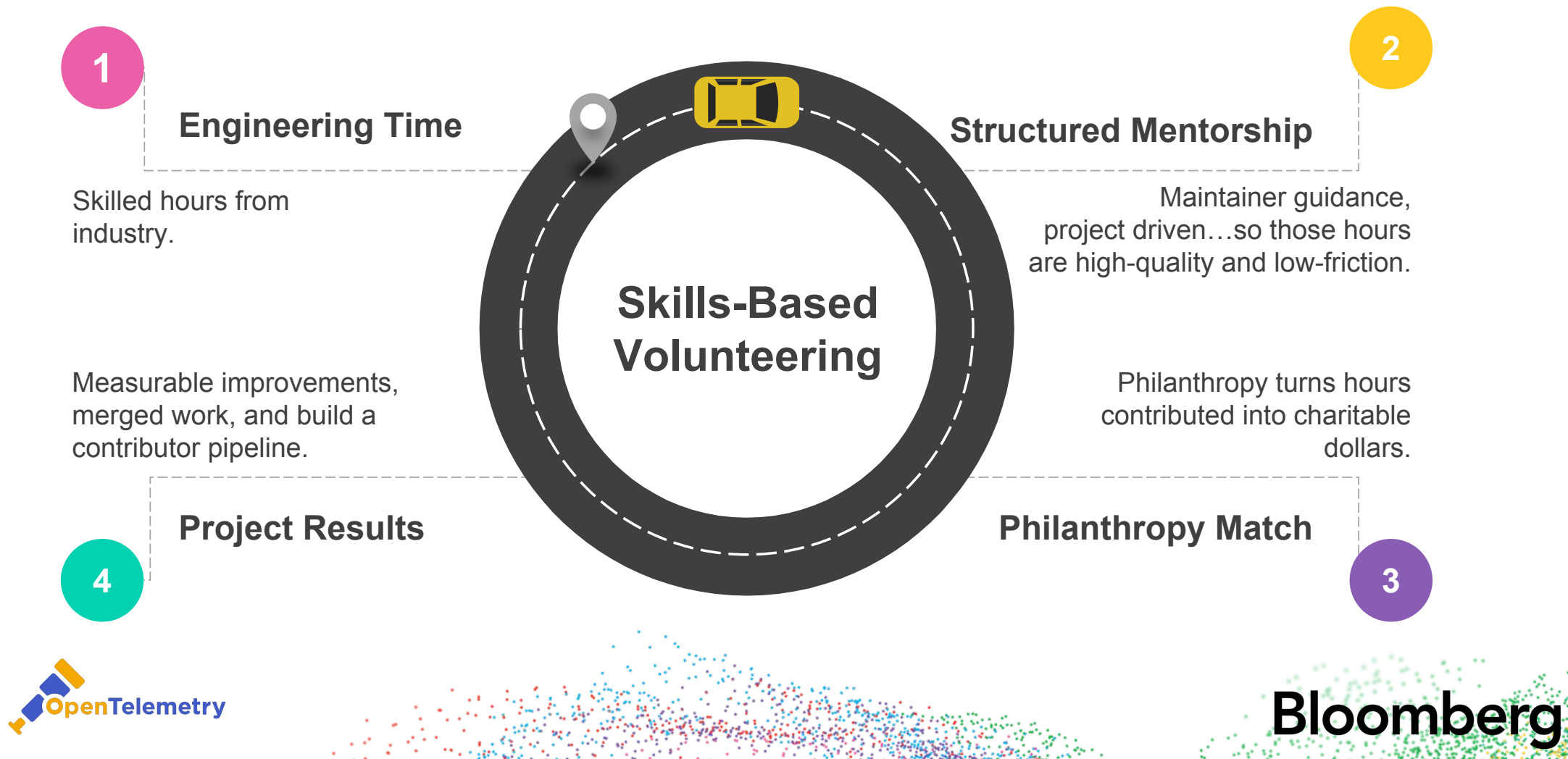
“We staff a cohort”
“We reduce maintainer load”
“We improve the backlog”

Maintainer overload is not somebody else's problem. It's an risk on our side of the fence too.



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How the hours actually get funded



The framework, in five parts

01

Ten weeks, fixed

Long enough to land real work, short enough that people commit.

02

Curated issues, ready before day one

Scoped, labeled, and agreed with maintainers in advance.

03

Weekly office hours

Same time, every week, cameras on, maintainers present.

04

Paired company mentors with project maintainers

Company mentors absorb the onboarding load.

05

Sanctioned time

Written down, approved by managers, logged. Not evenings and weekends.

02

Why the project said yes

The half that decides whether the maintainers in this room trust any of it.



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A Different Mentorship Program

What mentorship usually means

- Students and early-career engineers
- A proven, valuable model. Many of us got here that way
- The teaching load is technical: how to set up the project, how to write the code
- Most people move on when the internship ends

What was actually proposed

- **Senior engineers** who already know how to write software
- A company with a commercial interest in them staying
- The teaching load is social: how the community works, how decisions get made, how to find something worth doing
- The company keeps paying them afterwards



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What convinced us to open the door

01

A proven path

02

It came through Bloomberg and the CNCF

03

Senior engineers invested in success

Evidence it worked: Cohort members are still contributing to OpenTelemetry today.



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How We Ran It

Open by default, with a back channel

Open source means working in public. It also means giving people a safe place to ask the question they are embarrassed by. We deliberately ran both.

Straight to the SIGs

We pushed people to talk to SIGs directly, on issues, in Slack, in the meetings. Not through us. That is how you end up with a contributor rather than a ticket.

Ten weeks of the same hour

Regular check-ins, a shared topic each week, and faces instead of handles. Putting a face to a tag is most of what turns a stranger into a colleague.

Weekly activity reports

Regular light-touch status updates to gauge where contributors are, spot blockers early, and ensure nobody is left stuck in silence.



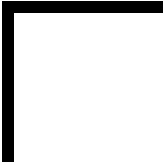
03

What was hard

What we'd do differently next time.



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Issue discovery was the bottleneck. Not motivation.

People wanted to contribute and could not find where. We badly underestimated this, so next time we will spend far more cycles than we think we need on curation before day one.

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Three More Things We Learned

01

The mismatch problem

Contributors wanted to contribute to sub-projects without a dedicated mentor in large numbers. We initially wanted to avoid that, but eventually enabled it by setting expectations on both ends properly.

02

Maintainers are already flooded

Adding well-meaning contributors to a drowning review queue does not automatically help. Sometimes persistence carried it. Sometimes the volume could not be absorbed.

03

Life has other plans

Within the ten weeks, personal and professional change happened among mentors and mentees, so we also had to adapt to that. Congratulations to everyone who found a new job, became a parent, or accomplished another big life goal!

04

The human element

Why AI raises the stakes: the cost of producing a plausible contribution collapsed, the cost of reviewing one did not.



“

I can hand someone an issue and they can run an AI over it and hand it back. **How do I know they want to do good**, and aren't just collecting internet points or doing something malicious, and then vanishing?

”

Severin Neumann · OpenTelemetry Governance Committee

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How company partnerships (can) create maintainers

People, not pull requests

Contributors who showed up every week, had faces, and were accountable to somebody. Not a spray of patches from an account created yesterday.

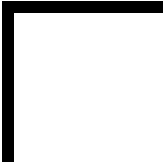
A named counterpart

Someone on the company side who owns the relationship, absorbs the onboarding, and can be called when something goes wrong.

Currency other than code

Attending SIG meetings, reviewing, writing docs, testing, answering questions. Non-code participation is a legitimate on-ramp, and it is underrated exactly where maintainer capacity is thinnest.





**Showing up was always the scarce
thing. AI just made output free.**



The blueprint

Photograph this one. If both columns are true, you can run this.

What a company must bring

- Sanctioned time for and after the program, written down and approved by managers.
- Company-side mentors who absorb onboarding, so maintainers do not.
- A named owner who is still there in week ten.
- Patience for the agreements: legal, trademark, philanthropy rails.
- A willingness to let the project set the priorities.

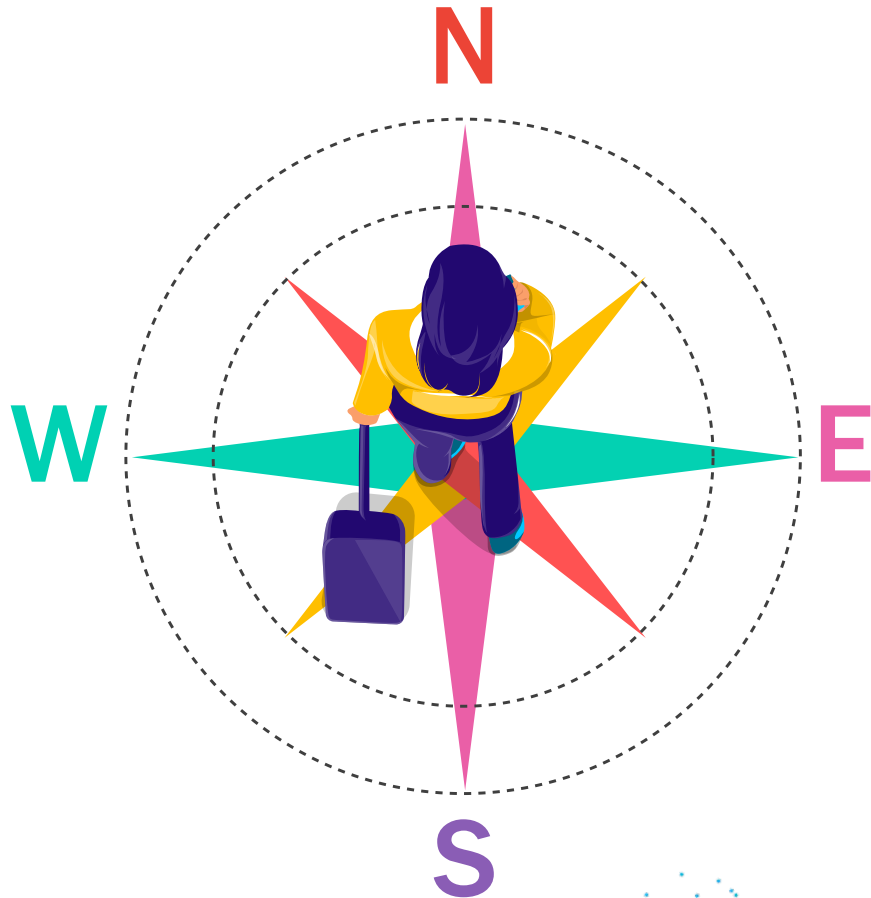
What a project must bring

- Maintainer buy-in that is real, not polite.
- A curated backlog of scoped issues, ready before day one.
- Maintainer coverage for the areas people will want.
- A weekly hour, and answers in between.
- A foundation to anchor it: neutral convening and simple rails.

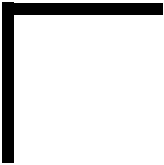


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It replicates. Come build with us.



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Thank you. Questions?

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