

Contributor Covenant



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Frequently Asked Questions

We recognize that the adoption of a code of conduct can be a source of confusion or even anger for some people in an open source community. This FAQ is intended to address some of the common concerns that we see raised by people whose reaction to adoption is a negative one, and we hope it will help alleviate some of their concerns.

Are codes of conduct a mechanism for turning project governance over to “social justice warriors”?

Project maintainers are responsible for tailoring and enforcing the codes of conduct that they adopt. A code of conduct does not grant any authority or power to anyone outside of this group. Even if pressure is applied from a third party, such as on social media, the project maintainers alone have the authority to enforce the code of conduct and are under no obligation to bow to external pressure.

What should I do if I have been accused of violating the code of conduct?

The first step when dealing with accusations of violation of the code of conduct is to deal with it in a professional manner. Do not respond with sarcasm, attack the code of conduct or its enforcement, or the accuser. Calmly focus on the evidence of what happened, work to understand any damage you may have caused, and examine how your intentions may have inadvertently caused harm. The more you stick to the facts of what happened, and demonstrate your willingness to work with the enforcement team as they evaluate the claim, the better. Most importantly, trust the project maintainers to act in a fair and just manner.

Won't a code of conduct have a negative effect on the end product?

There is no evidence that adopting a code of conduct has a negative effect on code quality. But it will affect the experience of those who participate in communities where the CoC is enforced. Ensuring that more people feel safe contributing to the project can significantly improve the quality of the codebase.

Won't this just promote participation for the sake of participation and an end of meritocracy?

The code of conduct is not a positive discrimination policy, and it does not include any recommendation on how to recruit or select project participants. It also does not state or imply that any and all contributions should be accepted, regardless of quality or adequacy, based on any personal characteristic of the submitter. By fostering a more cooperative and civil environment, the code of conduct actually creates the opportunity for more people to participate, learn, grow, and improve the quality of their contributions in a positive and supportive environment.

Why should my community have to change to accommodate marginalized people?

The level of accommodation that the code of conduct implies is not higher than the one that is expected when dealing with peers in other professional settings. It is not about being accommodating to one group, it's about making all potential contributors feel welcome and safe.

When I code, I just see the code, not the person, so why should I care about this code of conduct? Can't minorities keep their minority-status to themselves and focus on the code?

Research shows that the two most important factors in successful teams are diversity ("Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter", Harvard Business Review) and psychological safety ("Foster Psychological Safety", re:Work). If a potential contributor has to hide some portion of their identity in order to avoid explicit or implicit bias, they may not feel safe contributing to the project. Each person should feel welcomed and accepted and free to bring their whole selves to their work. What's more, hiding behind an anonymous account, a gender- or racial-neutral pseudonym, or otherwise hiding one's true identity can have a materially negative effect on building the kind of reputation and open source track record that many employers look for in potential hires.

Isn't this just a way for progressive/left-wing people to push their agenda?

"Everything is politics", but the code of conduct is not about an advance of progressive/left-wing politics. It's about establishing

a minimal level of civil and professional collaboration. Civil, non-discriminatory, and professional behavior should be a baseline and shared value held by people of all ideologies, regardless of political affiliation (with the obvious exception of hate groups).

Doesn't adopting a code of conduct make a contributor subject to removal from a project for a simple mistake, holding an unpopular belief, or sharing an opinion on their Twitter account?

The Contributor Covenant specifically states that behavior, actions, and communications outside the scope of the project cannot be considered violations of the code of conduct, unless the person in question is representing the project in an official capacity.

In the case of a confirmed violation, project maintainers are expected to meet the violation with a consequence that is proportional to the offense and to work with the offender to prevent future violations. Maintainers want a safe, collaborative community of bright, kind, compassionate contributors with solid technical and communication skills. It is not in their best interest to be hostile or overly punitive to members of their community.

Doesn't this code of conduct just promote political correctness?

Only if you define political correctness as the belief that women, non-binary people, gay, lesbian, queer, and/or transgender people, people of color, and people of different religious backgrounds should be afforded the same rights and privileges as everyone else.

What is so wrong that white males dominate a

certain profession?

Women and men of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and races can have competence and interest in software development and deserve equal access to opportunities in open source and tech. But the low rate at which marginalized people are recruited, and the high rate at which they leave the industry, point to a larger cultural and systemic problem. Codes of conduct attempt to address this in part by reducing the potential for discrimination, explicit and implicit bias, and the negative impact of homogeneous teams.

I don't agree with Coraline Ada Ehmke's politics. Should I avoid this code of conduct?

If you're a meritocracy fan, you already abide by the principle of separating the person from the contribution. And even if you're not, adopting the Contributor Covenant does not imply any political or social orientation aside from the (unfortunately politicized) goal of making your project welcoming and inclusive to people of all backgrounds.

Doesn't a code of conduct give too much power to project maintainers?

Project maintainers are the arbiters of code of conduct violations and are the unquestioned leaders of the projects they own. Without a code of conduct, a project maintainer has the power to eject any contributor from a project for any (or no) reason at all. A properly enforced code of conduct creates a social contract between and among contributors and maintainers that make such abuses of power less acceptable and common. If you don't trust a project maintainer to act in a just and fair

way, you probably should consider not participating in their community.

Can I be cited for a code of conduct violation for something that I say on Twitter or other social media site?

The Contributor Covenant only applies in project spaces and when an individual is representing a project. Your conduct outside of these situations is not governed by the code of conduct.

Does the prohibition on publishing private information include email addresses sent to a public list?

No. Information that has voluntarily been published to a public location does not fall under the category of private information. Such public information may be used within the context of the project according to project norms (such as in commit metadata in code repositories), without that constituting a breach of the code of conduct.

Why are ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ called out as two separate pivots? Aren’t these terms interchangeable?

- Ethnicity (or ethnic group) is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation.
- Race is the grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society and usually resulting from genetic ancestry.

We recognize different cultures and the process of translation

might make the differences between these terms less apparent. Violence and discrimination can occur based on the perception of either and sometimes both at the same time which is why it is important to call them out as two separate concepts.

The Contributor Covenant explicitly lists a set of protected classes; does this make it acceptable to discriminate or make others feel unwelcome based on other factors?

No. The Contributor Covenant explicitly lists protected classes for many reasons, such as reminding people to give them appropriate consideration, and assuring people in those protected classes that they are welcome. However, this is not an invitation for rules lawyers to seek loopholes, or to discriminate against others or make people feel unwelcome based on criteria not listed here. (With the notable caveat that those who discriminate or make others feel unwelcome are themselves not welcome.)

The Contributor Covenant was created by [Coraline Ada Ehmke](#) in 2014 and is released under the [CC BY 4.0 License](#).

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