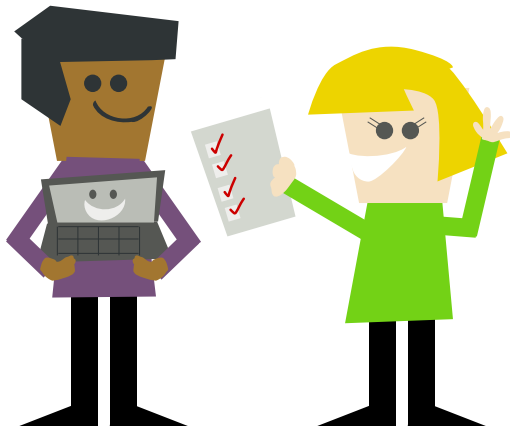


# Get Involved with Open Source: a Creative's Guide

*Have you ever thought about or even tried to get involved with a free and open source project, but found it was too coder-centric? These projects need your help more than ever. Here's some tips from another creative on how to get involved.*



## #1: Know that you're needed and wanted (badly!)

Can you do any of the following and have fun while doing it?

design icons & icons    write HTML/CSS    conduct usability studies  
create webpages    skin/theme apps    design interactions  
compose music    film short videos    write marketing materials

If so, I guarantee you there is a free & open source project out there that is not only desperate for your help, but will also deeply appreciate it and love you to pieces for providing it, and it'll be a blast to work on. If you encounter a project that's difficult to work with, move on, you're going to find one you love that loves you back.

## #2: Help the project help you help them (help<sup>3</sup>)

Many free & open source software projects today are dominated by programmers and engineers and while some are lucky enough to have the involvement of a

creative person or two, for most projects a designer, artist, or other creative's presence is an often-yearned-for-yet-never-realized dream. In other words, they may not know what kinds of help to ask you for, what information they need to give you to be productive, or even the basics of how to work with you effectively. If you can make it clear to them the kind of work you'd like to offer, providing samples of other work you've done - and let them know what you need, then they will better understand how to help you engage in their project.

## #3: Ask questions. Lots of questions. There are no stupid questions.

We've noticed sometimes in Fedora when new creatives come on board, they are afraid to ask technical questions for fear they will look 'stupid.' The secret is, free & open source developers can be so specialized that there are a lot of technical details outside of their immediate expertise that they don't understand either. The difference is that they aren't afraid to ask - so you shouldn't be, either! If you're not sure what to work on, or you're not sure how to get started, or you're not sure why that thing someone said in chat is so funny - ask. Free & open source communities are a friendly bunch! It can be especially effective to seek out a mentor - some projects have mentoring programs - and ask them if they wouldn't mind being your go-to person when you have questions.

## #4 Share and share often. Even if it isn't ready yet. Especially if it isn't ready yet.

We've also noticed new creatives in Fedora and other free & open source projects are a little shy when it comes to showing their work. I understand that you don't want to ruin your reputation by putting something out there that isn't your best or even finished, but a big part of how open source projects work is sharing often and openly. The further along you've come on a piece before you've shared it, the harder others will find it to provide you actionable feedback and to jump in and get involved. It's also harder for others to collaborate on your piece themselves and feeling a sense of ownership for it, supporting and championing it through to implementation. In some free & open source projects, not being forthcoming with your sketches, designs, and ideas is even seen as offensive! So please, give this tip a try and keep an open mind. Share your work early and often, and make your source files available. You might be pleasantly surprised by what happens!

## #5 Don't be shy. Be as visible as you can within the project community.

Do you blog? Find out which blog aggregations the members of the free & open source project you're working on read, and put in requests to have your blog added to them (there's usually a link to do so in the sidebar.) For example, the main blog aggregator you'll want to join to become a part of the Fedora community is called Planet Fedora ([planet.fedoraproject.org](http://planet.fedoraproject.org).) Write a first blog post once you've been added introducing yourself and letting folks know what you like. The project will surely have a mailing list or forum where discussion takes place. Join it, and send an intro there too. When you create assets for the project - no matter how small, no matter how unfinished - blog about them, upload them to the project wiki, tweet about them, send links to prominent community members in IRC to get their feedback - make your work visible, and folks will start to associate you with your work and approach you with cool projects and other opportunities based solely on that.

