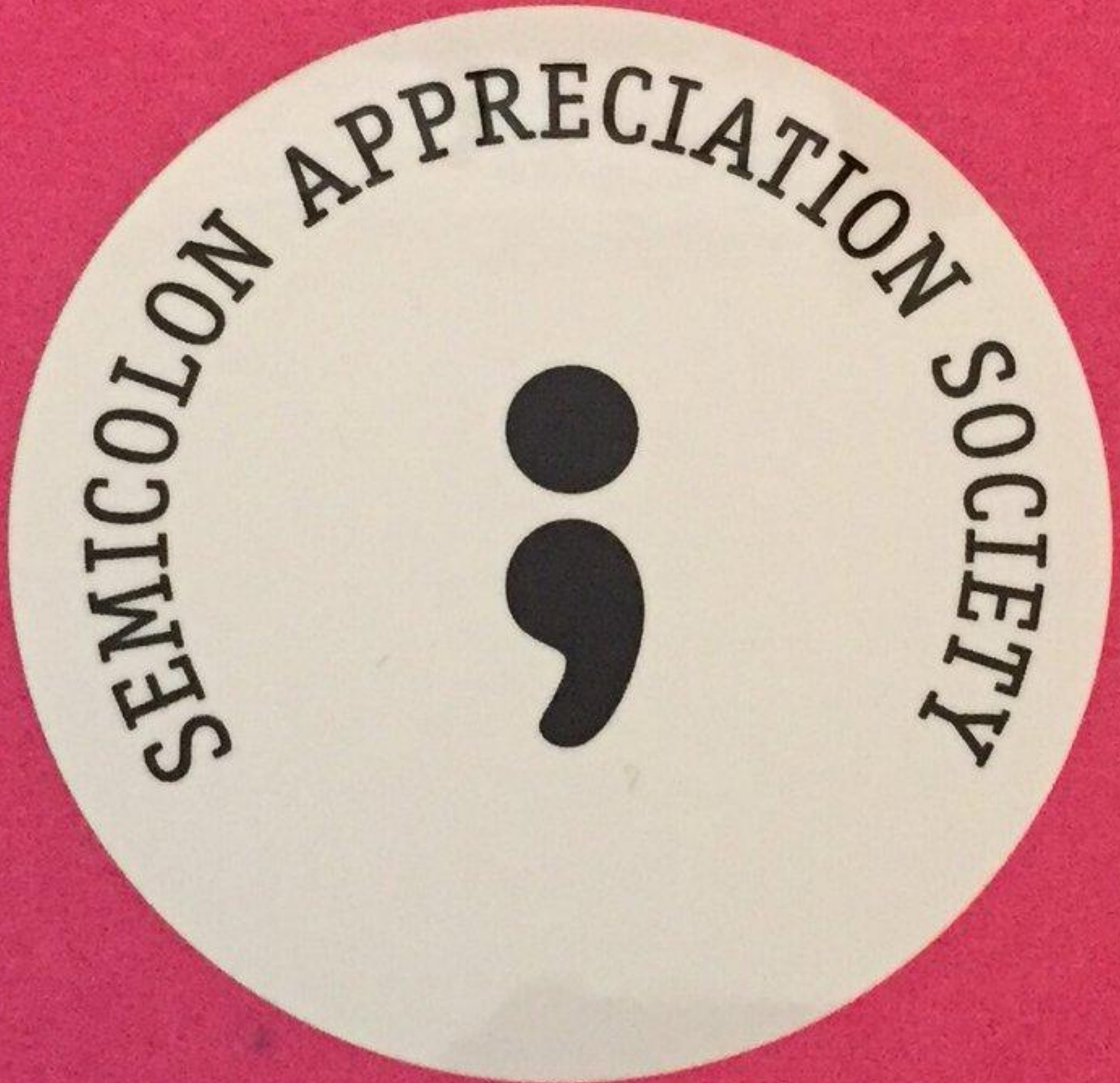
Solving community problems with documentation

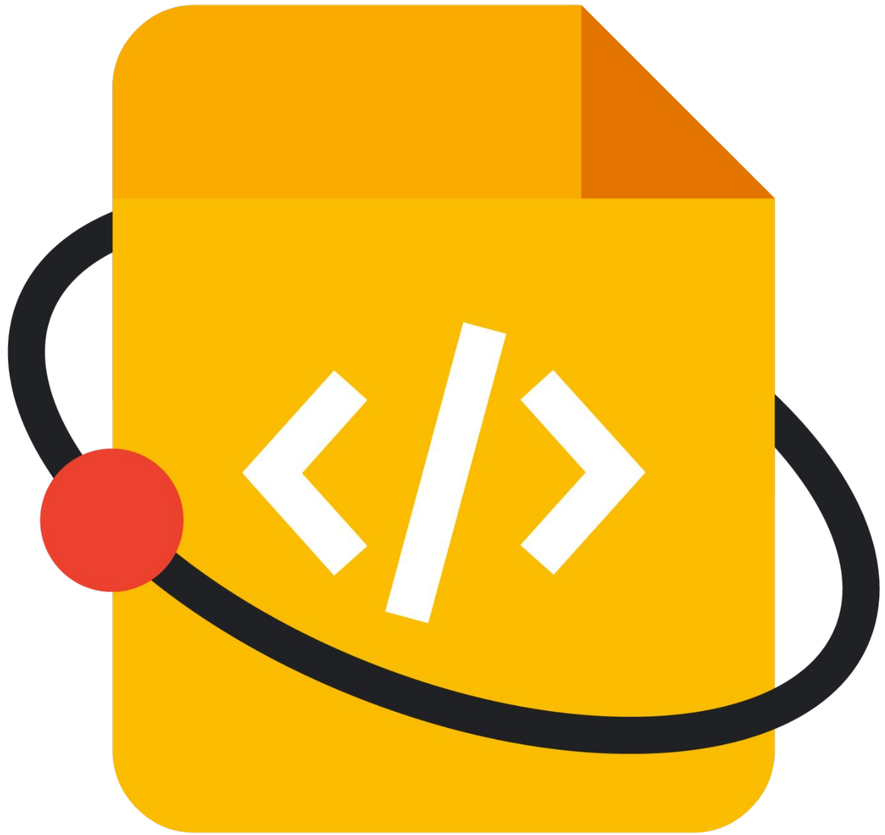
What we've learned from Google Season of Docs

Erin McKean
Open Source Programs Office
Google

“hello!” by m anima CC-BY 2.0


SEMICOLON APPRECIATION SOCIETY

Google Season of Docs



Google Season of Docs

- Created by Sarah Maddox and Andrew Chen
- 2019-2020: mentorship
- 2021-today: grants

Summer of Code

- **g.co/gsoc**
- Mentorship program
- Goals:
  - Build community
  - Give students and beginners experience in open source
- ✨ 20 years! ✨
- VERY BIG

Season of Docs

- **g.co/seasonofdocs**
- Grant program
- Goals:
  - Create documentation
  - Create knowledge of best practices for documentation in open source
- 🎉 6 years! 🎉
- very small

Research says:

72% of surveyed developers say “Established policies and documentation” is a **key decision factor** when choosing open source.

2019 Tidelift Developer Survey

Research says:

> “Lack of documentation” was the **top reason** developers gave for deciding ***against*** using an open source project

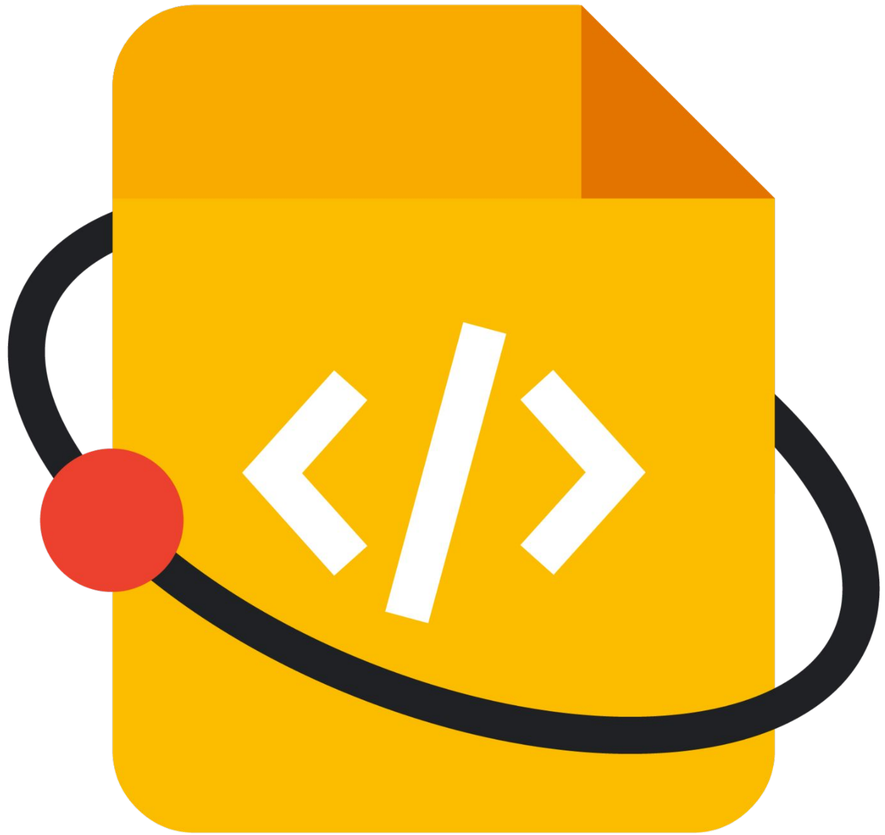
2018 Digital Ocean Survey

Research says:

In both open source projects and enterprises, developers see about **50% productivity boost** with easy-to-source documentation

2021 State of the Octoverse

Google Season of Docs: **process**



Google Season of Docs

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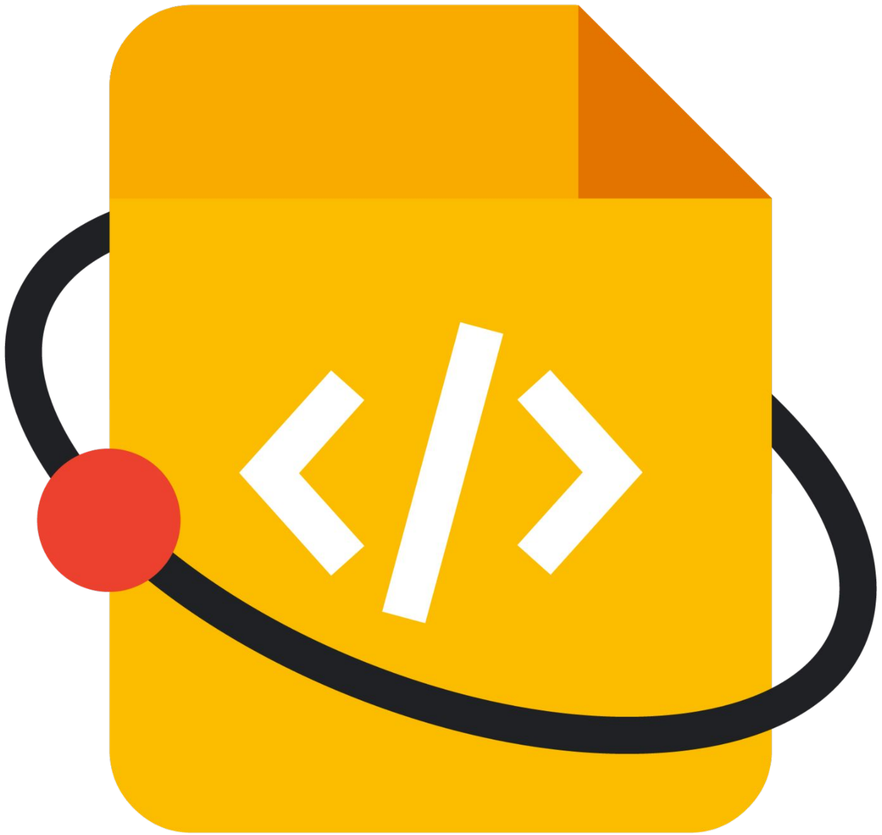
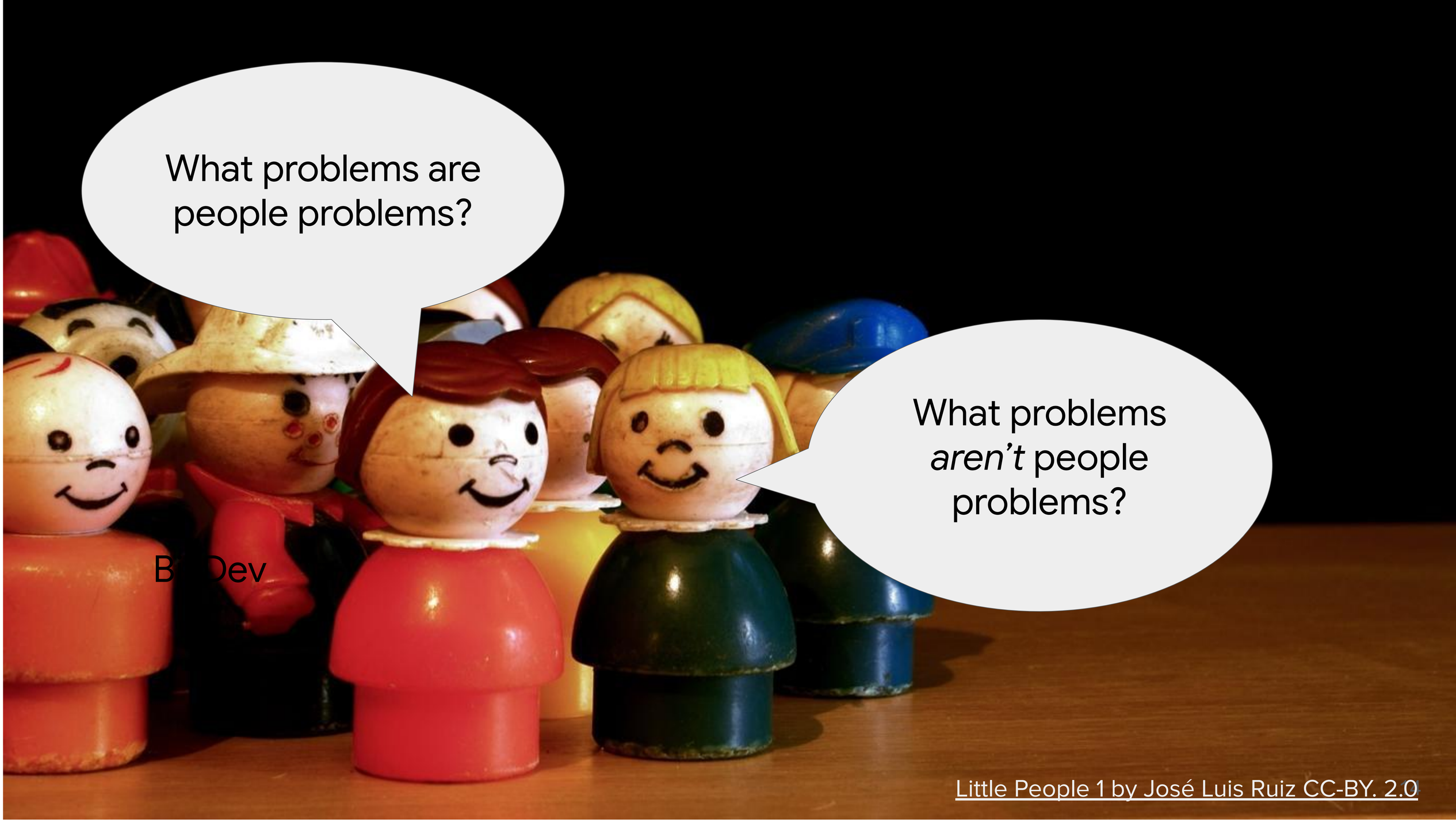


Google Season of Docs

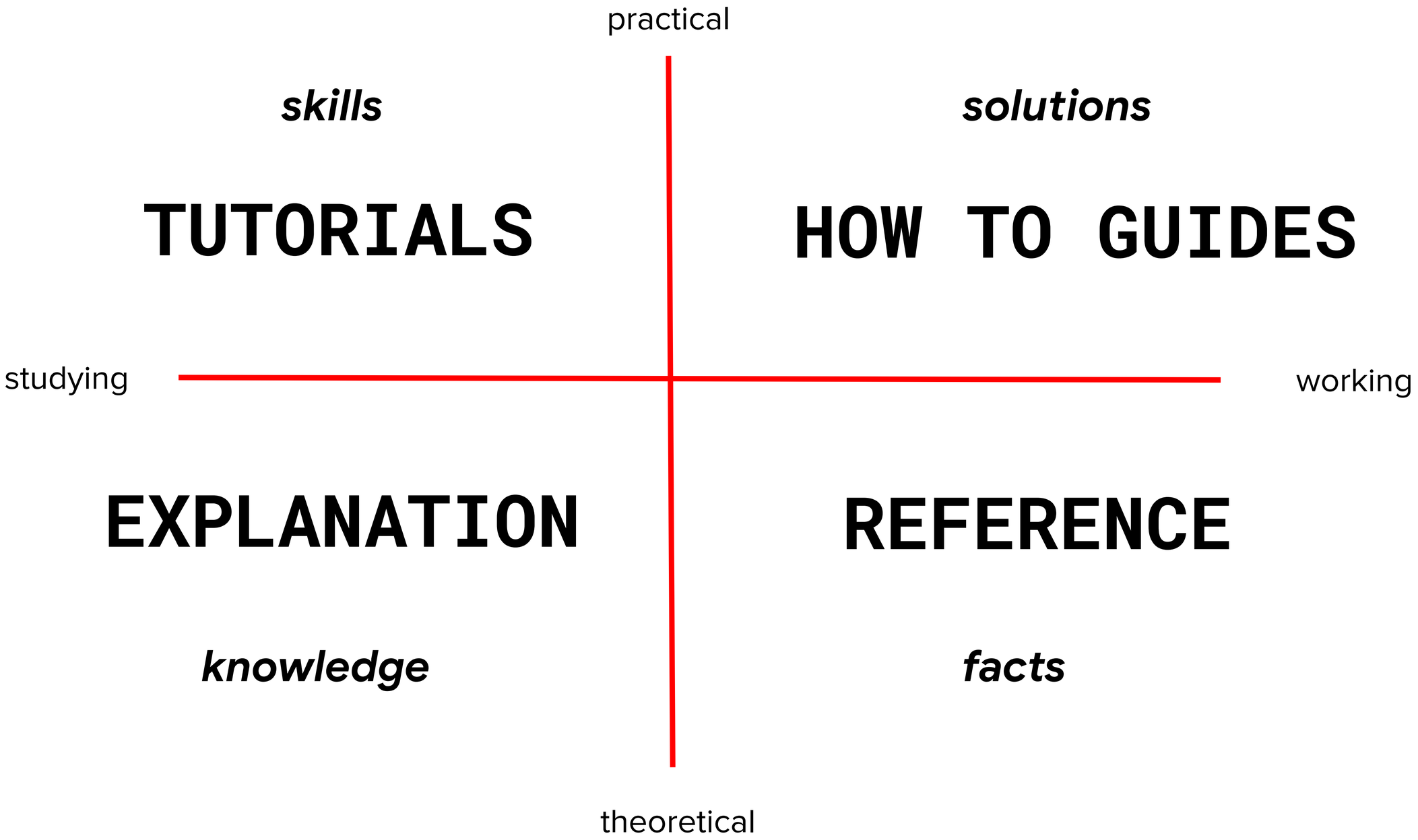
- Project Description
- Budget
- Participants
- Timeline
- Results
- Metrics
- Analysis
- Summary
- Appendix

Little People 1 by José Luis Ruiz CC-BY. 2.0



Little People 1 by José Luis Ruiz CC-BY. 2.0

Vintage Ad #1,541: Draggin'? Complainin'? By Jamie CC-BY 2.0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TUTORIALS
HOW TO GUIDES
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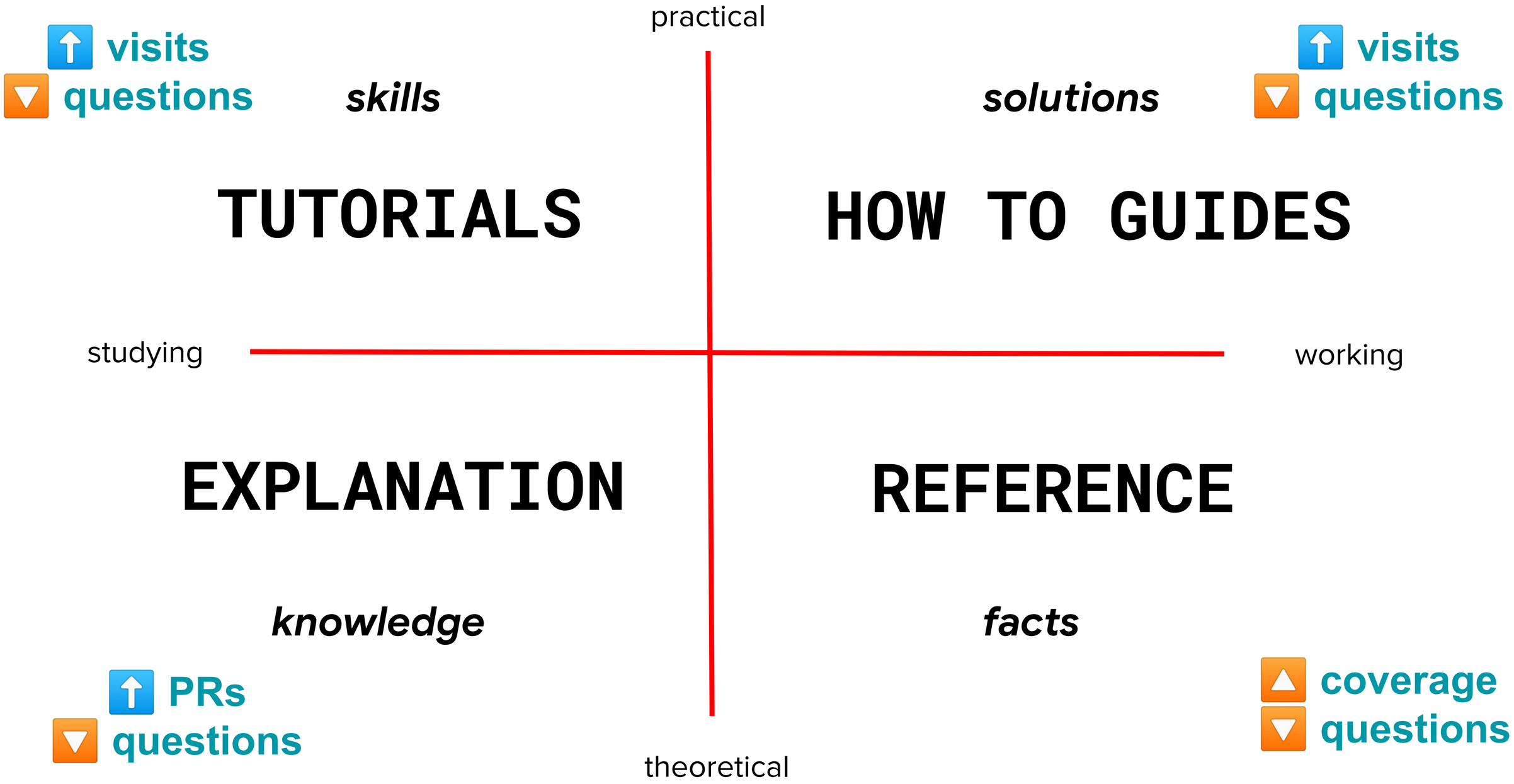
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🔽 questions
🔼 coverage
🔽 questions
theoretical

More people

“After the new document was released, daily visits to Casbin and Casdoor almost doubled, and bounce rates dropped by about 30%.” *Casbin, 2022*

“A 95% increase in the number of users viewing the OpenAPI CLI docs from July.” *Redoc, 2021*

More (kinds of) people

> “Also, the new manual is much easier for newbies to computational mass spectrometry. To illustrate this point: the CZI grant also provides stipends for historically underprivileged individuals and some awardees have used the new OpenMS manual to jump-start their six-week internship period and have given positive reviews of the new manual.” *OpenMS, 2022*

More (knowledgeable) people

> “Amarachi created the first edition of the FLINT Analysis Handbook which seeks to guide new users through the "why" and "how" of our software - by describing common analysis tasks, the Handbook takes new users on a journey that increases their skill and capability.” *mojaglobal, 2022*

> “Whereas prior to the documentation existing, only those with technical abilities could build a book! Success!” *Curious Learning, 2021*

More (knowledgeable) people

Carine Diaz 2 months ago

So now you have at last 2 translators who praised this change specifically!

1 1 1

Ian Cowley 2 months ago

Yay! I'm glad the contexts and screenshots are helping people with the translations. It's great to get feedback. Thanks to @radina for all her patience and for helping me to better understand Kolibri!

1

Kolibri, 2021

More (maintainer) people

> “We created a steward guidelines as part of the contributor docs to provide both technical instructions on how to work with reviewing issues and PR but also information about how we aim to manage community contributions as a whole.” *p5.js 2022*

More (contributing) people

> “The project is without a doubt successful. Having an inclusive guide that we can send potential contributors to is a huge win for us.” *Julia, 2021*

> “Current Contributor Count: 153, surpassing our goal. Notably, the WasmEdge documentation has witnessed a significant rise in contributors, growing from an initial count of 2 to 25.” *WasmEdge, 2023*

More (satisfied & enthusiastic) people

“The project energized and mobilized the whole community in contributing to documentation and influenced other changes like the updates to our governance” *PyMC, 2021*

“The closure of a set of severe issues related to the site, including the persistent caching bug and the site sometimes freezing on search, can be considered major quality-of-life improvements for users and contributors.” *Sigstore, 2023*

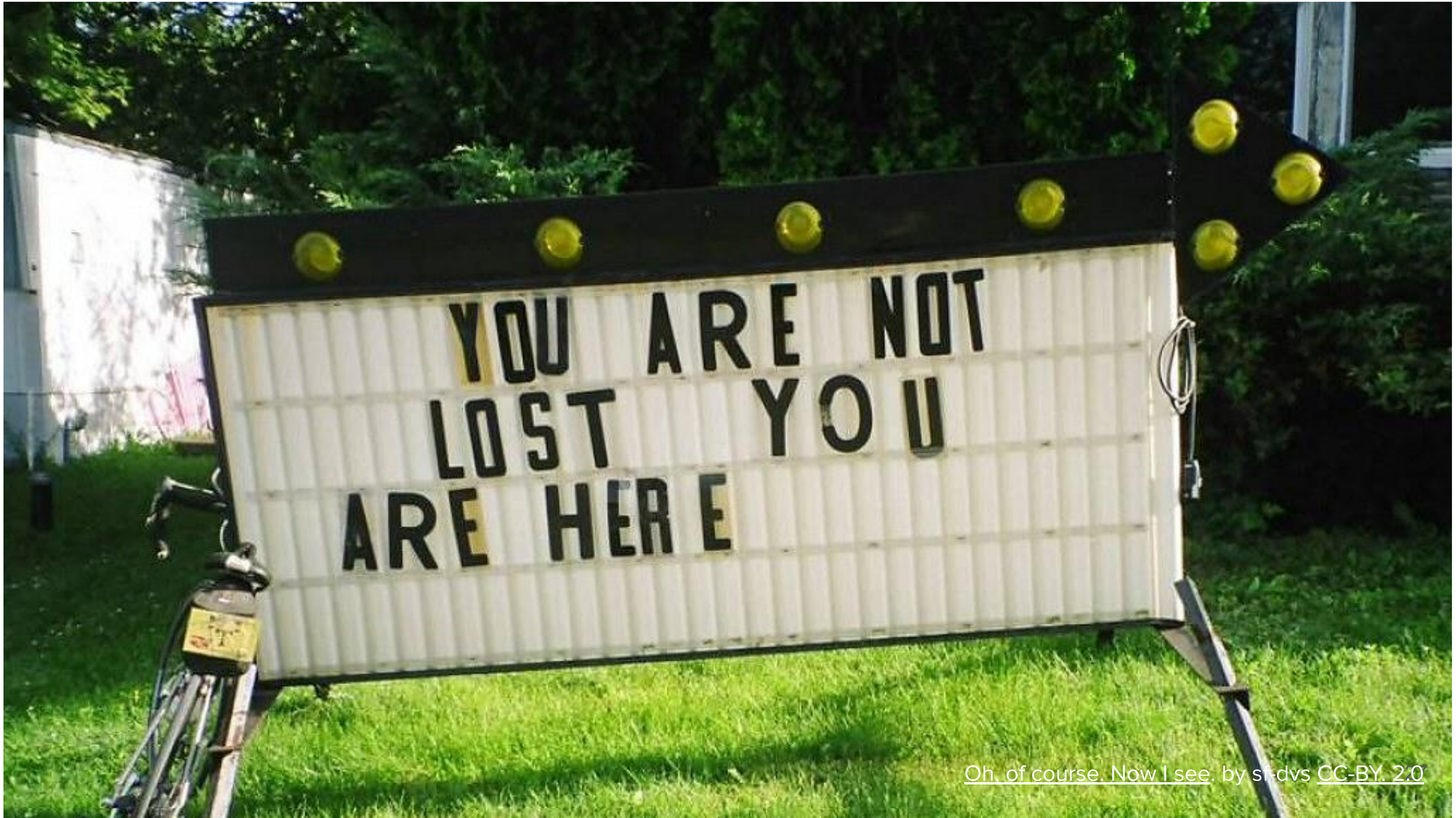
More (docs) people

“[We] grew our OSS Docs contributors to 3 more!” *AsyncAPI, 2022*

“[SoD] helped us recruit two talented technical writers which is highly difficult in a regular setup, who continue to be active OS contributors to OpenMined” *OpenMined, 2022*

More (docs) people

> “Many people want to contribute to our projects and find documentation an accessible entry point to make valuable new additions. We set up a Documentation Working Group to harness this energy and now lead fortnightly meetings for people to develop new connections and get to know our community.” *mojaglobal, 2021*



Oh, of course. Now I see. by sf-dvs CC-BY. 2.0

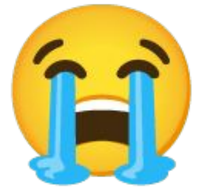
Fewer (confused) people

> “In the support forum's Q&A area, the number of users getting started questions decreases by 20%.” *Mautic, 2022*

> “For the month of November, 95% of the developer’s questions on the public-chat room related to codebase structure and “how-tos” were resolved with a direct link to a wiki page” *Oppia, 2021*

Little People 1 by José Luis Ruiz CC-BY. 2.0

- Maintainers learned new skills working with technical writers
- Valuable onboarding feedback
- New perspectives on projects



- Recruiting difficulty
- Slow onboarding
- Slow review of contributions
- Lack of clear contract terms
- Payment hiccups
- Communications coordination problems
- Covid and other blockers

“In doc review there’s no set of tests to provide extra reassurance; you really need to carefully check every word.” *Julia, 2022*

“the rest of the community could continue the work with much higher standards thanks to the guidance and expertise brought by the technical writer.” *Arviz, 2021*

“Our OSS participants have joked in unison that Technical Writing is much more work than imagined!” *AsyncAPI, 2022*

- Do you have *enough people?* Do the people have *enough experience*?
- Can you create documentation that will bring *new* people, energize *current* people, and help people *improve their skills*?
- Can people easily *find, use,* and *contribute* to your documentation?

- g.co/seasonofdocs
  - ✨ Project case studies ✨ (also include links to original proposals)
  - Case study reports
  - Timeline of the 2024 program
  - Guides for admins
- writethedocs.org

Photo by Emily Morter on Unsplash

Neon study #4 by Lauri Stallings by esperbot CC-BY 2.0