

JANUARY 31, 2023

OpenUK's Amanda Brock tells us how new State of Open event will be different

Our founder/CEO Jennifer Cloer talks to Brock about how a conference hosted by a women-led organization will expand OSS collaboration in the UK

Q: What an incredible lineup you've put together for [State of Open](#). How was this event conceived and how will it be different from other open source events?

Amanda: It was something that the [OpenUK](#) Board asked me to build a year or so ago when we had a disappointment with another



Amanda Brock

tech conference. We realised that there just wasn't a UK open technology conference of scale. They wanted to pick up on our State of Open reporting work and take the push we had made there into this space.

Q: I see a lot of familiar names in your lineup. A variety of them are Story Changes Culture clients. Bec Rumbul will be keynoting on security, while Liz Rice from Isovalent is your track host for platform engineering and so many more great contributors. There's a lot of diversity among speakers, particularly the number of women leaders across the open source and programming ecosystem who will be speaking at State of Open. Was this intentional or are we starting to see more women submit talks to conferences?

Amanda: I am glad that you see a lot of familiar names, but I also hope that you see a

lot of new ones, too. For example, in the US you may not be familiar with Judy Parnall from the BBC, whose role includes being Head of Standards, or Emma Thwaites, the Director of Corporate Affairs at the Open Data Institute. We have so much talent here in the UK and much of it is diverse. I do want us to celebrate that.

I suspect that a female led-organisation naturally attracts this diversity and we certainly consider DEI along with sustainability as central to everything we do.

Q: What else have you done to create an inclusive event that can attract a diverse community of attendees? Why is this important to you?

Amanda: For our first State of Open Con, we have chosen to follow our OpenUK cultural beliefs with both Sustainability and DEI at the heart of everything we do. We attached a score for each in the CFP review process and also provided a briefing to every speaker asking them to keep these in mind in their content.

As you would expect, we have an enforced Code of Respect and have organised a creche and doggy

daycare. We also have things like a neurodiversity room and a prayer room. These are small things that we hope will make a difference for people and encourage them to attend.

Tickets are affordable for many at (heavily subsidized) £199, and joining the stream is free. Recognizing that we're in a difficult market, we just announced 100 free tickets for our colleagues who are between roles. We're also working with Open Source Job Hub to create a large job board available onsite.

And we've onboarded woodlands.co.uk as a sponsor. They have committed to planting a deciduous tree in the West of England for each delegate, so we go some way to legitimately offset our carbon footprint with the event.

It won't be perfect, but we are trying to support a shift in the way things are done.

On a personal level, I want everyone who attends our event to be comfortable and welcome. We believe as an organisation in creating a sense of belonging for all.

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the heart of everything we do.”

Q: We love that you have a track dedicated to entrepreneurship in open source. Can you tell us more about that? Why did you prioritize that and what can founders gain from participating in this? Do you expect an equally diverse turnout of attendees as you have in your speaker lineup, particularly in this area?

Amanda: I absolutely love this track. We are setting the room out banquet style with round tables, each hosted by a founder. There will be five sessions on open source business, with panels led by founders on topics ranging from product development, community and contributions, revenue generation, and open source funding and scaling.

After the panels, the founders will take 45 minutes with the delegates to discuss the topics, giving unprecedented access to founders.

But this room has caused me a bit of an issue. It has been super difficult to find female founders. We've done a lot of research and found a few women, but only a small number are able to attend. I suppose I was slightly aware of this but very much as something in the back of my mind and I wasn't conscious of just how problematic this is. I will really be doing my best to encourage women into the room and hope that they will be inspired to be the founders of the future.

Like all of the tracks, this room is being streamed and

recorded -- but unique to this track, it will also become part of a Massive Open Online Course after the event.

Q: A big win to get Jimmy Wales to keynote on open data. Can you give us a sneak preview of what we can expect from him?

Amanda: Jimmy is a fantastic man. He has been super supportive of me and OpenUK since I took on the role of CEO and I will be eternally grateful to him for putting his weight behind this event early on and helping to build our credibility. He'll be giving a special keynote on day two of the conference, "Online Safety and How to Protect Our Open Movement," which promises to be very topical and definitely not to be missed.

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Q: What do you hope this year's event accomplishes?

Amanda: I hope that we have a good turnout, that attendees enjoy the experience and that we set a

solid foundation for an annual event in the UK. If we can achieve that then perhaps we can create a more people-centric organisation.

I should mention that we have a structured space with more than three floors of what might be classed as exhibition space, with 48 tables - no booths and no premier spots - as well as a wealth of interactive experiences such as Boeing's VR Flight simulation headset and festival tents going up on the lawn outside. We have a photo exhibition for everyone to enjoy and an evening of entertainment and party.



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