

# GROWING THE OPEN SOCIAL WEB



**Newsmast  
Foundation**

*Position Paper*

# Our Approach to the OSW

## Defining the OSW

We believe that the Open Social Web (OSW) encompasses all interconnected, either directly or via bridging, social protocols.

## Necessity of the OSW

In the early 2000s, social media began its journey to become a world power. Now, twenty-some years later, we see a world enraptured by it. The owners and creators of the platforms shaping world politics without qualification, justification, or democratic right.

We believe that the premise of the OSW, and the technology which enables it, provides an opportunity to break free of the control of Big Tech social media and revert to community-first communication. Allowing people to share their knowledge with other, likeminded, people.

## Limitations of the OSW

We've found that the OSW, and many of the gateways to involvement on it, were built 'tech-first'.

Not only does this approach ostracise people who have little to no knowledge of technical specifications, but, considering the white-male demographic of the OSW, it greatly discourages diverse and marginalised groups from finding community on the OSW.

Even within the groups which find their way to the OSW, there is little effort by the existing structure to connect users to conversations, corners, and communities of interest to them.

As a result, the current culture of the OSW can seem hostile, unwelcoming, and hard to navigate to newcomers.





## Our Response

We firmly believe that more people, organisations, and communities should be using the OSW to rebuild their digital community.

Alongside working on advocacy and with our partners, our Foundation is taking direct action.

After joining the OSW in 2023, we encountered the barriers first-hand. To succeed, the OSW needed to address these barriers. We, as a UK charity trying to bring people to this space, needed to address these barriers.

Since 2023, we've taken multiple actions to help the OSW newcomer.

- We federated our 62 hand-curated topical feeds.
  - Helping newcomers, and established users, easily find and follow topics that matter to them.
- We shared our federated feed curation technology - Channel.org.
  - Giving OSW users, especially those on ActivityPub, the ability to build their own curated feeds across the federated network.
- We worked with organisations to help them join the OSW and, most importantly, we **listened** and we **learnt**.

## Apps for Change

Now, we're building our **Apps For Change** programme. Working directly with organisations to help them join the OSW without the hassle and confusion. Their digital space, their online community, their app.

**Apps for Change** provides tools for organisations who already have communities and want a better home for them. We work with charities, independent newsrooms and professional networks to bring people together in safe, healthy, independent spaces with elegant, user-friendly apps, all connected to the OSW.

**It's working.** We're partnering with organisations across the globe, from Lebanon to Canada, bringing their communities to the OSW.



Our apps are built **community-first**, not tech. We're not builders, we're collaborators, helping organisations provide for their communities away from Big Tech on the OSW. From conception to production, we work hand in hand with those we're bringing onboard, providing design workshops, focus groups, and continuing support.

Next, we'll repackage this open-source technology to make it quick and easy for **any** community to build their own gateway to the OSW.

We believe the OSW should be accessible for all and we hope our technology will help break down some of the barriers to entry.

## Personal Accounts of OSW Onboarding

The Newsmast Foundation is a small organisation, run by individuals from different backgrounds who had little to no prior experience of the OSW. Therefore, our team all have different perspectives on the OSW.



*Co-Founder*  
**Michael Foster**



We can grow by bringing on communities of people together, with a shared, safe starting point and home. Branch out from there. We're not all one person. We're many. On the open social web we can be all those things, and more. Community + connections can make the OSW Open, Shared and Welcoming.



*Head of Community*  
**Saskia Welch**



The biggest barrier for me was the culture. The lack of openness to anything new. As a 23 year old queer woman, I wanted a platform that reflected my interests and, unfortunately, this was not the OSW as I found it. I believe that to grow the OSW, not only do we need new doors, but we need to dismantle this pack-like mentality, be more forgiving, and far more welcoming.



*Editor*  
**Ben Parker**



The way things are going (\*gestures at everything\*), I see the Fediverse as a refuge from toxic manipulation, and part of the future of better online spaces. It has growth potential for publishers that need to reclaim their connection with audiences and for campaigners who need to protect their independence.