

The Transition

From founder to Fellowship: how this community learns to govern itself

Founder: Zohaib Khan
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3,000+

Members

80+

Countries

March 2024

Founded

WHY WE ARE WRITING THIS DOWN**Why we are writing this down**

The AI Fellowship started in March 2024 as a WhatsApp group with a conviction: that AI should be shaped by everyone it will affect, not just the people who already have a seat at the table. Two years later it is more than 3,000 people across more than 80 countries, with chapters running real events on every continent.

Everything so far has been held together by two things: goodwill, and the founding team making decisions. That worked because the community was small enough for everyone to know who was deciding what, and to trust them. It will not work forever, and it should not.

"A community this good should not depend on any one person staying healthy, available, and right."

This document explains, in plain language, how the Fellowship moves from a founder-led community to a community that governs itself. It gives the phases, the dates, and the criteria. It says what we are giving up, when, and what can never be taken from you regardless of who is in charge.

We are writing it for one reason: so things can outlive us. If the Fellowship is doing its job, it will still be running qualifiers and demo nights in cities we have never visited, long after our names are just a line in its history. That only happens if we hand over power deliberately, on a schedule, in public. This is that schedule.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The founder-led phase

Right now, the Fellowship runs on a founder-led model. Zohaib founded the community and holds final decisions. A small central team, the Stewards, carries the operational work: the brand, the platforms, the Code of Conduct, chapter support, and the flagship initiatives.

WHAT THIS MODEL IS GOOD FOR

Founder-led is fast. One conversation can fix a problem, launch a chapter, or change a plan. In the earliest years of any community, that speed and coherence is the difference between existing and not existing. It is why the Fellowship got this far.

WHAT IT CANNOT GIVE

Legitimacy: as chapters grow, the people building them deserve a real vote in decisions that affect them. Resilience: if the founder disappears tomorrow, a founder-led structure goes with him. Succession: leadership that is never handed over is leadership that eventually fails in place.

So the founder-led phase is a stage, not the design. This document is the founder putting an end date on his own final say.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

The end state

1**Everything operational is voted**

How the Fellowship runs, which platforms it uses, how programs work, how money is allocated, who sits in central seats: all of it decided by vote, through elected representatives or directly by members. Nothing operational is decided by the founder alone, because by then there is no "founder alone."

2**The deepest things are protected – and even those belong to the community**

The mission, the Code of Conduct's protections, safeguarding, and the ownership of the brand sit behind a supermajority wall. But the wall itself is the community's wall: changing these things requires a broad community process, not a founder's signature.

3**The center holds only what must be the same everywhere**

Identity, brand and IP, the Code of Conduct, and the frameworks of the flagship initiatives. So that those initiatives mean the same thing in Lagos as in London. Everything else belongs to chapters.

4**Chapters have their own autonomy**

Chapters run their own money, their own partnerships within the charter, and their own programming. From Phase 3, a chapter large enough may incorporate locally under charter and, where it can fund them, engage its own paid organisers.

5**The Stewards become an elected body**

The central team that today is appointed by the founder converts, seat by seat and on a published schedule, into a body elected by the community it serves.

THE STEWARDS

The Stewards

Through the transition and after it, the Fellowship's central body is called the Stewards. The name is deliberate. A steward does not own the thing they hold. They hold it in trust for the people it belongs to, and they are accountable for handing it over in better condition than they found it.

The Stewards hold

- The Fellowship's identity documents
- The brand and intellectual property
- The Code of Conduct and its enforcement
- The frameworks of the flagship initiatives
- The global platforms
- The execution of this transition itself

The Stewards never hold

- Your chapter's local decisions
- What events you run or who speaks
- Which local partners you work with
- How your community feels
- "The brand and the mission are fixed; the playbook is yours" stays true at every phase

TODAY THE STEWARDS ARE APPOINTED

The whole point of the phases below is that this stops being true, on dates you can hold us to.

THE FOUR PHASES

The four phases

Each phase has target dates and entry criteria. The criteria are the real triggers; the dates are our commitments to hit them. If a date slips, the Stewards will publish why, and the new date, within 30 days. We can be late. We cannot be silent.

Four Phases of Transition | Criteria are the real triggers



Entry criteria are the real triggers for each phase.

Phase	What changes	Entry criteria
Phase 0 Foundation	Governance docs adopted and published. Existing chapters formally chartered. Role ladder (Doc 2) goes live. Founding Stewards named publicly: the Founder plus four appointed members, at least one active Chapter Director. Public Decision Log begins.	Documents adopted, every active chapter holds a charter, Founding Stewards named.
Phase 1 First Voices	Steward body expands to seven seats; first two elected by Chapter Directors. Country Heads appointed in every country with two or more active chapters. First community-wide vote on an operational matter. Finances published from the first month the legal entity exists.	Two elected Stewards seated, Country Heads cover every qualifying country, at least one community vote completed.
Phase 2 Shared Power	Elected seats become the majority: four of seven Stewards are elected. Region Heads in place for all regions. Chapters take full control of budgets. Proposals process opens to individual members. First annual Community Assembly.	Elected majority seated, every region has a Head, first Assembly has met.
Phase 3 Community Governance	All voting Steward seats elected on staggered two-year terms. Founder's seat converts to honorary, non-voting Founding Steward role; Zohaib may stand for election like any member. Chapters may incorporate locally under charter. Constitution changeable only by community process.	This phase does not end. It is the design.

WHAT THE FOUNDER GIVES UP, AND WHEN

What the founder gives up, and when

We want this to be uncomfortably specific, because vague promises about "eventually decentralizing" are how communities stay founder-led forever.

Today	Zohaib holds final decisions on strategy, appointments, and disputes. The Stewards are his appointees.
Phase 1	Appointment stops being the only door: two Steward seats are filled by election, and Country Heads are confirmed from nominations by their own country's Directors, not chosen top-down.
Phase 2	The founder becomes a minority voice by design: elected Stewards outnumber appointed ones, and the founder's role in ordinary votes is a tie-break only.
Phase 3	The founder's structural power ends. The permanent seat becomes honorary and non-voting. If Zohaib wants a vote after that, he earns it the same way anyone does: by standing for election.

SUCCESSION

From Phase 0 onward, the Stewards maintain a succession file: if the founder is suddenly unavailable, the community knows within days who holds what, where the accounts and credentials live, and how work continues. An organization that depends on someone's memory is one accident away from not existing.

WHAT IS PROTECTED

What can never be voted away

Handing over power is not the same as leaving members unprotected. A small set of things sit behind the supermajority wall at every phase. They are locked to protect you, not us.

What can never be voted away

- PROTECTED** The mission and core values
- PROTECTED** The Code of Conduct's protected categories and enforcement protections
- PROTECTED** Safeguarding of minors – overrides every other internal procedure
- PROTECTED** Brand ownership by the Fellowship's nonprofit entity – it can never be privatised
- PROTECTED** Placement, ranking, and recognition in Fellowship programs can never be bought

EVERYTHING ELSE

Everything else is the community's to change.

WE ARE NOT THE FIRST

Communities that made this journey

We are copying from the ones that made it well – and learning from the one that did not.

Python

Ran for nearly 30 years under its founder's final say. In 2018, Guido van Rossum stepped back and the community wrote itself an elected Steering Council. Python did not fracture; it got stronger.

Scouting

Outlived its founder by building a world conference of national organisations holding the movement's standards collectively. More than a century later, tens of millions of young people are still in it.

Rotary

One club, one vote for over 100 years. Clubs elect their own leadership annually. That simple rule has carried it through every crisis since 1905.

Wikimedia

The cautionary tale: grew enormous under an informal centre, only later negotiating a movement-wide charter when every party had entrenched interests. Democratize on purpose while it is easy.

HOW TO HOLD US TO THIS

How to hold us to this

This charter is reviewed annually, in the open, and every date in it is a commitment the community may quote back at us.

If we miss a date and go quiet

Raise it in #feedback-and-ideas or through the proposals process. The Stewards owe a public answer.

If you think a phase criterion has been met and we have not moved

The same channels apply. Raise it, publicly, and we answer.

Disputes about specific roles and appointments

Follow the process in Doc 2.

Conduct concerns

Always go through the Code of Conduct channels, at any phase, about anyone, including us.

"The best possible outcome of this document is that in a few years it reads as history: a description of a handover that simply happened, on time, because it was written down and the community held its authors to it."

DRAFT v1.0, AUGUST 2026

Founder: Zohaib Khan | theaifellowship.com | This document is open for community review.

Feedback via [#feedback-and-ideas](#).