

Florida DrupalCamp

Feb 2025

BACK DROP
TO THE FUTURE

Laryn Kragt Bakker

Senior Developer

laryn@aten.io





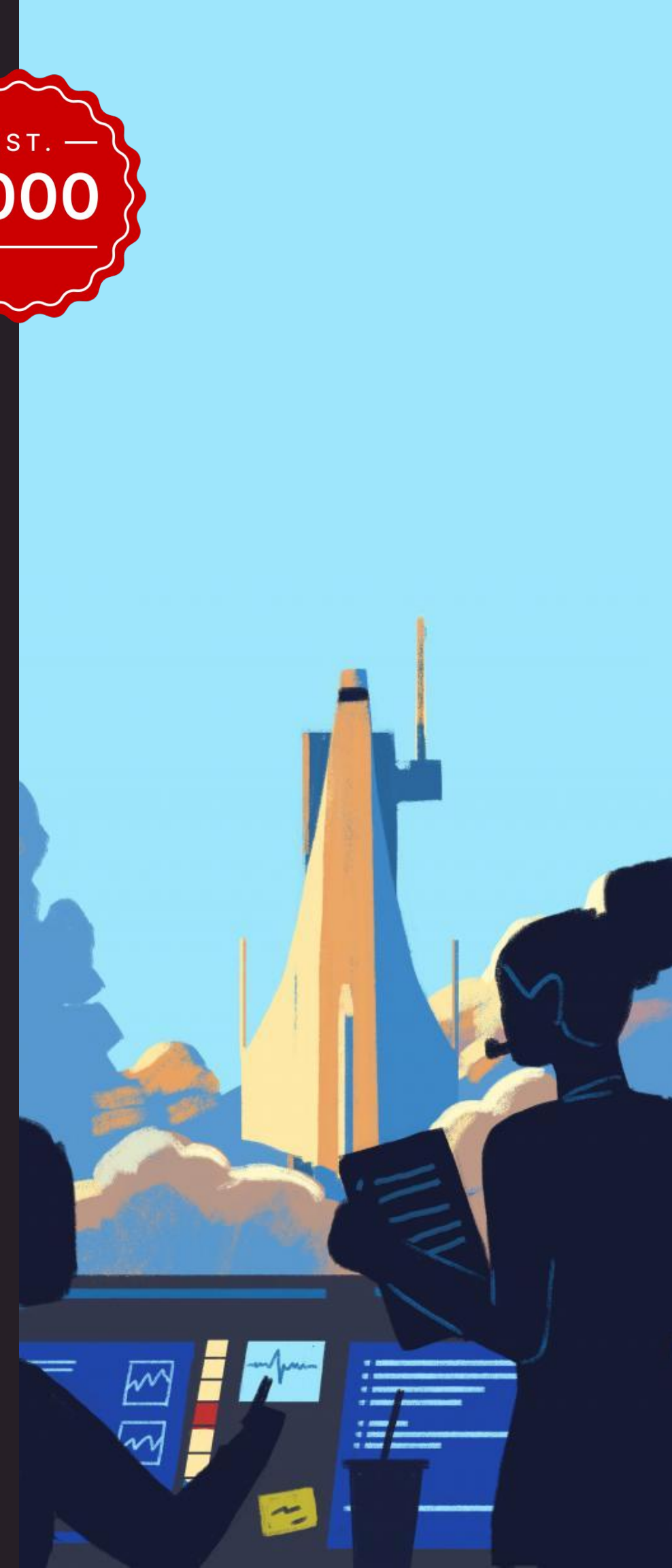
ATEN DESIGN GROUP



Strategy, Design & Development for the Mission Driven

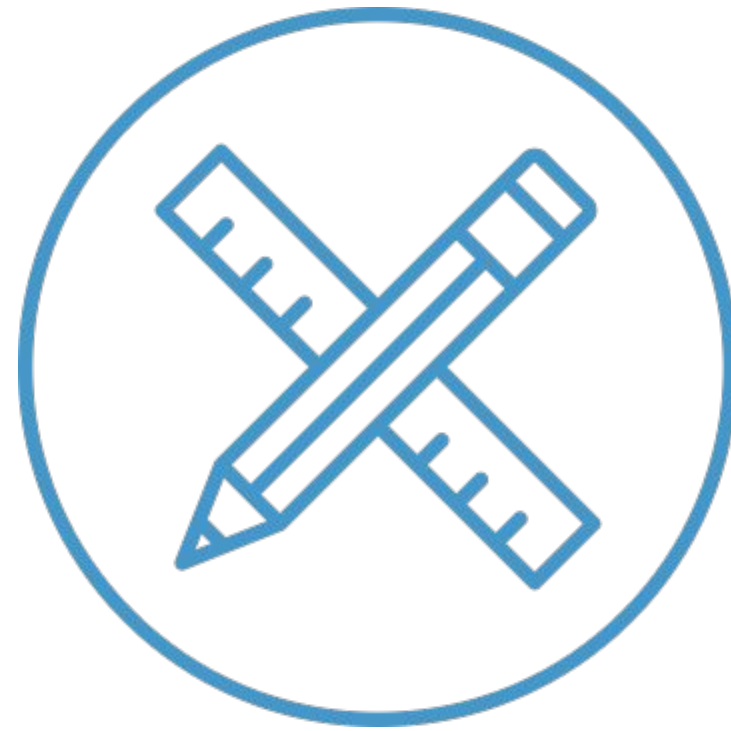
From the next major website redesign to ongoing support, we've got you covered.

aten.io





Strategy



Design



Development



Stanford



guttmacher



Colonial Williamsburg



Tufts
UNIVERSITY





Stanford



Work That Matters



Special thanks to

Kevin Reynen

Lead Web Developer,
University of Denver

For being a conversation partner
on this topic and reviewing an
early version of this presentation.



Special thanks to

Backdrop User Group

Fortnightly community meeting.

For giving up a typical meeting to talk through and give ideas on an early version of this presentation.





Who has heard of (or used) Backdrop?



Interrupt slides for live demo/walkthrough

- <https://backdropcms.org/demo>
- Project installer for modules, layouts, themes: demo installing Gin
- Layouts overview under Structure > Layouts

Quick background

- Fork of Drupal 7 (or very early Drupal 8)
- A group of people who loved Drupal and were very active with Drupal saw the scope of changes moving deeper into Enterprise space/budgets, realized it was going to be too much for too many people to follow, and decided to fork the project.
- Affordability and backwards compatibility were always key commitments.



Similarities with modern Drupal

- Great for clean, structured data
- Views
- Content types
- Taxonomy
- Granular roles and permissions
- Configuration management
- CKE5 out of the box (*Backdrop also has actively maintained TinyMCE contrib option*)





Some key differences from modern Drupal

- Layouts are different
- Simpler implementation
- Many of the same questions are answered but in a different way (typically less complex).

- When Drupal got “off the island” and integrated Symfony, Twig, went fully in on the Composer workflow and the whole dependency tree model, for many projects, everything was awesome...



...but for other projects, getting off the island resulted in a system that is too heavy, too complex, and too expensive to build and maintain.



Backdrop CMS mission

Backdrop CMS enables people to build highly customized websites affordably, through collaboration and open source software.

Backdrop CMS principles

1. **Easier updates:** Backwards compatibility is important.
2. **Simplicity:** Write code that the majority can understand.
3. **Focus:** Only include features that benefit the majority.
4. **Extensibility:** Ensure Backdrop can be customized.
5. **Security:** Keep sites and people safe.
6. **Performance:** Meet low system requirements.
7. **Release on-time:** Plan and schedule releases.
8. **Freedom:** Remain both Free and Open Source.

Handwritten notes on a piece of paper, including the word "Backdrop" and other illegible scribbles.

So... what are some of the reasons that you might consider Backdrop for a project?

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project?

Affordability

- Drupal 7 site upgrades (upgrade, not migration)
- Lower total cost of ownership/maintenance

“We have a fiduciary duty to our university. We take stewardship of funds and resources seriously. With Backdrop on Pantheon, we were able to save nearly half a million dollars!”

-Zach Chandler, former Director, Research IT and Innovation (now IT Strategy & Services) at Stanford University ([Source: Pantheon+Aten case study](#))

That's not a small amount, said Chandler. "It is equivalent to several postdoc salaries, which – quite honestly – the university (and the world) needs more than we need any particular website technology, assuming the alternative is just as viable, which Backdrop is.”

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project?

Predictability

- Commitment to backwards compatibility
- A safe alternative to LTS, where you still get improvements
- Release schedule is set, three times a year
- Bug squad / Security team / community ownership of contrib



quicksketch

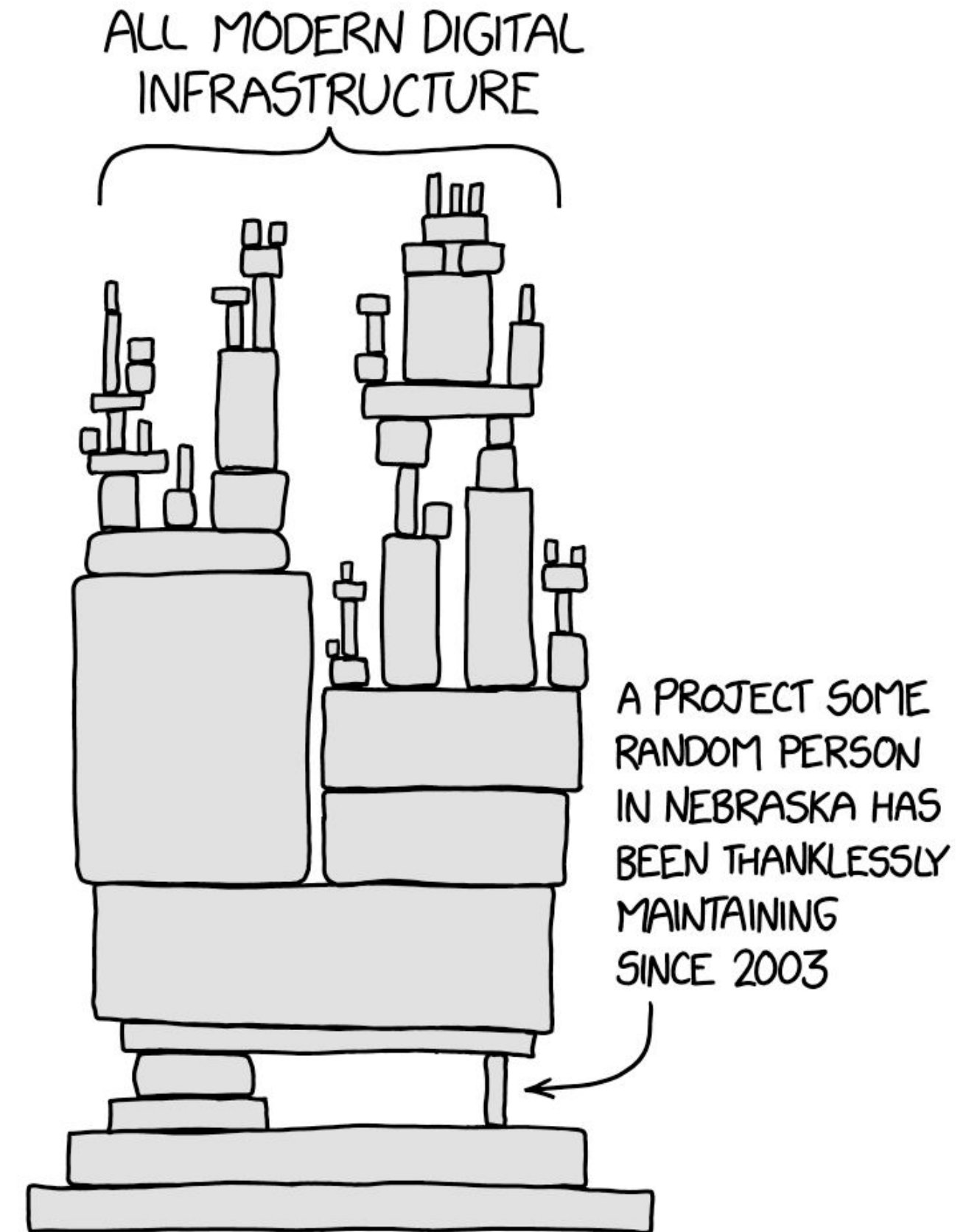


This might not qualify to answer the question; but I think a "meta" answer to "what's the biggest feature" might be "no breaking changes". Yes, we dropped support for MySQL 5.0 and 5.1, but that decision was backed by Telemetry reporting 0% of current sites use those old versions. Backdrop 1.30.0 marks **10 years** of continuous incremental improvement while maintaining maximum compatibility. That high-compatibility translates to a low cost of ownership.

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project?

Simplicity

- Smaller dependency stack (fewer moving parts)
- Traditional power, structure, flexibility of Drupal but in a simpler shell
- You don't need Drupal-only solutions like Mercury Editor, modern Drupal's webform

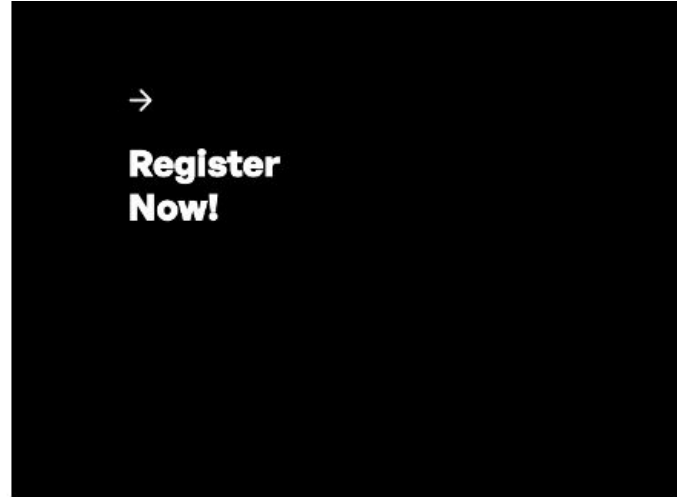


<https://xkcd.com/2347>

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project? [Simplicity]



Conference ▾ Sponsors ▾ Community ▾ Info ▾



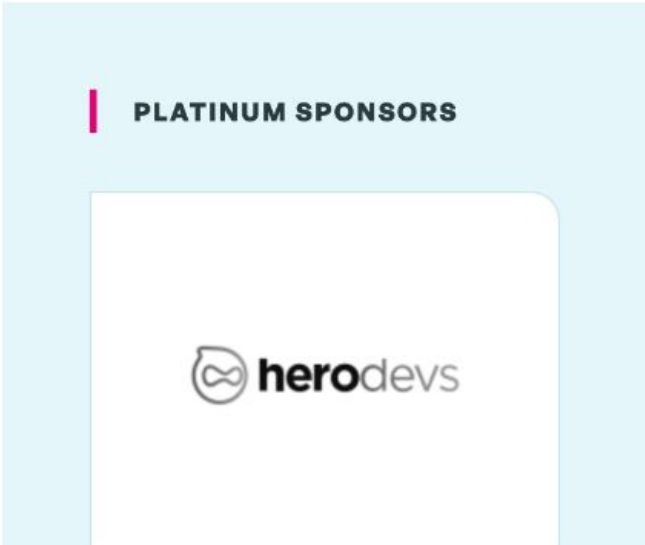
Follow the Drupal Brick Road? Is Drupal Just Complex or Becoming Too Complicated?

📁 Site-Building 158 👤 All Attendees ⌚ Sun 11:00am to 11:45am (2/23/25)

Users and Admins and Developers, OH MY! Have Drupal's increasing number of third party dependencies become too complicated for new users? Are those dependencies breaking Drupal's more advanced features?

In this discussion, Drupal is going to be held up to a microscope, dissected, and analyzed from a historical user perspective. Who builds, administers, and ultimately uses Drupal sites, and how has that changed over time?

Are all of these changes and added dependencies on outside technology actually for the better, or has Drupal



Why might you consider Backdrop for a project? [Simplicity]

The image shows a screenshot of a Mastodon instance page for **drupal.community**. The page includes a search bar, a description of the instance, a cartoon mascot, and server statistics. Below this is a thread of tweets from Mike McCaffrey and Trisha Lynn discussing Drupal hooks and the difficulty of finding a preview button in WordPress.

drupal.community is one of the many independent Mastodon servers you can use to participate in the fediverse.

Mastodon instance focused on the Drupal CMS.

ADMINISTERED BY: **Pedro Cambra** @pcambra
SERVER STATS: **152** active users

drupal.community: [About](#) · [Profiles directory](#) · [Privacy policy](#)

Mastodon: [About](#) · [Get the app](#) · [Keyboard shortcuts](#) · [View source code](#) · v4.3.2

Mike McCaffrey @mikemccaffrey@drupal.community
Feb 06, 2025, 08:02 PM · 🌐
God I miss #Drupal hooks. Life was so much easier when modules would say "Hey, I'm about to do this action, anyone need to make changes beforehand?"
0 boosts · 1 favorite

Mike McCaffrey @mikemccaffrey · 5d
That being said, alter functions are pretty nice when they are available and accomplish most of the same things.

Trisha Lynn @trishalynn@mastodon.sandwich.net · 5d
@mikemccaffrey Is Drupal easy to learn? I'm trying to update my WP-based website and the fact that I couldn't easily find the preview button is pissing me off.

Mike McCaffrey @mikemccaffrey · 5d
@trishalynn Do you have an engineering degree? Otherwise, I'd say you should probably stay clear.

Trisha Lynn @trishalynn@mastodon.sandwich.net · 5d

mastodon
Explore
Live feeds
Mastodon is the best way to keep up with what's happening.
Follow anyone across the fediverse and see it all in chronological order. No algorithms, ads, or clickbait in sight.
Create account
Login

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project?

Efficiency

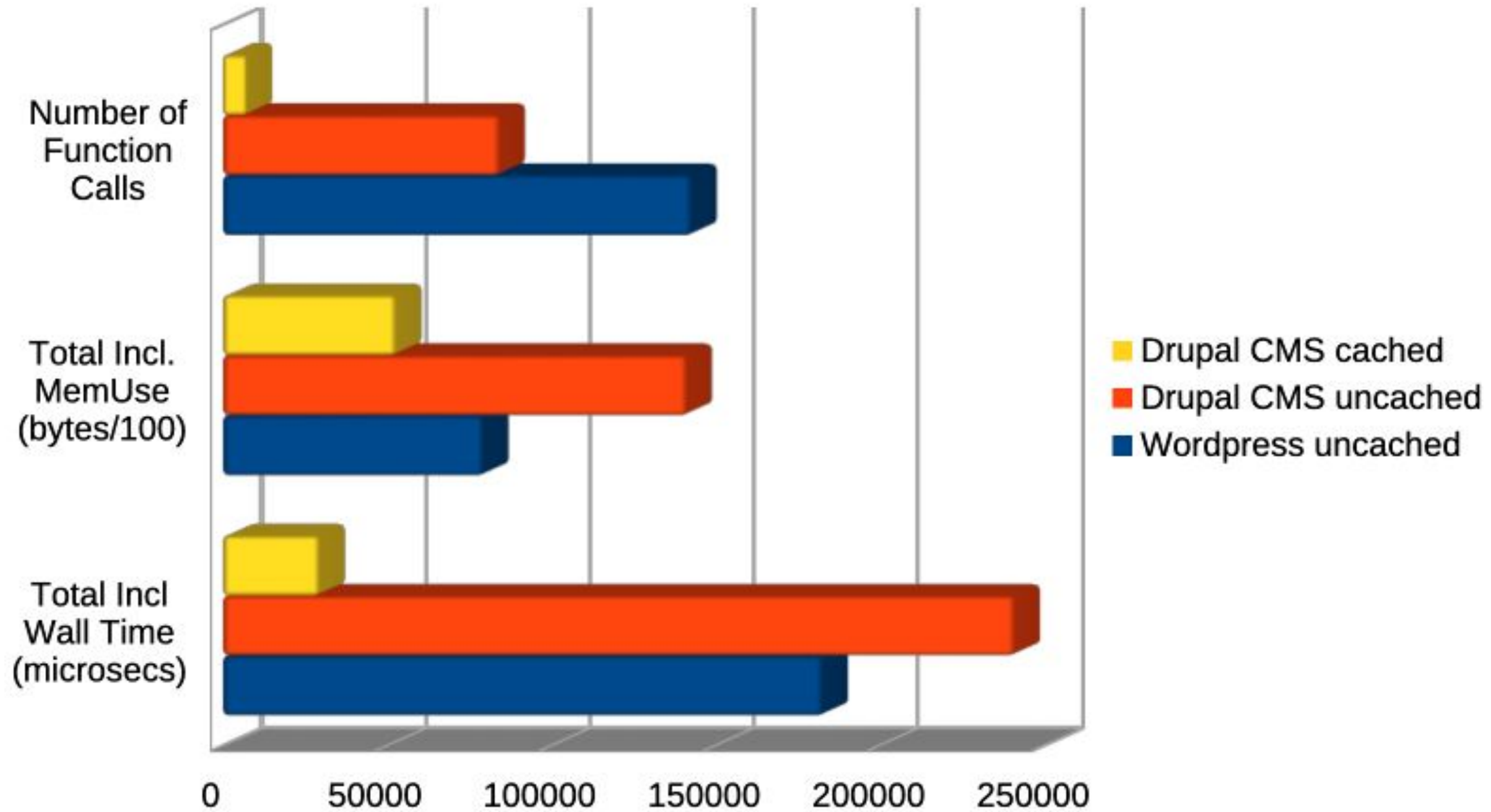
- Spin up quickly without a lot of maintenance overhead
- Reuse config (recipes-lite)
- Performance: can run on shared or lower-resourced hosting; can also run extremely well self-hosted or on hosts like Pantheon **[NOTE: mention config storage flexibility?]**
- Lower resource usage: potential positive environmental impact

Eco-friendly Web Alliance:

“The internet, a seemingly ubiquitous aspect of modern life, has a significant carbon footprint, contributing to 3.7% of global emissions – more than the aviation industry.”

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project? [Efficiency]

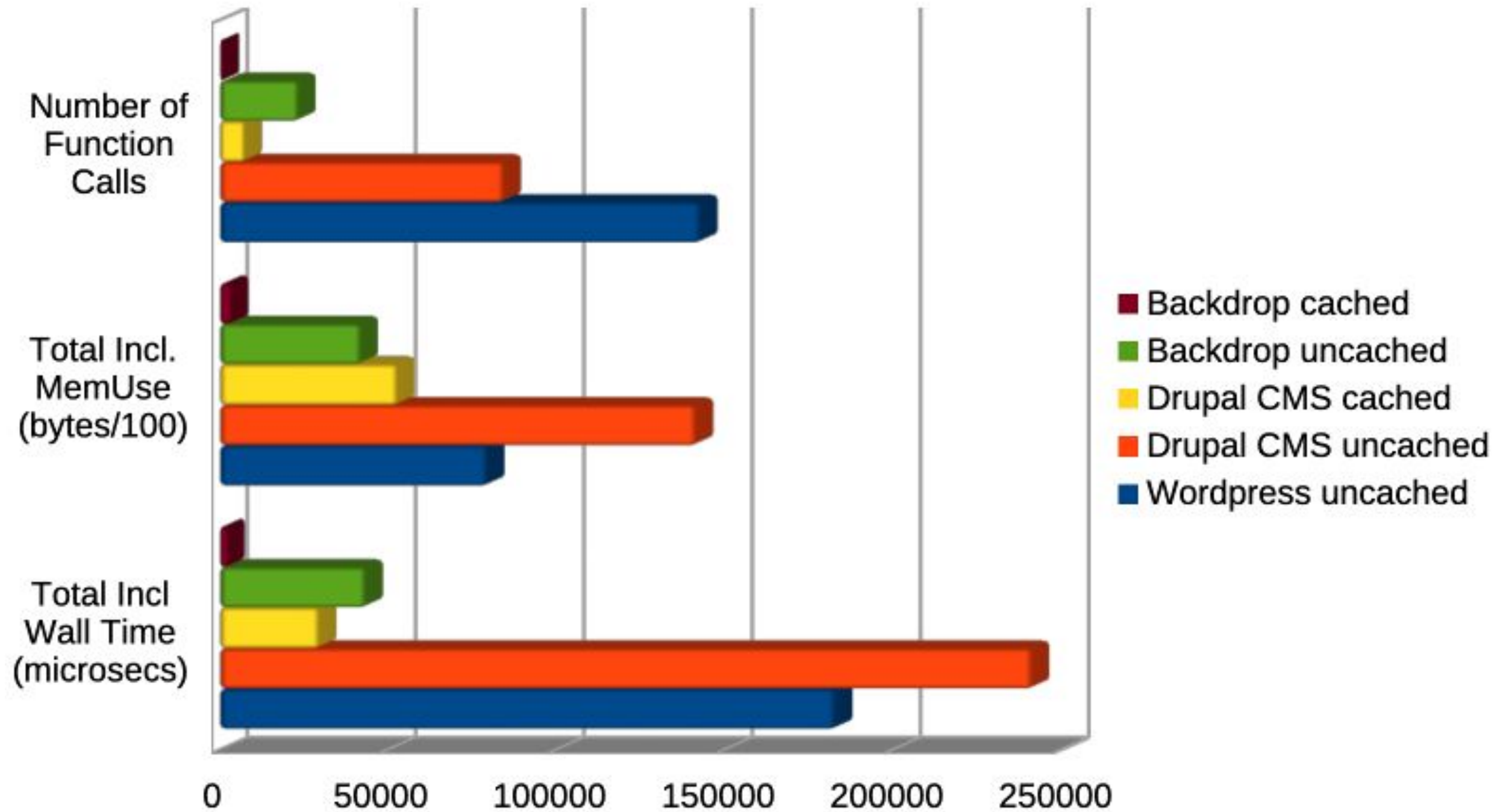
Drupal CMS (cached/uncached) vs. core Wordpress (uncached).



Data from <https://www.tag1consulting.com/blog/drupal-cms-vs-wordpress-performance-2025>

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project? [Efficiency]

Backdrop CMS (cached/uncached) vs. Drupal CMS (cached/uncached) vs. core Wordpress (uncached).



As with the original comparison, this is not a complex, real world comparison, but can provide some information.

Why might you consider Backdrop for a project?

Philosophically

- Governance structure of the project
 - Project Management Committee (PMC) as modeled after the Apache project, rather than a “benevolent dictator for life” model. This is reassuring when considering things like the recent Wordpress drama.
- Needs of the project/organization/budget over dev preferences (avoid dev “shiny object” syndrome)
 - Smaller budgets for development and/or long-term maintenance
 - Small (or no) client dev team
 - Project specs make Backdrop appealing even if Drupal could work
 - Higher ed example: Sites provided to professors, units, departments, clubs that don’t have extremely difficult specifications.

Early comparison of Backdrop and Drupal CMS/Starshot

Starshot:

- Not mature yet, moving quickly, has a lot of excitement in the Drupal world
- More AI-forward
- More highly developed recipes to package and pre-configure contrib modules
- Details of future functionality are yet to be seen (Experience Builder)

[[Mike Anello](#)]: “I don't think 'seasoned Drupal developers' are going to be affected all that much by Drupal CMS nor Experience Builder—with both of these things, we'll bring new folks into the Drupal community, and a portion of those will quickly require things that require a 'seasoned developer'.”

[Kevin Reynen]: Still expensive, requires constant maintenance and updates due to the modern Composer workflow and large dependency tree.

Early comparison of Backdrop and Drupal CMS/Starshot

Backdrop:

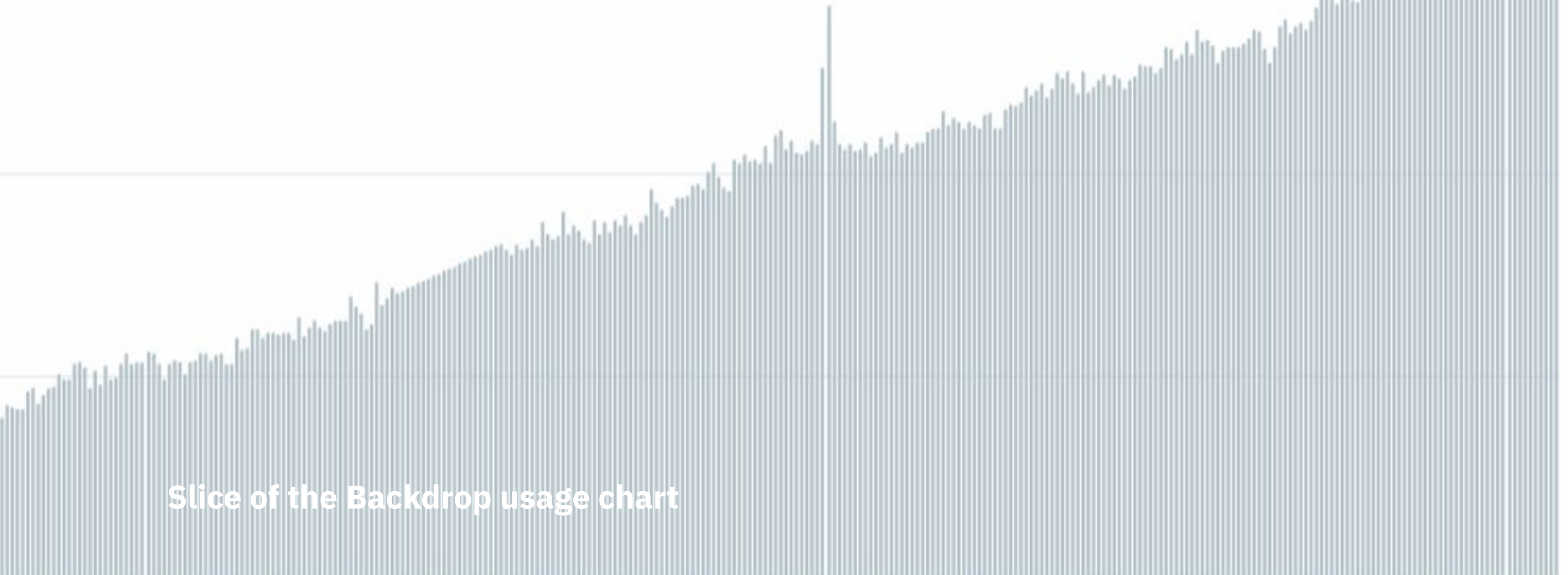
- Commitment to backwards compatibility even with improvements and new features
- Predictable release cycle
- Many “80% use case” modules have been merged into core
 - Some as core modules, some more deeply integrated (e.g. pathauto, token)
- Not all the bells and whistles (but still a lot of bells and whistles)
 - Some that aren't in core are available in contrib: Gin theme, AI module, etc.
 - Others in process and being answered differently: Recipes

Future of Backdrop

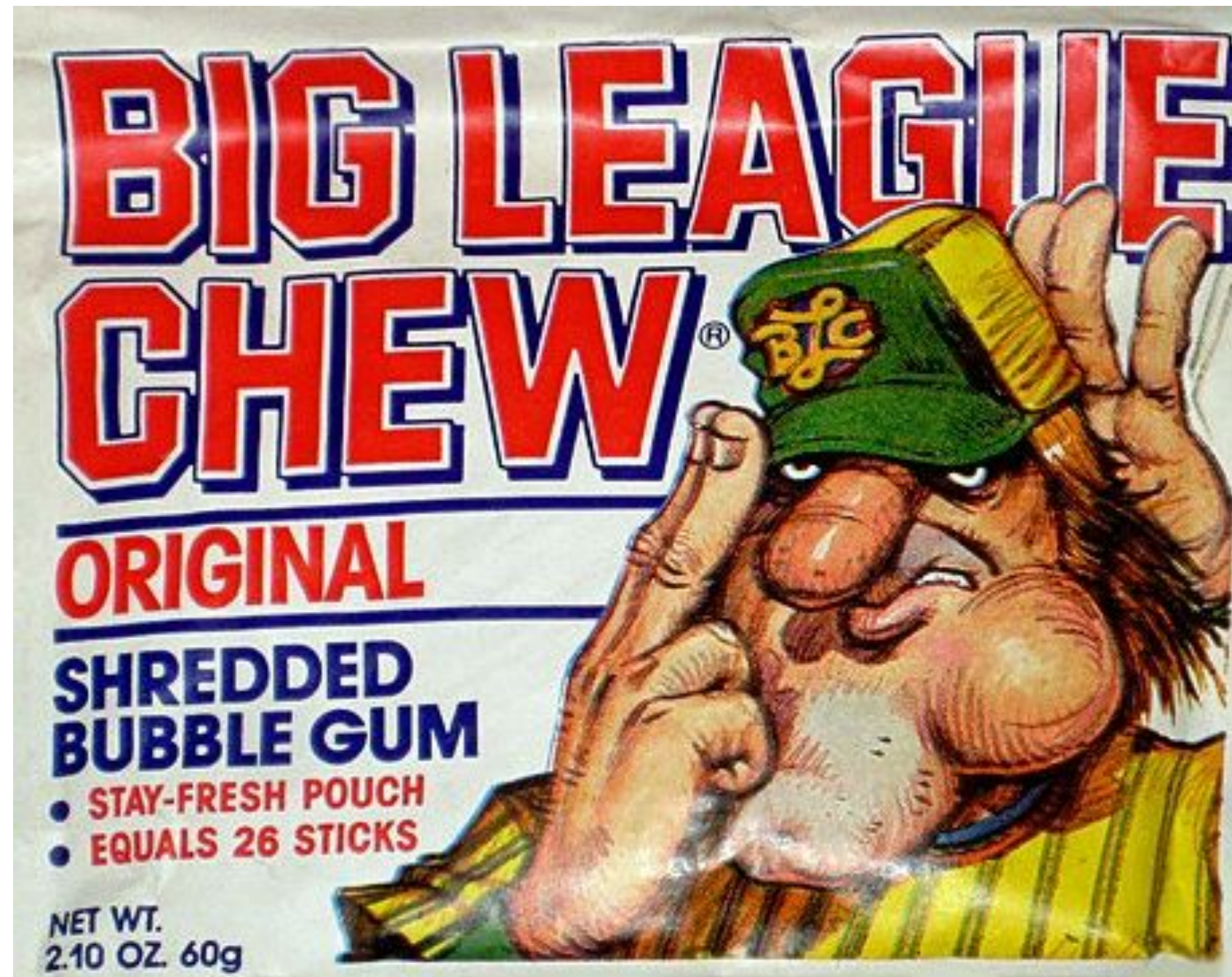
- No denying it is currently a smaller community – but it’s steadily growing with 10 years already under its belt.
- Led by diverse voices in the Project Management Committee (PMC) as modeled after the Apache project, rather than a “benevolent dictator for life” model. This is reassuring when considering things like the recent Wordpress drama.
- Agencies are beginning to offer Backdrop as an option: using it and also contributing back to it.
- And the project is still committed to backwards compatibility as much as possible even with ongoing improvements



Future of Backdrop: trajectory



Bite-sized case studies from Aten



Stanford | On & Off-Campus Learning Opportunities

Opportunities

About

Subscribe

Log In



Some things can't be learned in the classroom!

Search Opportunities

By Keyword

or

By Location

Search

Reset

Opportunities 1 - 20 of 60

Open now (60)

Coming soon (8)

Closed



United States of America (Stanford on-campus)

Cantor Scholars

Offered by Cantor Arts Center

Cantor Scholars pursue research or creative projects inspired by art at the Cantor. Two Cantor Scholars per year will receive mentorship from experts and professionals at the museum to develop original contributions to the arts at Stanford.

📅 Spring
Summer
DEADLINE:
February 21, 2024

💰 **FUNDING TYPE:**
Stipend

👤 **OPEN TO:**
Junior

Stanford SOLO/SSF

This complex web application that ties into Stanford systems but is largely self-sustaining. The quote about the massive savings by using Backdrop was from this project. Lower upgrade costs and lower costs to run, means more of the budget can be put into ongoing features and UI improvements. Config management make it largely painless to test branches in separate environments and merge down.

WELCOME TO Bud Werner Memorial Library

Join us for a summer reading challenge! [Browse Challenges](#) →

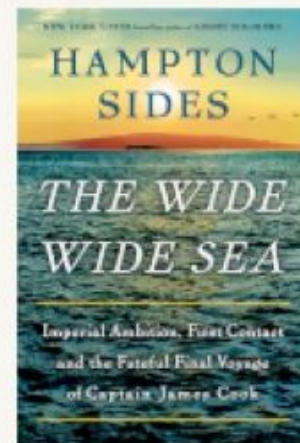
Books of the Day



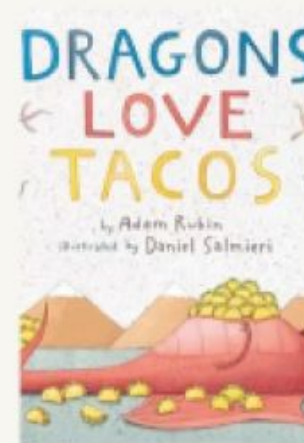
[The Creative Act: A Way of Being](#)
Rick Rubin



[The Complete Cookbook for Young Chefs](#)
America's Test Kitchen



[The Wide Wide Sea](#)
Hampton Sides



[Dragons Love Tacos](#)
Daniel Salmieri



[Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Hard Luck](#)
Author

WELCOME TO Bud Werner Memorial Library

Join us for a summer reading challenge!
[Browse Challenges](#) →

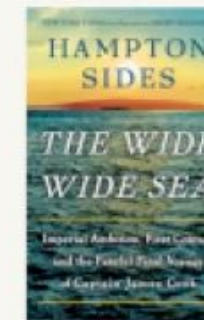
Books of the Day



[The Creative Act: A Way of Being](#)
Rick Rubin



[The Complete Cookbook for Young Chefs](#)
America's Test Kitchen



[The Wide Wide Sea](#)
Hampton Sides



[Dragons Love Tacos](#)
Daniel Salmieri

Staff Directory



Jeanette Spakinowicz

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123



Magdalena Abakanowicz

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123



Annie Taylor

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123



Moira Smith

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123



Alexei Maridashivili

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123



Alexander Hipp

Adult Services Associate Librarian & Head of Circulation
jspakinowicz@steamboatlibrary.org • 970-878-0240 et. 123

Staff Picks

What We're Reading Now



Wonder
Magdalena Abakanowicz



Supercommunicators
Magdalena Abakanowicz



The Prey
Magdalena

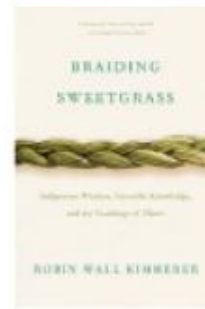


The Creative Act: A Way of Thinking
Magdalena



The Women
Magdalena

The Great Bud W



Braiding Sweetgrass
Magdalena Abakanowicz



The Familiar
Magdalena Abakanowicz



Somehow
Magdalena

Calendar

April, 2024

← March, 2024

May, 2024 →

Bud Werner Memorial Library

Fresh design and an upgrade from D7 preserved years of work on a site that was largely working well, and the process also is providing opportunity to tweak and improve moving forward while helping empower their team to manage the site with minimal support from us.

PennState University Education

14 diverse units working together to enhance teaching and learning at Penn State

Ignite curiosity. Expand opportunity.

Undergraduate Education offers diverse courses and experiences. Penn State's broad General Education programs provide a common foundation, interest and career support, engagement opportunities, and leadership experiences.

Feature Story

News and Events

News and Events

Learn more about our units and programs

Learn more about our units and programs

Academic Advising and Learning | Career and Program Resources | Digital Learning Support | Engagement

Academic Advising | Financial Support | Learning Edge Academic Programs | Student Transition Programs | Summer Programs

Bachelor of Philosophy | Center for Penn State Student Entrepreneurship | Division of Undergraduate Studies | Entrepreneurship and Innovation | Learning Edge Academic Program | Morgan Academic Center | Office for General Education | Office for Summer Session | Penn State Learning | Prior Learning Assessment | PLOE | Summer Programs for Teaching Excellence | Salomon Miller Family Financial and Life Skills Center | Student Engagement Network and Transition Programs | Student Success Center | Student Transitional Experiences Program | Undergraduate Research and Fellowship Mentoring Office

Connect with UE

Subscribe to UE News Headlines

Follow PSU_Undergrad

Connect with UE

Information for advisors

Quick links

Legal Statements

Office of the Vice President and Dean

Legal Statements

PennState University Education

Center for Penn State Student Entrepreneurship

Explore entrepreneurial academic programs at Penn State

Gain the knowledge you need to succeed as an entrepreneur in any field.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation Minor (ENIT)

Learn LaunchPad Microgrant Program

Other Entrepreneurial Resources

Top-Ranked Programs

Entrepreneurship Magazine TOP 50 UNDERGRAD PROGRAMS OF 2023

Featured News

For more information, please see the article on Penn State News.

More News

Contact the Center for Penn State Student Entrepreneurship

Legal Statements

PennState University Education

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Earn credit for what you already know

We understand that you have prior knowledge, training, and professional skills that may be applicable to your degree requirements.

Is PLA right for me?

EARN COLLEGE CREDIT FOR WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

Get the Credit You Deserve

Take our **3-MINUTE** assessment to see how you can **SAVE TIME & MONEY** toward college!

How to Earn Credit

TRANSFER | MILITARY | TESTING | WORK | PORTFOLIO

Contact the Prior Learning Assessment

Legal Statements

PennState University Education

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

Academic success is within your reach.

Penn State undergraduate students have the benefit of a vast network of support. Earning a college degree is no easy feat, but Penn State undergraduate students do not have to navigate their journey alone. The Student Success Center supports undergraduate students to overcome obstacles on the pathway to achieving their academic goals.

Complete Penn State

First-Generation Students

Additional Resources

Academic success is within your reach.

Penn State undergraduate students have the benefit of a vast network of support. Earning a college degree is no easy feat, but Penn State undergraduate students do not have to navigate their journey alone. The Student Success Center supports undergraduate students to overcome obstacles on the pathway to achieving their academic goals.

The center serves as both a physical center at University Park as well as a broad-based commitment towards **University-wide student support, retention, and graduation goals.** The center partners with various University departments, programs, and initiatives to assist Penn State students in their academic pursuits while also promoting opportunities for meaningful campus connection and personal development. The Student Success Center supports undergraduate students and their associates by contributing to a **learning-rich culture of care** and assisting students as they strive toward academic goals and degree completion.

Complete Penn State

First-Generation Students

Additional Resources

PennState University Education

Office for Summer Session

Make Penn State part of your summer plans.

Enhance your learning through courses that begin in the classroom but don't end there

Explore your academic passions through General Education courses

Catch up on courses to keep you on track to graduate or help you get ahead

Ease your transition to college with a summer start

Students definitely benefit from staying engaged in the summer. It's a great time to get caught up, work on a minor, explore an interest, complete an internship, or study abroad. Three summer sessions and the availability of online courses give you the flexibility to make summer work for you.

Katy Griffith, Director, Office for Summer Session

Contact the Office for Summer Session

Legal Statements

PennState University Education

Office for General Education

CONNECTING CURIOSITY GENERAL & EDUCATION CAREER

From the sciences to the humanities, General Education at Penn State is the keystone for preparing students to live and work in our diverse global society.

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPLORATION

INITIATIVE LEARNING

General Education isn't just some requirement. Think of it as an opportunity to take control of your own future and have the option to take it your way.

How Does General Education Help Students?

Students acquire skills, knowledge, and experiences for living in interconnected contexts; making life better for themselves, others, and the larger world.

Richard Alley, Distinguished University Professor of Geosciences

News

Penn State Undergraduate Education

A Backdrop solution provides different units and departments with a consistent shell to work within, with all default content types, paragraph types, etc. pre-configured using a shared config collection that gets imported. Ongoing maintenance time is minimal. Configuration settings allow some customization of color scheme and a few other choices. Going on a dozen or more sites upgraded from Drupal 7, created from scratch, and potential for migrations from other systems.



The Financial Key to Community Revival

[Free February Excerpt](#)

[Ebook of the Month](#)

[Donate today!](#)

[Become an](#)

[Learn from our](#)

[2 books f](#)

Island Press

Affordability is key for a small non-profit organization doing important work. Backdrop has allowed us to upgrade Drupal 7 site that was beginning to deteriorate, fix many of the issues in the process, and set the stage for additional future visual and functional improvements with low ongoing maintenance costs.

Backdrop resources

- 🔗 Code: github.com/backdrop/backdrop
- 💬 Chat: backdrop.zulipchat.com
- 🗨️ Forum: forum.backdropcms.org
- 🌐 Site: backdropcms.org and Demo: backdropcms.org/demo
- 📖 Docs: docs.backdropcms.org
- 🦋 Bluesky: [@backdropcms.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@backdropcms.bsky.social)
- 🐙 Mastodon: [@backdropcms@phpc.social](https://mstdn.social/@backdropcms@phpc.social)
- 📅 Meetings: Thursdays backdropcms.org/news/meetings

Get in touch with Aten!

work@aten.io

Register for our webinar series

aten.io/webinars



Questions?

