

Conserving the first Commons: TCC in operation

2018 ISOC.nl NY Bash, Amsterdam



THE COMMONS
CONSERVANCY

1 minute executive summary



We said we would...

**Building the Greenhouse /
Building the Commons Conservancy**



Guido Aben

ISOC New Year's Bash

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Amsterdam

...we bloody well did...



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 **eduVPN**
Safer connections for everyone

Virtual Private Networks are an important class of technologies that enable secure and private use of networks (such as wifi hotspots) even in the common case where the trustworthiness of the network is hard to establish. The use of untrusted wifi networks is as common as it is risky, and without protection potentially exposes users to all kinds of attacks. However, setting up VPN's is traditionally a very cumbersome task. eduVPN is an effort to make VPN technology commonly available, by building better and more user-friendly tools.

 **RedWax**
Modular security for the web

The Redwax Project provides a number of small and modular security tools to make it easy to build security services on the web. These can be combined to form various types of certificate authorities, issuing certificates with SPKAC and SCEP, servicing certificate revocation with CRLs and OCSP, and creating timestamps. The aim of the project is keep the security footprint and the number of dependencies as low as possible.

 **FileSender**
Making bits travel everywhere

FileSender is a (self-)hosted service that allows people to securely share large files with anyone. It works through your web browser and you can send a file to anyone with a mail address. FileSender was originally created with the needs of scientists and researchers in mind, which means that it scale to extreme file sizes.

Private instances of FileSender are currently in use by many nation research networks and scientific institutes across the world.

 **Internet of Coins**
Blockchain wizardry

Internet of Coins is a project that aims to create a decentralized, self-sustaining economy by implementing inter-blockchain connectivity. Not through centralized exchanges, nor federated partnerships, or multigateways, but sustained by a hybrid P2P meta-network to leverage each of its participant's strength in numbers. The dream of the project is to integrate all coins into an interconnected and financially liquid nervous system.

 **Fashion Freedom Initiative**
Open up the fashion industry

The Fashion Freedom Initiative wants to make sure that everyone benefits from new advances in technology in the fashion industry and beyond. It aims to assist the industry and the wider society in transitioning into a new phase where social responsibility, art, usability, privacy and sustainability are combined into a better and smarter fashion for everyone. Designing and making clothes isn't just a luxury for the affluent, or a prerogative of large factories and consumer brands: it is a universal need at the largest possible scale.

And we've got actual projects onboarded!

PROFIT!

....no, no, wait, not for profit!

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9 minute
attempt at
seriousness





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What is The Commons Conservancy

- Netherlands based foundation
- Established in 2016
- Experienced board with veterans from free software/open source, e-science, internet community and digital heritage

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Designing with reuse in mind

(scratching our own itch, in fairness)

So you thought your tiny 'local' open source project was unlikely to ever turn into a comprehensive, cooperative global effort supported by a lively ecosystem of contributors.

What happens when it does, though?

What stops scaling?



How does formalised structure help scaling?

Project stage

- predefined lifetime
- Project/capex funded
- ad hoc involvement
- 'pioneering'
 - **experimental/pilot**
- meet short term needs
 - **frantic feature development**
 - **work in progress**

Mature stage

- open ended
- open community
- maintenance/opex funded
 - **Need to be able to pool monies across tax years and re-distribute them according to agreed targets**
- Need for “enterprise grade”
 - **No room for shifty code development: long term relationships with veteran coders needed**
- balancing long-horizon stakeholder goals
 - **solidifying technology**
 - **software engineering**
 - **security hardening**



Enter: [The Commons Conservancy]

- An 'organisation hypervisor' that can spawn and support *virtual* open source foundations. Each Program runs independently from others, in near-perfect isolation
- Each Program determines its own 'operating environment' (such as statutes, CLA/FLA, etc) with off the shelf templates/defaults provided, potentially has full connectivity to the outside (own site, etc). Standardising could make things spectacularly easy.
- Long term vision, should still exist 75 years from now



fundamental principle of
hygiene: separation of
concerns



- independent programme governance
- maintain a shared roadmap
- a neutral, trustworthy vault for shared intangible assets (such as source code)
- advanced legal infrastructure



- professional fund management
- benefits from existing charitable organisation: reputation and tax facilities (established in 1989)



- Not-for-profit invoicing
- All proceeds donated to Nlnet
- with earmark attached



Cordon off the money

- Separate projects from money = no risk of financial contamination between programmes.
- Money can be injected into projects in multiple ways:
 - tax deductible donations, subsidies and grants (through NLnet foundation)
 - Invoiced like 'normal' software licenses (through Commons Caretakers BV)
- Promiscuous: projects choose where their money is handled best
- An ecosystem of capable, attuned developers can evolve around [TCC]



Stewardship

- [The Commons Conservancy] is designed to be a very safe place for contributors to keep IP of source code + other assets – if so desired
- By its nature it is limited to Free Software / Open Source efforts
- License agnostic, though comply-or-explain around <https://opensource.org/licenses>



And looking ahead

- No lock in
 - **A Programme is free to go at all times to 'graduate' to a dedicated legal entity (e.g. run its own 'bare metal' organisation)**
- Also not financially
 - **Feel free to shop around the globe for whomever**
 - ... has the best fit with (fiscal?) specifics of donors and community
 - ... delivers the best operational support and value add
 - ... has a custom fit for specific needs



Summary: a light-Weight solution

- [The Commons Conservancy] is a light-weight, 'invisible' infrastructure
 - **Virtual open source foundations that are otherwise independent**
 - **Very fast and flexible ('pick your own governance' model)**
 - **License agnostic (mix of licenses is not a problem)**
- Separation of concerns:
 - **Safe home for resources and structure for collaborative decision making**
 - **Financial transactions dealt with externally through umbrella MoUs with established external public benefit organisations → charitable tax status out of the box**



Questions?

Just let us know...



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