Conserving the first Commons: TCC in operation

2018 ISOC.nl NY Bash, Amsterdam
1 minute executive summary
We said we would...

Building the Greenhouse / Building the Commons Conservancy

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ISOC New Year’s Bash

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...we bloody well did...
And we’ve got actual projects onboarded!  

PROFIT! 

...no, no, wait, not for profit!
9 minute attempt at seriousness
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
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?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project stage</th>
<th>Mature stage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● predefined lifetime</td>
<td>● open ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Project/capex funded</td>
<td>● open community</td>
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<tr>
<td>● ad hoc involvement</td>
<td>● maintenance/opex funded</td>
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<tr>
<td>● 'pioneering'</td>
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<tr>
<td>• experimental/pilot</td>
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<tr>
<td>● meet short term needs</td>
<td>● Need to be able to pool monies across tax years and re-distribute them according to agreed targets</td>
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<td>• frantic feature development</td>
<td>● Need for “enterprise grade”</td>
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<td>• work in progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>● balancing long-horizon stakeholder goals</td>
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<td>• solidifying technology</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• software engineering</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• security hardening</td>
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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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