curl, governance, money and the future

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Background

The curl project was founded the day of the first curl release, a fine spring day in March 1998. Since that day, "the curl project" has been a bunch of loosely associated people on the Internet working on source code together. Whenever we needed something that real money was necessary to pay for, a company or a volunteer would sponsor that. Servers, bandwidth, stickers, etc.

For a long time we've accepted donations to paypal, which has ended up on Daniel's personal account. The amount of donations has however never grown very large and the amount of money Daniel has spent on the main server alone through the years surpass the donated amount with several magnitudes.

With a growing amount of money in and around the project it has become increasingly inconvenient to "shuffle" money through single individuals, and it is bound to cause trouble at one point sooner or later unless we do something. Like with tax authorities or with fellow project members who disagree. It is time to find a place that can hold funds for the project.

Core teams

Thanks to this relaxed design of the project, there's never really been a clear definition of a "core team". Decisions and discussions are held on the general public mailing list and allows everyone and anyone to speak up and argue and let their voice get heard on all and any topics.

Maintainers

We offer the most active people who show an interest and understanding of the code, push rights to the git repositories. People we can rightfully call curl maintainers. Right now, the total amount of persons with push rights is 23. Having the right doesn't mean that these people exercise this right very often. It also isn't a right that remains forever; persons who "vanish" or otherwise decide to leave the project for a prolonged period of time are likely to get their rights revoked. If nothing else, for security reasons and to keep control of the group that have these rights.

Github org admins

Four persons (out of the 23 with push rights) are marked as 'owners' of the github organization and thus have rights to add/edit users and change everything else on the organization's behalf on github.

Security team

A group of project members builds up the "security team", who pays special attention to security matters/reports/vulnerabilities. This group currently consists of 7 persons.

Server admins

The main server for the curl project is the primary web site host that also runs the various mailing lists and a few other assorted services. This server is owned and run by Haxx AB, which is a Swedish company co-founded and part-owned by Daniel. The leadership of this company have access to this server as admins and have the admin powers. Those are three other humans apart from Daniel.

Code authors

During the last few years, we see around 30 - 40 *authors* of content in each release. Usually around half of them are newcomers. We have a very long tail of contributors and there are only a few persons who have contributed significant amounts of code. Eleven humans authored more than 100 commits. Four did more than a 1,000 commits (out of which two have since vanished). Daniel has done and still authors more than half of the commits.

Money

Paid-for development

The project has not been involved directly with companies for paid-for development. Companies have of course paid individual developers directly or indirectly over time to help getting features written or bugs fixed, both to employees of these companies but also to contractors. Daniel has for example been paid for such contracts a few times throughout the years, but getting paid for developing something does not alter nor lower the requirements to get that code merged into the project. Paid or not paid, contributed code needs to meet the same bar.

Sponsors

For a long time we've had sponsors. They're paying for non-trivial things the project needs and then we mention them as sponsors on the project as a "thank you". The money for these then

never ends up "in the project" but we only reap the benefits of the paid stuff. Bandwidth, server costs, conference arrangements, stickers, etc.

Paypal

As mentioned above, we have received donations to the project via paypal to Daniel's personal account. The total amount received through 20 years is within a few thousand US dollars.

Opencollective

Not too long ago we were contacted by a company who wanted to donate money to the project (as a one-time thing). The condition put on us to receive this donation was basically that we would create an account on Opencollective. Once created, we received the donation and since then we have received a series of additional donations to that account. As of right now, the project holds 5,635 USD there.

Bountygraph

Recently we joined and created a bug bounty program on bountygraph.com to give out monetary rewards to researchers who report security vulnerabilities in curl. This is funded by company donors. Thanks to early sponsors there, curl now has 33,268 USD in the bounty fund.

Related: there's a separate bounty program run by hackerone (the "Internet Bug Bounty"), but that's done entirely independent of us and we have no say in it so it's not listed here as something that we need to worry about.

Tidelift

Tidelift is a company who's in the game of selling support for open source packages to companies and funneling support money down to open source maintainers. While their current offering isn't really a match for the curl project (since they focus on other ecosystems), we're still in talks with them and have a special arrangement with them. They're willing to fund the "curl project" with 10,000 USD over the next two years. Possibly to grow later.

curl up

We need and spend money on the annual conference. This is done by getting sponsors to cover expenses and if necessary, by charging attendees.

Suggestion: new coordination

There are probably some forgotten project details here too. They're piling up. We don't have any "legal entity" that can receive money or represent the curl project in any proper way.

A proposal: let's do two things.

Create: The curl steering committee

A limited set of people to make decisions about (how to distribute) money and project planning etc for the curl project, as a means to move away this from being solely/mostly on Daniel's plate. All regular code and development chats should remain exactly as they are today, on the mailing list or in the github trackers.

We propose we have a nomination and election process for this board and that each person sits for a fixed time (perhaps two years) until reelection with overlapping intervals to avoid that the whole board is re-elected each time. We can work out the exact details separately. Possibly by borrowing someone else's (already proven to work) design.

This could help to make this project a little less Daniel-centric. Daniel suggests himself as chair of this board for continuance and as a sign that this is not a sneaky way to hand anything off to someone else or to wind down in the project.

Voting for members to the committee

Everyone who has contributed to the project within the previous 24 months is allowed to place a vote.

Join: The Software Freedom Conservancy

We propose the curl project applies to become members of the Software Freedom Conservancy (https://sfconservancy.org/) to have them help us host the legal entity for the project that we've been missing - like the ability to receive money as a project and not just as single individuals. The leadership board mentioned above should preferably then be in place.

SFC has been selected partly because of its track record with other open source projects and its prominent board members.

Daniel has sent an initial application. This process is expected to take some time.

Signed by

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