

# Center for the Cultivation of Technology: A Non-Profit Project Incubator

<<http://techcultivation.org/>>

## Executive Summary

The Center for the Cultivation of Technology (CCT) will provide a supportive and nurturing environment for free and open source projects. We will take care of organizational matters for the projects, including contract management, office and legal setup, organizational structuring, fundraising, progress reporting and tax filing. Additionally, CCT will train and empower project maintainers to navigate all organizational matters themselves, so they can choose to set up their own organization using our platform and tools should they wish to do so.

## Mission

We are setting up a non-profit company in Germany specifically designed to act as an active fiscal sponsor for Internet Freedom, Free Software and social-change projects.

We are developing a flexible web platform, tailored to the needs of umbrella organizations. This platform will help us manage donations and grants, as well as payroll and reimbursement processes. The web platform will be made available as Free Software for other organizations to use. Templates will help replicate the legal structure in other jurisdictions.

The Center for the Cultivation of Technology will help projects develop operational and funding plans tailored to the specific needs and abilities of the project members, and allow projects to easily and transparently manage and allocate their own budgets under our umbrella. We will take care of all matters accounting, and in cooperation with the projects provide the necessary reporting and documentation for donors. We will assist with crowdfunding campaigns and the logistics of shipping out merchandise.

Member projects will become part of a community where they can coordinate and cooperate with related projects and initiatives, collaborate on fundraising, and exchange knowledge around grant applications, project development, and management.

## Why?

The vast majority of free and open source technology is developed and maintained by small groups of technology and internet activists. Despite a number of collaborations on the projects' side and a genuine interest in supporting free and

open source technology towards the general good of society on the funders' side, there is at the moment no entity capable of truly fostering both open source technology and project-funder relations on the scale necessary for meaningful impact.

Over the past years, we have analyzed how foundations and project organizations in the Free Software world work, in order to create not only one 'active' fiscal sponsor, but also collect information and resources that are helpful to any such organization, whether it is dedicated to a single project, a certain area (i.e. "privacy tools"), Free Software as a whole, or even completely different (non-software) projects.

Currently, the dominant approach to supporting open source development and other technologies and activists is through financial means. However, in many cases, this complicates things for small developer and grassroots groups. In addition to their usual organizational overhead, they also have to continually apply for funding, manage these resources, and report on their progress. Many would much rather be able to concentrate on their core issues, i.e. writing code, developing hardware, and building community.

Too much energy is lost - both on the individual level and in aggregate over all projects - when each and every software project has to come up with, maintain and improve their own organizational structure. Weeks, if not months, can be lost in setting up office and legal status, contract management, progress reporting and tax filing. New projects especially are unequipped to handle these things, or overwhelmed by what organizational and legal nightmare their newly successful project entails. This is exactly where many excellent ideas and projects fail - they become too burdensome to maintain. On a societal level, this means we lose great tools and technologies; on a individual level this means failure and frustration for the most dedicated developers.

## **Our Solution**

It is our goal to support open source and its developers as best we can - by helping them concentrate on their projects and what they do best. For this, we serve both as virtual incubator and umbrella organization.

In this double function, we first identify important projects worth pursuing and assemble around them the required components of the development ecosystem (leading academics, software maintainers and developers, charities, NGOs, educational organizations, etc.), provide know-how as well as connections, advice as well as shared experience amongst the projects.

We then, as umbrella, take organizational and other matters off our projects' hands, by providing them with organizational support (from planning and collaboration tools to meeting and travel arrangements), networking help (connecting them with other projects in their field and beyond), and especially payment, payroll management, budgeting, and auditing.

This, we believe, will free their energy to work on their core projects, raise productivity, and provide for more stability both in development and in the support communities. Overall, this directly translates to a strengthening of the overall resilience and sustainability of tech development and activism.

## **Our Services**

### **Manage Accounting, Employment, Contracting, Payroll**

Our web platform allows for all projects under our roof to manage and allocate their budget as they see fit, including provisions for sub-budgets such as contract work, travel, or equipment. Our platform will facilitate all transactions and help us manage required paperwork including receipts and documentation, will provide employment and contracting templates, both for Europe and world-wide, according to the specific needs and wishes of projects, employees, and contractors. We will manage payroll and tax reporting, and provide necessary documents for internal and external audits. In essence, all projects will be free to allocate funds and work as they wish, and we will take care that everything goes smoothly and is properly documented.

### **Manage Donations, Donor Reporting, and Help with Fundraising**

We support our projects' applications for funds (for example to private foundations or for EU grants) and will also spearhead our own funding initiatives. The donor management platform will facilitate tax-deductible donations to all projects under our roof using various means such as bank transfer, Paypal, or Bitcoin. We will take care of all matters accounting, and in cooperation with the projects provide the necessary documentation for donors. This includes the processing of larger grants, including the management of (restricted) funds, the joint handling of deadlines and deliverables, and all necessary reporting.

Initially, the Center will be able to provide instant tax-deductibility in Germany and within some European member states. We are confident that by partnering with fiscal sponsors in other regions of the world, we will be able to offer tax-deductibility in more and more regions of the world over time.

### **Provide Asset Stewardship**

We will be able to hold assets, e.g. trademarks, domain names, and physical equipment, for member projects whenever they would like us to do so. In many cases, this will help avoid licensing issues quite common in larger projects with fluctuating contributors.

### **Offer an Expert Network and Mentor Community**

Our own knowledge and connections and the knowledge and connections of our projects combine to build an expert network. We use this to provide advice to projects, but also to help fill needs and vacancies, to connect developers and activists with, for example, designers, journalists and institutions. All projects will be able to call upon our mentor community (including members of our advisory board and other experts) with problems or questions they might have.

### **Facilitate In-Person Developer Meetings / Code Retreats / Hackathons**

Most open source projects are developed in a distributed fashion. With some projects, it is quite common that developer teams have never met in person. Despite this, the importance and effectiveness of human contact is as strong as ever. Most successful projects have in common the fact they regularly meet, e.g. at project-specific developer conferences, which often see great bursts of creativity and productivity. We organize and plan these meetings, including travel arrangements and conference support (moderating, note-taking, etc.) We also actively seek to bring individuals and projects under our roof together with other developers and activists.

### **Provide & arrange office space**

While most projects are not housed in a specific location, where this is the case and appropriate, we help arrange office space, ideally shared office space with similar projects to enable communication and further collaboration. We are already providing such a space to the community in Berlin.

### **Offer legal support**

This ranges from helping with the ‘spin-off’ of individual projects as their own organizations, to legally defending our projects and affiliated interests in court.

### **Take care of other organizational matters**

From (virtual) phone networks to postal mail services (scanning and encrypted delivery to the projects), we also take care of all matters “office”.

### **Vision of Automation**

We envision our platform as an eventually automated web-service which will only require minimal manual tasks on part of CCT (e.g. actual necessary paperwork

handled by our certified accountant). Nearly all processes can be automated and will thus scale with growing demand.

New projects will submit some data about their project and pick a category. Once accepted, the project will immediately be able to use the full spectrum of the platform services, including receiving tax-deductible donations.

Project leads will be able to assign budgets for team members, manage grants, and generate financial reports from our transaction database. Team members can submit expense reports and request payout. The platform will provide contract templates for freelance work and employment, based on project and team member preference.

In our research, we identified this as a major gap; existing accounting platforms are proprietary, expensive, and usually not equipped to handle fiscal sponsorship and shared budget planning well.

We will not build a new system completely from scratch: We are currently evaluating existing components and libraries, to see which of them are best suited for fiscal sponsors.

## **Goals and longer term effects of the project**

### **Project Organization, Funder Assistance, Virtuous Circle**

We are confident that with our help, many projects will no longer have to re-invent the wheel in terms of organization, finance, fundraising and reporting. Instead, they will be able to rely on the tools and experience we provide, thus freeing their energy for what they originally set out to do. In addition, funders can be confident that they will receive quality reporting via one interfacing organization across multiple, independent projects.

We also believe that projects able to concentrate on their core work are both more productive and more stable over longer periods of time, because they can focus more on their products and the community that they serve. We are thus confident we can create a virtuous circle effect. By successfully incubating ideas and projects and releasing them out into the world as valuable constituents of the community, this will focus attention on CCT and attract additional high quality projects and ideas.

### **Focus Area & Re-Use of Platform**

Our focus area is Europe; even so, projects and participants do not have to be European to join. For existing projects with organizations in the US, we can facilitate European Union grants and process tax-deductible donations from

European users. Ideally, we have a partnership with at least one US-based organization that handles tax-deductible donations towards our projects for United States donors.

We believe one actor cannot be sufficient or ideal for our field. Therefore, our platform will be open source and designed for reuse, and we will provide our templates and active guidance to set up similar funder-independent umbrella organizations in more specific focus areas or in other regions of the world to help strengthen the global activist community.

## **Roadmap**

### **pre-registration**

- specification of the platform (use cases, components, data flows)
- further market research & documentation
  - survey of existing ERP systems
  - typical projects

### **July 2016: Incorporation**

- registration of the Center as a legal entity

### **August 2016: Manual fiscal sponsorship**

- ability to manage an initial set of third-party project grants (employment, contracting, reimbursements)

### **January 2017: Alpha launch**

- ability to automatically process donations via bank transfer and Paypal
- online submission forms for receipts/bills by team members

### **Mid-2017: Beta launch**

- accounting processes are automated
- projects from waiting list are hand-selected and invited for beta phase; existing member projects can invite other projects

## January 2018: Public launch

- public signup possible
- the platform allows to manage hundreds of small projects
- source code all cleaned up, project documentation available

## Origin of CCT

The concept for this project was developed and refined over four years, based on interviews with a broad number of actors within the Internet Freedom and larger Free Software community. We held “Umbrella sessions” to bring actors together at numerous events like the Circumvention Tech Summit in Berlin in 2013, the Google Summer of Code Mentors Summits in 2013 and 2014, LinuxCon Europe 2014, Chaos Communication Congress 2013 and 2014, the Circumvention Tech Festival in 2015, and many others. We had conversations with a diverse set of players, including funders like OpenTechFund and Ford Foundation, existing fiscal sponsors like the Software Freedom Conservancy, SPI, Apache Foundation, KDE Foundation, Mozilla Foundation; Internet Freedom projects like GnuPG, Tor, Tails, QubesOS, NGOs like Tactical Tech, Article19, Digitale Gesellschaft and researchers who investigate Open Source and economic models around it like Nadia Eghbal and Dirk Riehle.

Members of our team are serving as management staff for existing fiscal sponsoring organizations for projects like Tor, Tails, GNUnet and Privoxy. We maintain a group mailing list and contact list that includes a wide spectrum of key people in the field that have in the past years shown considerable interest in this effort. Many of these organizations and individuals have expressed their interest in stronger strategic partnerships.

## Team

**Renewable Freedom Foundation** is a non-profit foundation established in 2012 by newspaper publisher Georg Schäff in Germany. Its focus is capacity building in the Internet Freedom and Free Software space. As an active grant-maker, RFF identified the lack of funder-independent umbrella entities and services as a crucial missing piece for better and more sustainable project growth. Renewable Freedom Foundation provides initial financial support to bootstrap CCT.

**Stephan Urbach** is a trained and certified accountant and spent the last years as finance officer of several associations. He was part of Telecomix working in the field of free communication, Internet Freedom and human rights and knows the pains of activist groups to handle funding and spending money. In the last 15 years he was volunteering in various local and international groups. He is an

active member of the Chaos Computer Club and likes vintage hardware older than 20 years.

**Moritz Bartl** serves as the Director of the Renewable Freedom Foundation. Active in the Free Software and hacker community for the past 15 years, he is a core member of the Tor project, a fellow at the Hermes Center for Transparency, an active member of the Chaos Computer Club in Germany, and works in close partnerships with international NGOs in both technology and tech policy areas. He studied computer science at TU Dresden, with a focus on privacy & anonymity, software engineering, project management, and machine learning. His project [torservers.net](http://torservers.net) brought together 20 non-profit organizations in 14 countries, many of which were newly created for this purpose.

**Dr. Martin Modlinger** is Director of Science and Culture at Renewable Freedom Foundation. In this position, he seeks to connect human rights activists and digital rights hackers with scholars, journalists, and the general public, in order to protect and preserve civil liberties, especially in the digital landscape. In the past, as a (cultural) historian by trade, he has dealt with utopian and dystopian visions in philosophy, literature, and history. Now he sees his role in translating visions of a better world into reality. He holds a PhD in German (History & Culture) from the University of Cambridge, and still picks up a book from time to time.

## Advisory Board

**Claudio “vecna” Agosti**, Tactical Tech, Globaleaks (Germany)

**Mario Behling**, OpenTechSummit et al (Germany)

**hellekin**, Dyne.org Foundation (Netherlands)

**Allen “gunner” Gunn**, Aspiration Tech (USA)

**Dr. Martin Krafft**, Debian (Germany)

**Beatrice Martini**, Aspiration Tech (Germany)

**Niels ten Oever**, Article19 (Netherlands)

**Christian Pfaab**, Bremen University (Germany)

**Simon Phipps**, Open Rights Group/Document Foundation (UK)

**Fabio Pietrosanti**, Hermes Center (Italy)

**Jonah Sheridan**, Information Ecology (USA)

**Liz Steiniger**, previously Open Tech Fund (USA)

**Tiberiu-Cezar Tehnoetic**, Fundatia Ceata (Romania)

**Dr. Stefano Zacchiroli**, Open Source Initiative, Debian Project Leader 2010-2013 (France)