

Installing ODK Central

There are two ways to get access to a Central install. You can pay for official managed hosting on ODK Cloud, or if you are technical, you can self-host Central for free on your own infrastructure.

The software is the same either way you choose, but there are important trade-offs to consider.

ODK Cloud (recommended)

If you are looking for the fastest and easiest way to run Central, use [ODK Cloud](#). ODK Cloud is official managed hosting of Central on ODK's fast, reliable, and secure infrastructure.

- ODK Cloud is fully-managed and fully-supported, so no technical skills are required.
- ODK Cloud has guaranteed and hassle-free levels of speed, reliability, and security.
- ODK Cloud directly funds continued work on ODK's software, community, and ecosystem.

Self-hosting

If you are technical, you can self-host Central for free. And while Central is available at no cost, please account for your infrastructure expenses and the time needed for ongoing maintenance.

Tip

We offer ODK Support packages for organizations who need to self-host, but don't want their staff to take on the added cost and responsibility of keeping a Central install fast, reliable, and secure. Email support@getodk.org for pricing.

Installing on DigitalOcean

If you want to self-host but you're not sure what cloud provider to choose, we recommend DigitalOcean. Start [here](#).

Installing elsewhere

Central is entirely defined via **Docker Compose**, which means the `docker compose` command will be all you need to manage the entire system.

Warning

We verify each version of Central on DigitalOcean and confirm that upgrades are possible. However, we do not verify them on other cloud providers and generally can't provide free support for installations that deviate from the DigitalOcean instructions. You may find other community members able to help [on the forum](#).

No matter where you plan to install Central, we recommend reviewing the [instructions we've provided](#) for DigitalOcean starting from [this section](#). In particular, you'll need to update your submodules after you clone the repository, and configure your `.env` file for your installation.

Installing on AWS

Amazon Web Services (AWS) is one of the many other options for installing Central. It's a good idea to read through the [instructions we've provided](#) for DigitalOcean, as many of the steps remain the same or similar.

To obtain a server you will need to first [create an AWS account](#). When launching your instance, select the Ubuntu Server 20.04 LTS AMI in step 1. The `t2.micro` instance type has the 1GB of memory recommended for if you don't expect many forms to be submitted at once and you don't expect many large media attachments. Regardless of how much memory you select, we also recommend 1GB of swap and a minimum of 15GB of disk storage.

When adjusting the security settings open up the ports for SSH, HTTP, and HTTPS. Once you have launched your instance, go to the Elastic IPs menu option under Network & Security, then allocate a new address and associate it with your server in order to keep the IP address for your server consistent.

Before installing Central on your server, you need to install Docker and Docker Compose. Follow the instructions below.

1. [Install Docker Engine on Ubuntu](#).
2. [Install Docker Compose](#).

Looking to save time? Try [ODK Cloud](#), the official managed hosting service from the creators of ODK.

After installing Docker and Docker Compose you can follow our DigitalOcean instructions from running `git clone https://github.com/getodk/central`. Continue with the DigitalOcean instructions for logging into Central.

Finally, [configure an e-mail service](#) such as [Amazon SES](#) because Amazon restricts emails sent from EC2.

Installing on Windows

We strongly recommend using Linux, preferably the latest Ubuntu Server LTS, as the host operating system (natively or in a virtual machine) for your Central install.

If you wish to use Windows as the host, it's a good idea to read through the [instructions we've provided](#) for DigitalOcean, as many of the steps remain the same or similar.

The major differences are that you'll first need to install Git, Node.js, Docker, and Docker Compose. You'll also need to clone the Central repository with the correct line endings: `git clone -c core.autocrlf=false https://github.com/getodk/central`.