



Shibboleth Technical Support

Dear all,

As many of you will be aware, the Shibboleth Consortium continually seeks to strengthen its financial sustainability via encouraging users of the software to join the Consortium and contribute to the costs expended on development, support and maintenance.

Over the last 12 months the Consortium Board has introduced new measures to ensure that the baseline costs of operating Shibboleth are met, whilst also investigating new initiatives to build on our financial position so as to increase development efforts, meeting the evolving requirements of the user community.

One such initiative, on which the Board has consulted with the Consortium Members, is to revise the model by which support is provided to users of the Shibboleth software at the direct expense of the Consortium. In order to lessen the burden on the core development team, and enhance the value of Membership, the model is being revised such that only Members of the Consortium will be eligible to receive support from the core development team using time paid for through the Consortium. Non-members will still have access to all existing mailing lists and the issue reporting system, however support queries raised by non-members will only be answered by members of the community, or, if by the core development team, by that person on their own time and not with time chargeable to the Consortium. A definitive date for this change has not yet been set, however the Board will give notice before introducing the revised model.

How the new Support Model will work

There will be no increases in Membership fees to facilitate this new model. This change aims to enhance the value of Membership to existing Members, whilst encouraging non-member users of Shibboleth to join and simultaneously enable the core development team to spend more time on the development and maintenance of the software and documentation.

The mechanism by which this revised support model is expected to operate is two-fold:

- Using a specialised workflow in our existing JIRA service to offer direct developer access. We are exploring the specifics of this, particularly the exact visibility of support issues and responses to the broader community, but we anticipate offering both “public” and “private” options for Members to use depending on their needs. Using JIRA will allow us to formalise the delivery of support, particularly on more complex topics.
- A new invite-only Slack channel established for members that wish to ask simple questions in a more casual manner, subject to developer availability. We wish to experiment with this approach and will revisit whether a mailing list for informal member support is warranted.

As part of this transition, we will be enhancing our web presence and mailing list footers to better document our support options and clarify where those seeking support should turn, in particular when that involves their local federation or NREN.

Service Level Commitment

The Consortium does not offer a formal service level commitment today, but is prepared to further incentivise Membership by offering some general guarantees on response time to the extent possible, when team members are available. The formal, JIRA-based, support mechanism will be subject to a 2 business day guarantee of acknowledgment and a 4 business day guarantee of some form of substantive response to the issue raised (general assessment, request for more specific log detail, etc.). This guarantee will not extend to the Slack channel.

Since holiday schedules vary by organisation and individual, the development team will endeavour to identify any gaps in availability via a Member-visible calendar.

Benefits

The Consortium Board believes that a balance is needed between maintaining the open community support model intrinsic to open source while at the same time recognising that the level of support offered by the development team has a high inherent value, and a cost to the Membership when offered to everybody at our Members' expense.

The Board believes that maintaining an open support forum while adding a more formal support channel for Members directly to the development team will better strike that balance, while adding value for Members and in the long run may save developer time that will be used to enhance documentation, and the general support and maintenance of the software.

Kind regards,

Shibboleth Consortium Board