
Core Python Funding Documentation

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January 2014 survey results

This survey was conducted among the 60 most active core developers since 2012 (measured by the number of commits in the Mercurial core repository). Given the sending method (plain Bcc e-mail), it is unfortunately possible that some intended recipients actually didn't receive the message.

Nevertheless, 36 people over 60 intended recipients have responded.

The survey was anonymous : people had the option of giving out a name and e-mail at the end, but I didn't want them to feel they were entitled to their answers (especially when one of their answers says they are interested in doing something). So they also could answer anonymously.

1.1 Single-choice questions

All of those questions were mandatory, and they didn't include a "don't know" / "no opinion" option. Therefore people had to make a choice at each step if they wanted to submit their answers at all.

1. Have you already been paid for Python core development ?
 - Yes: 10
 - No: 26
2. Regardless of your current availability, would you be willing to be paid, on a *temporary* basis (for a couple of days or weeks, as a contractor or a short-term employment), to work on Python core development?
 - Yes: 31
 - No: 5
3. Regardless of your current availability, would you be willing to be paid, on a *permanent* basis, to work on Python core development?
 - Yes, full time or part time: 16
 - Yes, full time: 4
 - Yes, part time: 10
 - No: 6
4. Do you think a transparent organizational structure, driven by core developers themselves, to drive funds for Python core development would be a good thing?
 - Yes: 33
 - No: 3

5. Would you like to participate in such a structure, regardless of whether you get paid for development yourself?
 - Yes: 21
 - No: 15
6. Do you think a PEP would be the right vehicle to discuss the creation of such a structure?
 - Yes: 18
 - No: 18
7. Do you think it would be realistic to find funding on a per-project basis?
 - Yes: 30
 - No: 6
8. Do you think it would be realistic to get funding on a more generic basis, without any specific objectives or milestones?
 - Yes: 21
 - No: 15
9. Do you have personal acquaintance with companies or organizations that would be likely to fund Python core development?
 - Yes: 11
 - No: 25

1.1.1 Analysis

First, non-respondents have to be taken into account. Some of them may have not received the e-mail (see above), some may have been unavailable. But it is reasonable to estimate that some simply aren't interested at all, to the point that they didn't bother filling in the survey. We may intuitively estimate a rough number of 10 to 15 completely uninterested core developers. This must be kept in mind when judging the consensuality of the various answers.

Nevertheless, the response has been surprisingly positive. I was expecting more people to say "No" with the rationale that volunteer work lets them forget about money and possible power plays related to economic stakes. Instead, an overwhelming number of respondents is actually positive to the idea of funding core development.

Per question

I will focus here on non-consensual questions. There are three of them.

First, the question of whether the PEP is the right vehicle. I was expecting this idea to be quite contentious indeed: PEPs are meant mostly for language and policy standardization. The rationale for the question was that I would like discussion about funding and a funding structure to be public, and the PEP process sounds almost ideal to me (why reinvent the wheel?).

Note: Of course, this survey wasn't public: I wasn't comfortable at all discussing this in the open right now; I first wanted to get a sense of how welcoming people were to the general idea. Also, it is better to have at least a structured project before opening it radically, especially when it touches potentially sensitive issues.

Second, the question of participation in a dedicated open structure. The result is quite expected. Many developers don't like the idea of being involved in non-technical, perhaps "political" tasks, especially as volunteers. This is not very much of a problem, though, as long as there is a critical mass of people interested in being involved.

Third, the question of actual acquaintance with possible funding sources. Here too, the results hints at the possible gap between ideals and reality. Given most of us are highly technical people, not really well-trained in social networking amongst economic powers, it is reasonable to not have an actual idea of where to ask for funds (I would probably have answered “No” myself). One important point of a collective and visible structure is to make possible what is often very difficult individually (depending on each person’s connections and personal luck).

Multi-variate

I’m not attempting a statistical analysis here. However, an informal review of the results points out that there is some amount of non-correlation between seemingly related answers. An interesting example is that, while the same number of people said Yes to short-term funding (Q2) and long-term funding (Q3), these are actually not necessarily the same people: some people are only interested in short-term funding, some only in long-term funding. This points to a diversity of involvement modalities that a concrete proposal would have to address and cater for.

1.2 Open text comments

The survey had an open text field which allowed respondents to post any number of comments and suggestions. They were also invited to e-mail me directly if they wanted to. They could also choose not to post anything here.

I only got two pieces of direct e-mail feedback:

- one person pointed at the lack of “don’t know” / “no opinion” options, which made answering difficult for them
- one person (a long-time core developer) sent a very positive e-mail encouraging me to continue digging the subject

As for in-survey text comments, I had several of them, quoted below:

1. The PyPy project is rather good at getting funding. We may try to copy them.
2. Questions 4 and 5 (and possibly others) might benefit of a “I’m not sure” option. For question 4 there’s a conflict of interest if the core devs are the ones administering the money and also getting paid. It might or might not work, depending on several factors. The PSF might be a more appropriate entity to handle the money. For question 5 it depends what I would have to do, how much time it would take, and if my presence is required once I sign up. Regarding questions 7 and 8 I think something like <http://blog.freedomponsors.org/about/> might be good.
3. I support you, but I do not feel I have it in me to help out with the organization.
4. My only concern is the effect it would have on the volunteer developers. Would such a structure reduce their commitment? Might someone volunteer less if they know that someone else is being paid, or they themselves might hold off on doing some work until they get paid?

On question 4, I’m torn between yes and no. I assume it’s worded the way it is to avoid PSF involvement? I actually think the PSF would be the best entity to drive this.
5. Good initiative, Antoine. I have to prefix all my answers with the fact that my current availability is close to 0 and will remain so in the foreseeable future.
6. Python core definitely *needs* full time developers.
7. For the first question “Have you already been paid for Python core development ?” I answered Yes because my employer supports my work regardless of whether or not it is a specific goal of my employment.
8. I think funding drives are likely to be a bit more successful if done with broad goals versus narrow ones. For example, I wouldn’t contribute explicitly to an Argument Clinic effort as is going on right now, but I would contribute to a 3.4 release push, through which a portion of the money would probably go to AC but also to the other bugs, features, and efforts.

As for question 10, it's hard to say if EditedCorp1 would be interested since they already pay a group of us to be doing community work, including myself (looking forward to switching to core work as PyCon preparation slows down). I believe we've talked about donating to people's Gittip accounts, so we may be interested.

Note: EditedCorp1 is the respondent's current employer, edited out for anonymity

9. Q1: I was allowed to work on core dev during my daily job.

Q3: I would also appreciate stuff like books, hardware, training/courses, subscriptions to computer magazines, conference invites with accommodation etc. Basically things that helps me to improve myself and my participation in core development

Q4: Why do you want to create our own funding structure? We have the PSF for it, don't we?

Addendum: I like to raise money for paid reviews, e.g. security reviews.

10. Interesting questions. I said no on the org ones mostly because it sounds like a distraction. I suppose it could be the right way, just needing more explanation/investigation. However, wouldn't the PSF be a better choice for administration. Regardless, thanks for taking the time to ask.

11. gittip already has such a structure available (transparent allocation of resources by the team members). It might not be exactly what you/we are looking for, but it would be worth checking out...and if what we want just requires some tweaks, I'm sure the gittip team would be interested in talking to us.

I answered 'no' to the per project and PEP questions because I had to answer something, but my real answer is "I don't know".

12. The answer to question 9 deserves elaboration: it's *possible* that EditedCorp2 would be interested in funding Python core development. I've marked 'No' because I'm not sure that I can reasonably say that it's *likely*, though I'd certainly be willing to push for it. My guess is that it would be easiest to sell in situations where there's direct applicability to EditedCorp2's work: a couple of examples that spring to mind are (a) finding some solution to Python 2.7 + MSVC 2010/2013/later (which is a combination that is of *huge* interest to our customers), and (b) better maintenance of the ctypes library, where the code being used for Windows + MSVC (and particularly for 64-bit Windows + MSVC) is horribly out of date and quite badly broken in places (cf. issue XXX).

On a more personal level, I would *love* to find a way to spend more time on core development, but currently that time's been squeezed out by other things (job, family). For me it's not so much about money as about time and energy; when I do find the time and energy I'm happy working on the core whether I'm being paid for it or not.

Note: EditedCorp2 is the respondent's current employer, edited out for anonymity

13. This is a great idea, but may be difficult to implement fully. I think it will be hard to line up "general development" funds, although with sponsorships it might be possible (e.g. Python 3.6 brought to you by Google, Coca Cola, and Guido's Snake Charmers, LLC). Full time employment can be very expensive, with overhead, tax, benefits, etc.

Based on experience I've had before, it might be more feasible to try to build the infrastructure for this using sponsored, limited focused, feature-based projects. Once we have organizational experience taking in money and paying short term contracting, we can try to raise more money and expand it. Then again, how would this work differently from the grants system?

Note: the respondent alludes to the PSF's grants system

14. Last few questions are rather vague :)

I think the most interesting answers might be the "level of interest" ones.

15. I don't think I'd have any interest in actually finding funding and I probably wouldn't be any good at it...

16. On some of the Bald (*sic*) “Yes” vs “No” questions I’d fall somewhere in the “maybe” or “hmmm...” category, but I’ve tried to answer honestly.

1.2.1 Analysis

First, while these results are anonymized, I was glad that several prominent developers were supportive in their answers.

Those comments generally show, not only a positive response, but also a diversity of viewpoints and ideas, which is quite encouraging for the prospect of future discussions. Interestingly, the person who said “Python core definitely *needs* full time developers” isn’t interested in being funded themselves.

The comment about the impact on volunteers is a very important one; possibly the most important question in the long term. This is something that a concrete proposal *has* to address.

Unsurprisingly, a couple respondents pointed the PSF as a possible venue (or even the most natural venue) for funding. One even correctly detected my own bias here: “I assume it’s worded the way it is to avoid PSF involvement?”. Indeed my thinking is that the PSF as it currently is shouldn’t be involved in the *allocation* of funds to Python core. A concrete proposal would have to clarify the distinction between *gathering* funds and *allocating* them.

Note: Since making this review was a personal decision, it was natural to incorporate my own bias in it. Of course, this needs to be clarified and challenged in any further discussion of the subject.

It was more unexpected to see gittip mentioned twice. Indeed, gittip (as other “crowdfunding” platforms) is at least an interesting example, and a possible funding intermediary. Also, even though unmentioned in the comments, gittip’s constitution as an “open company” is an example to look at.

Indices and tables

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