Bugfix accelerator program 2022/2023

Introduction

This is a proposal for hiring developers for a fixed amount of hours during the bug fixing season for Inkscape 1.3 (tentatively Q1 2023).

The design of this proposal is decidedly different from that of a "bug bounty" program. Instead, it relies on the self-management of the contractors, who were chosen from the set of trusted and experienced core developers. They have already demonstrated that they have the project's interests at heart and are (by nature of FOSS contribution) not driven by money, but they still need to cover their expenses. If this proposal is enacted, it would free them from other (paid) work during the bug fixing season and allow them to focus on Inkscape. In return, they commit to prioritizing bugs that prevent the project from releasing Inkscape 1.3 to its users.

Persons, financials and payment

All GitLab users that have contributed more then 20 Merge Requests at inkscape/inkscape containing the word "fixes" were contacted (12 people were asked, and all 12 responded) and suggested a contractor position under the terms of this proposal. Of those contacted, three expressed interest and were considered for this proposal. The selected contractors are:

- Martin Owens (@doctormo). He contributed several important features for Inkscape 1.3, notably delivering the shape builder tool (started during a GSoC project), various improvements to the Objects Dialog and multi-page documents as well as PDF import refactoring (WIP at the time of writing).

- Rafał Siejakowski (@S-Rafael). He contributed dozens of bugfixes and UX improvements for the 1.2.x series and master, and is particularly invested in the geometry library 2geom. A new color selector for the OKLab colorspace that he wrote is currently pending.

- Tavmjong Bah (@tavmjong). He is one of the most experienced core developers, and his work included the text editing engine and SVG standard compliance. He is a former Editor of the SVG2 standard. His recent work contributed to the Verbs to Actions migration and the design of the new dialog docking system, mentoring GSoC students working on both projects.

This selection covers both UI/UX and backend/library work, ensuring that issues in those crucial areas can be fixed.

For all three contractors, the budget of one month of full time work, using the SFC standard rate for developers (USD 70/hr), is allocated. This amounts to a total of USD 11 200 for each contractor.

The payment details may be negotiated between the SFC and each contractor individually. The hourly rate is not subject to negotiation. This proposal covers the following modalities:

Type A: Fixed volume contract

> The SFC and the contractor agree upon a total number of hours a priori, which is multiplied by the hourly rate to yield the contract value. This value must not exceed the allocated funds for a contractor, but may be lower. The contractor may request that up to a half of the compensation be paid upfront. The remainder is paid out after successful completion of the project.

Type B: Time-Tracking

> Instead of agreeing on a fixed contract volume, the contractor may choose to time-track their work and bill the SFC for the time spent on the project (at most 160 hours).

The details of the contract negotiation and payment are handled by the SFC.

Schedule & Selection of issues

The proposal will be voted upon in November/December 2022, following by contract negotiation, so that work could start at the latest on Jan 15.

Before then, a list of blocker issues for 1.3 will be created by the Bug Management team, which will be continuously updated during the period of the contract. Issues in this list should be prioritized by the contractors; otherwise, they will responsibly select issues from the list of open issues in the bugtracker, with emphasis on regressions, crashes, (UX) bugs in new features and other Importance::High bugs, in particular those within the knowledge domain of the contractor.

It is in the contractors' own interest to perform this selection (and their work in general) responsibly, to maintain their good standing and prove the effectiveness of the program overall.

License

The work done by the candidate will be licensed as GPL2+, and the copyright will be with the SFC.

Evaluation

Merge Requests financed by this proposal will be assigned a unique tag by the contractor to make the allocation of users' donations visible and to facilitate evaluation.

The progress of the project will be a (potential) discussion item at the weekly developer meetings.

A brief report on the project will be written by the Vectors team (with input from the contractors) and presented as news article.

A statement on the impact on the project(s atmosphere)

(Personal remark by Jonathan)

As a FOSS project driven by volunteer contributors, the transition to a structure in which project

members are paid for their work by the project's funds must be made cautiously and with constant feedback and monitoring in order to not alienate existing (and hopefully future) contributors. But the responsibility of the project is first and foremost to its users; and also to the wider FOSS community as one of the "lighthouse" FOSS applications. Bug reports indicate that 1.0 was very stable (surely a success partially influenced by the curated blockers list that was introduced for this release). Stability regressed a little bit, but in 1.3 major architectural changes are included. Keeping Inkscape stable enough for daily productive work must be a core objective – and with unpaid volunteers only, there is but social pressure to deliver on objectives that look boring to developers (as opposed to designing and implementing new features), and that does not appear to suffice.

I firmly believe that this proposal will not drive existing contributors away. The reality is that most of the core developers are not interested in personal financial gain from their contributions, often being employed full-time already. This would not change after finding a way to use the funds of the project - to the benefit of its users and its community. The long-term implications of transitioning to a project driven by developers employed full-time by the project (e.g. power balance between paid and unpaid/volunteer contributors) is a separate problem and irrelevant for such a short-term contract.

There are certainly pitfalls in such a proposal. For example, a contractor could demand a repetition of this project, or cease contribution of bugfixes for the next release. This is certainly possible and would have to be evaluated - but it is also in the very nature of volunteer contributions that a volunteer may always choose to not contribute anymore.

TODO:

- Wait on responses from ~~Marc~~, ~~Tav~~, ~~Thomas~~, Patrick