Becoming a Sovrin Steward

A Briefing from the Sovrin Foundation

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Recommended Pre-Reading

For complete background on Sovrin, the Sovrin Foundation, and the overall role of a Sovrin steward, we recommend first reading [The Inevitable Rise of Self-Sovereign Identity](#).

What is a Sovrin Steward?

A Sovrin steward is an organization that has agreed to operate a node on the Sovrin network and has permission to do so from the Sovrin Foundation. Stewards exhibit a set of common attributes. Each steward:

- Has the will and capacity to operate a validator node on the Sovrin network per the published specifications.
- Believes their organization can benefit from a secure and independent source of verified credentials, claims, and reputational data for their customers, clients, partners, vendors, or members (constituents).
- Wants to shape the future of Internet identity.
- Wants to strengthen their image/reputation in the eyes of their constituents.

Sovrin stewards are the engines of Sovrin. They ensure that the network runs effectively, and by running nodes diffused throughout the Internet, help ensure the security and reliability of Sovrin itself.

What Organizations Can Become Sovrin Stewards?

Any organization that serves in a position of public trust and/or has a vested interest in the integrity and success of the Sovrin global identity network. Some examples of organizations meeting this criteria are:

- Financial institutions
- Healthcare providers
- Universities
- NGOs
- Government agencies
- Utilities and telecom providers
- Sovrin infrastructure or service providers

Why Should My Organization Become a Sovrin Steward?

Be recognized as a leader in building a trusted Internet

Initial steward organizations receive a special designation of "founding steward". A founding steward serves a trust anchor[1] for the network which has additional benefits including:

- Receiving special recognition on the Sovrin Foundation website and in press releases.
- Participating directly on the Sovrin Foundation Technical Governance Board.
- Contributing directly to the Sovrin Trust Framework.
- Nominating and electing other stewards.
- Potentially serving in governance positions for the foundation itself.

Obtain the highest performance access to the Sovrin ledger

Stewards are the only organizations who run Sovrin validator and observer[2] nodes. This provides the lowest latency access to the Sovrin ledger and also enables the steward to have complete control over its own security, privacy, and hosting environment.

Provision new Sovrin identities

Organisations who have permission to create new identities on the Sovrin ledger are known as "trust anchors". All Sovrin stewards are automatically trust anchors. A trust anchor must have some pre-existing knowledge of the identity owner for which the identity is being created. As such, they are also likely to be issuers of verifiable claims which the identity owner can utilise elsewhere.

An example of a trust anchor could be a bank or credit union that is legally required to "know your customer" (KYC) and already has a secure way of identifying them online. Such an organisation would be very well placed to register a Sovrin identity for a customer, thus making the customer the identity owner. Once established on Sovrin, the identity owner can begin accepting claims from other issuers to their Sovrin identity. (Note that only the identity owner can tie these claims tie together—there is no external correlation between them unless the identity owner wishes to reveal it, for example by sharing claims from two different issuers with the same relying party.)

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[1] A trust anchor is the highest ranking of reputation within the network. A trust anchor is initially vetted by the foundation and then maintains its ranking through observable activities and subsequent claims put forth by network members.

[2] Validator nodes can write to the ledger, observer nodes can only read from the ledger.

Trust anchors thus perform a vital service within Sovrin—they are the means by which new identity owners are brought onto the network while maintaining the network's overall integrity and trust.

Issue Sovrin claims and reputation

Although any Sovrin identity owner may issue claims[3] about themselves or other identity owners, Sovrin stewards are regarded as the highest authority for the claims they issue. These claims, especially those that can be verified using the steward's digital signature, will potentially be of great value to relying parties (information consumers) as the market develops.

A special class of Sovrin claims are reputation statements about other identity owners; these are the basis for portable, verifiable reputation systems. Again, founding stewards, as trust anchors, will factor strongly into the initial reputations of other members of the network.

What Does My Organization Need To Do to Become a Sovrin Steward?

Becoming a Sovrin steward has costs associated with it. Besides the "hard costs" of actually running the node itself and ensuring that it operates according to the Sovrin Trust Framework, there are "soft costs" including:

- **An implicit commitment to use the Sovrin ledger**. Self-sovereign identity should be part of the steward's overall identity management architecture.
- **Active participation in technical governance process**. The Sovrin network is new and will require the help of the stewards in shaping the technology for the benefit of all.
- **Participation in the Sovrin open source project.** Like the Sovrin network itself, the Sovrin open source project is an open collaboration to design and develop the code required support the server and client capabilities of the network. Stewards are encouraged to be actively involved with these projects on github.
- **Abide by the Sovrin Trust Framework**. As representatives of the network and trust anchors, the stewards must follow the rules they are involved in setting.

The initial steps of becoming a steward are to:

- Set up a Sovrin node. More details on the actual activities to set up a node are in the Sovrin Developer's Getting Started Guide.
- Sign and adhere to the Sovrin Steward Agreement once it is developed (it will be one of the components of the Sovrin Trust Framework).

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[3] A claim is a statement of fact or opinion. A claim is verifiable by virtue of the digital signature of the Sovrin identity of its issuer.

Could My Organization Outsource the Running of a Sovrin Node to a 3rd Party?

Yes, however the steward needs to disclose their decision to employ a 3rd party and needs to ensure that the hosting environment and security and privacy protections of the 3rd party complies with all requirements of the Sovrin Trust Framework. The steward will be fully accountable for the actions of their appointed 3rd party. Also, the Sovrin Foundation may not allow too large a concentration of steward nodes at a particular 3rd party hosting environment if there is a chance it could skew the diffuse trust of the network.

How Do I Contact The Sovrin Foundation for More Information?

Please use the Contact Us page on sovrin.org