



Cairn

# A brief for IT and managers

Your team's handbook, kept on the shared drive you already have.

Version 1.0.0, released October 7, 2026 · Free and open source (MIT) · [cairn.thekovie.com](https://cairn.thekovie.com)

## What Cairn is

Cairn lets everyone on a team search, read and write documentation pages that are kept as ordinary files in a shared folder the office already has, such as a network drive. Each person runs a small program on their own computer and uses it in their normal web browser.

**There is no server and there are no accounts.** It works fully offline. The pages are plain Markdown (text) files and the pictures are normal picture files, so if a team ever stops using Cairn, its documentation is still just a folder.

## Why teams use it

|                             | On a shared drive of Word files                   | With Cairn                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Finding the answer</b>   | Open Word file after Word file and hope.          | Type a few words. Pages come up, even if you misspell.                           |
| <b>Two people, one page</b> | "The file is locked for editing by another user." | One person edits at a time. Everyone else keeps reading and sees who is editing. |
| <b>Which copy is right?</b> | Policy_final_v2_REAL.docx                         | One page, with every earlier version kept so you can go back.                    |
| <b>Renaming a folder</b>    | Every link to it quietly breaks.                  | Links are updated for you, so nothing goes missing.                              |
| <b>Deleted by accident</b>  | Gone, unless someone has a backup.                | It waits in Recently deleted until you bring it back.                            |

## How a team starts

- 1 Download and install.** The Windows installer installs just for you and never asks for an administrator password. It takes about a minute.
- 2 Point Cairn at your shared folder.** Choose "Create a new documentation folder", or "Open a documentation folder we already use". Pick a folder on your shared drive.
- 3 Tell your team.** Everyone installs Cairn and opens the same folder. From nothing to your first published page takes about ten minutes.

## What IT needs to know

---

- ◆ **Runs only on each person's own computer.** Cairn opens at a private address on that computer (127.0.0.1) in the person's usual browser. Nobody else on the network can reach it, and nothing is hosted anywhere.
- ◆ **No server and no administrator rights.** There is nothing to install on the file server. The Windows installer installs just for the user and does not ask for an administrator password.
- ◆ **Permissions belong to the folder.** Cairn has no accounts or log-ins. Who can read or write pages is whatever the shared folder's own permissions allow, the same as any file on that drive.
- ◆ **Works offline, with no outside requests.** Fonts and scripts are built in. The only thing Cairn looks up online is a once-a-day check for a newer version, which can be turned off, and a proxy can be set. The check sends nothing about the user or their documentation.
- ◆ **A strict Content-Security-Policy.** The pages Cairn serves allow no inline scripts and no inline styles, which keeps the browser side tightly locked down.
- ◆ **Signed updates, checksums on every download.** Each download comes with a SHA-256 checksum and a minisign signature. Updates are signature-checked before they install, and the user can go back to the previous version.
- ◆ **The builds themselves are not code-signed.** Cairn is free and open source and does not use a paid signing certificate, so Windows SmartScreen and Mac Gatekeeper show a first-run caution. Users choose More info then Run anyway on Windows, or Open Anyway once on a Mac.
- ◆ **Documentation stays in plain files.** Pages are Markdown and pictures are ordinary picture files, kept in folders you already back up. Cairn adds only a small shared-docs.json and a \_system folder for earlier versions and edit notes.
- ◆ **Open source under the MIT licence.** The code is public on GitHub, so your team can read it. Security problems can be reported privately through the project's security page.

## Will it work on our shared drive?

---

Cairn coordinates editors with small lock files kept in the folder itself, so it depends on the storage behaving like a real file system.

### Safe for several editors

Local disks (NTFS, APFS, ext4)  
Network shares using SMB2 or SMB3, which is most office file servers

### Not safe for several editors

Folders kept in OneDrive, Dropbox or Google Drive  
Some NAS devices (Cairn warns you when it opens a folder it cannot trust)

## Computers it runs on

---

Windows 10 or 11, 64-bit

Mac with macOS 11 or newer (Apple silicon or Intel)

64-bit Linux (x86\_64)

The Mac and Linux versions are new in version 1.0.

## What Cairn does not do

---

It is better to know before you start.

- ◆ **It does not open Word files.** There is no import for .docx. You start new pages in Cairn and bring over the ones people use most.
- ◆ **Some folders are not safe to share.** Editing locks work on normal disks and on SMB2 or SMB3 network shares. Folders kept in OneDrive, Dropbox or Google Drive, and some NAS boxes, are not safe for several editors. Cairn warns you when you open one.
- ◆ **It only knows about edits made in Cairn.** If someone changes a file in another program, Cairn cannot show them as the editor. It notices when you publish and shows both versions side by side instead of overwriting.
- ◆ **There is no log-in.** Who can see or change pages is decided by the shared folder's own permissions, the same as for any file.
- ◆ **Everyone runs their own copy.** Cairn is a small program on each person's computer, not a website you sign in to. A small window must stay open while you use it.
- ◆ **A few small things.** Pictures can be PNG, JPEG, WebP or GIF, not SVG. Table cells cannot be merged. There is no "who is reading this page" indicator. Mac and Linux are new in version 1.0.

## Where to find things

---

|                                       |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Download for Windows, Mac and Linux   | <a href="https://cairn.thekovie.com/download">cairn.thekovie.com/download</a>                                 |
| This brief, online                    | <a href="https://cairn.thekovie.com/for-it">cairn.thekovie.com/for-it</a>                                     |
| Questions and answers                 | <a href="https://cairn.thekovie.com/faq">cairn.thekovie.com/faq</a>                                           |
| Source code and releases              | <a href="https://github.com/thekovie/cairn">github.com/thekovie/cairn</a>                                     |
| Report a problem or ask for something | <a href="https://github.com/thekovie/cairn/issues/new/choose">github.com/thekovie/cairn/issues/new/choose</a> |
| Report a security problem privately   | <a href="https://github.com/thekovie/cairn/security/policy">github.com/thekovie/cairn/security/policy</a>     |

**Checking a download:** every file has a .sha256 checksum and a .minisig signature next to it on the release page, so IT can confirm it is exactly what was published.