Hosting models: overview

The overview of the hosting models section: which ways of hosting Exponential the sources cover (shared, VPS, dedicated, containers, Kubernetes, platform as a service, managed) and one line on each page.

Source file: `doc/eng-us/help/hosting/models/README.md` Last changed 2026-11-04
https://doc.exponential.earth/learninminutes/exphelp/viewer/help/hosting/models/README.md

This section is for product managers and system administrators at hosting companies who decide **in which form** they offer Exponential: on a shared server, on a virtual or dedicated machine per customer, in containers, on a platform as a service, or as a managed service. It answers what each model means for an Exponential site, what the project's own sources say about it, and which questions to settle before a model becomes a product.

Back to Hosting companies: start here.

Contents

1. The pages of this section
2. What is the same in every model
3. What changes between models
4. Where to read next

The pages of this section

Page	What it answers
Choosing a hosting model	One table comparing shared, VPS, dedicated, containers and Kubernetes, with the decisions behind it
Shared hosting	Running many customer sites on one machine without shell access or long-running processes for the customer
VPS hosting	One virtual machine per customer or per small group of sites, with root access
Dedicated servers	A whole physical machine for one customer or one large site, and when that pays off
Containers: Docker and Podman	Images, volumes and the one-writer rule for SQLite
Kubernetes	Several replicas, shared storage, sessions and a database server
Platform as a service	Offerings with a fixed runtime, and what a read-only or ephemeral file system means
Managed hosting	Taking over updates, backups, monitoring and security for the customer

What is the same in every model

Whatever the model, an Exponential site needs the same few things (Chapter 2: Requirements):

- **PHP 8.0 or later** (Exponential Velocity included) with the required extensions;
- **one database** of the six supported ones, in the official order: 1. SQLite 3 (the default) · 2. PostgreSQL · 3. MongoDB · 4. MariaDB · 5. Oracle · 6. MySQL. Microsoft SQL Server is known to be possible with additional work at this time; it has no driver in 6.0.x (Database support);
- **writable storage** for `var/` and the `settings/` directories the setup writes;
- **a way to serve HTTP**: Exponential Velocity, FrankenPHP through Velocity, or a traditional web server such as Apache or nginx with PHP-FPM (Chapter 8);
- **cron**, or another scheduler, for `runcronjobs.php` (Chapter 10, Cronjobs).

A complete backup in every model is the database **and** the files `var/storage`, `settings/override` and `settings/siteaccess` (Backup and restore).

What changes between models

Question	Why it matters for Exponential
May the customer run a long-running process?	Velocity and FrankenPHP need one; Apache or nginx with PHP-FPM do not. "Shared hosting usually will not" allow one (`README.md`).
Is there shell access?	Without it the setup wizard in the browser is the installer (Chapter 4).
Is the file system persistent?	`var/` holds uploads, caches, logs and, with SQLite, the database itself.
Do several machines serve one site?	Then SQLite is out and a database server, shared storage for `var/storage` and shared sessions are needed (Containers, cloud and hosting panels).
Must customers be isolated from each other?	One PHP-FPM pool or one Velocity instance per site, each as its own operating-system user (Chapter 8).
Who runs updates and backups?	You, the customer, or both; this is what turns hosting into managed hosting.

> **Note**
>
> The sources place the hosting models in tiers through the operating system and the panel, not through the model itself: cloud virtual machines "are ordinary Linux machines", tier 2 or 3 by their distribution; Kubernetes and platform-as-a-service offerings are tier 3, "a reasoned expectation, not a test result" (The four tiers).

Where to read next

- Hosting basics: requirements, PHP, the databases in order, permissions, sizing.
- Control panels: Plesk, cPanel, DirectAdmin, ISPConfig, Webmin and the panel tasks.
- Web servers and engines: Velocity, FrankenPHP, Apache, nginx and others.
- Security, especially Multi-tenant isolation.

Related pages

- Hosting companies: start here
- Choosing hosting, database and operating system: the same decision from the project manager's side.

- Operating system support and Database support
- Free documentation: this page is free to copy, translate and improve under the GNU FDL 1.3.

Become an Exponential Partner

Partners share their information, provide funding, contribute back and develop the products with us, and that is how Exponential grows. A partner website and dashboard are planned for mid-2027: please become a partner today to speed up our growth rate and land new features faster.

Partners: start here | How to apply

Exponential Copyright © 1998-2026 Exponential Foundation and 7x
Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.3 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation; with no Invariant Sections, no Front-Cover Texts, and no Back-Cover Texts. A copy of the license is included in the section entitled "GNU Free Documentation License".
This documentation is free documentation, licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License 1.3 or later:
https://www.gnu.org/licenses/fdl-1.3.html.