Internal developer platforms: golden paths, self-service and Backstage

26 October 2026 · 5 min read · blogs.iictp.org/internal-developer-platforms-golden-paths

An internal developer platform (IDP) is the set of tools and workflows a company offers its developers so they can build and run services with little friction. The user-facing part is often a developer portal.

TL;DR The short version

- An internal developer platform is the set of tools and workflows that lets developers build and run services with little friction.
- Golden paths give a well-supported way to do common tasks, with pipelines, monitoring and security checks already in place.
- Backstage is a common basis for the portal, but do not build a portal before there is something worth putting in it.

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Golden paths

A golden path is a well-supported way of doing a common task, such as creating a new service with a pipeline, monitoring and security checks already in place. Teams can leave the path, but the path is the easiest option.

Self-service

Developers should be able to create what they need without raising a ticket and waiting. Guardrails in the platform, rather than approval queues, keep this safe.

The portal

Backstage, an open-source framework originally from Spotify and now part of the CNCF, is a common basis for a developer portal: a catalogue of services, templates for new ones and links to documentation.

Pitfalls

- Building a portal before there is anything worth putting in it.
- A platform nobody asked for.
- Mandating use rather than earning it.

Related credential: Agile Delivery Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. Backstage. backstage.io.
2. CNCF Platforms White Paper. tag-app-delivery.cncf.io/whitepapers/platforms/.

Published by IICTP, an independent technical credential body, on 26 October 2026. The current version of this post is at https://blogs.iictp.org/internal-developer-platforms-golden-paths. More guides: blogs.iictp.org.