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Linux Foundation PCA Prometheus Certified Associate (PCA)

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Linux Foundation PCA Exam Syllabus Topics:

Topic	Details
Topic 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Observability Concepts: This section of the exam measures the skills of Site Reliability Engineers and covers the essential principles of observability used in modern systems. It focuses on understanding metrics, logs, and tracing mechanisms such as spans, as well as the difference between push and pull data collection methods. Candidates also learn about service discovery processes and the fundamentals of defining and maintaining SLOs, SLAs, and SLIs to monitor performance and reliability.
Topic 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Prometheus Fundamentals: This domain evaluates the knowledge of DevOps Engineers and emphasizes the core architecture and components of Prometheus. It includes topics such as configuration and scraping techniques, limitations of the Prometheus system, data models and labels, and the exposition format used for data collection. The section ensures a solid grasp of how Prometheus functions as a monitoring and alerting toolkit within distributed environments.

Topic 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instrumentation and Exporters: This domain evaluates the abilities of Software Engineers and addresses the methods for integrating Prometheus into applications. It includes the use of client libraries, the process of instrumenting code, and the proper structuring and naming of metrics. The section also introduces exporters that allow Prometheus to collect metrics from various systems, ensuring efficient and standardized monitoring implementation.
Topic 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PromQL: This section of the exam measures the skills of Monitoring Specialists and focuses on Prometheus Query Language (PromQL) concepts. It covers data selection, calculating rates and derivatives, and performing aggregations across time and dimensions. Candidates also study the use of binary operators, histograms, and timestamp metrics to analyze monitoring data effectively, ensuring accurate interpretation of system performance and trends.
Topic 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alerting and Dashboarding: This section of the exam assesses the competencies of Cloud Operations Engineers and focuses on monitoring visualization and alert management. It covers dashboarding basics, alerting rules configuration, and the use of Alertmanager to handle notifications. Candidates also learn the core principles of when, what, and why to trigger alerts, ensuring they can create reliable monitoring dashboards and proactive alerting systems to maintain system stability.

>> Certified PCA Questions <<

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Linux Foundation Prometheus Certified Associate Exam Sample Questions (Q12-Q17):

NEW QUESTION # 12

Which metric type uses the delta() function?

- A. Counter
- **B. Gauge**
- C. Histogram
- D. Info

Answer: B

Explanation:

The delta() function in PromQL calculates the difference between the first and last samples in a range vector over a specified time window. This function is primarily used with gauge metrics, as they can move both up and down, and delta() captures that net change directly.

For example, if a gauge metric like node_memory_Active_bytes changes from 1000 to 1200 within a 5-minute window, delta(node_memory_Active_bytes[5m]) returns 200.

Unlike rate() or increase(), which are designed for monotonically increasing counters, delta() is ideal for metrics representing resource levels, capacities, or instantaneous measurements that fluctuate over time.

Reference:

Verified from Prometheus documentation - PromQL Range Functions - delta(), Gauge Semantics and Usage, and Comparing delta() and rate() sections.

NEW QUESTION # 13

What should you do with counters that have labels?

- A. Instantiate them with their possible label values when creating them so they are exposed with a zero value.
- B. Investigate if you can move their label value inside their metric name to limit the number of labels.
- C. Make sure every counter with labels has an extra counter, aggregated, without labels.
- D. Save their state between application runs so you can restore their last value on startup.

Answer: A

Explanation:

Prometheus counters with labels can cause missing time series in queries if some label combinations have not yet been observed. To ensure visibility and continuity, the recommended best practice is to instantiate counters with all expected label values at application startup, even if their initial value is zero.

This ensures that every possible labeled time series is exported consistently, which helps when dashboards or alerting rules expect the presence of those series. For example, if a counter like `http_requests_total{method="POST",status="200"}` has not yet received a POST request, initializing it with a zero ensures it is still exposed.

Option A is incorrect - label values should never be encoded into metric names.

Option B adds redundancy and does not solve the initialization issue.

Option D is discouraged; counters should reset naturally upon restart, reflecting Prometheus's ephemeral metric model.

Reference:

Verified from Prometheus documentation - Instrumentation Best Practices, Counters with Labels, and Avoid Missing Time Series by Initializing Metrics.

NEW QUESTION # 14

What is `api_http_requests_total` in the following metric?

```
api_http_requests_total{method="POST", handler="/messages"}
```

- A. `"api_http_requests_total"` is a metric label name.
- B. `"api_http_requests_total"` is a metric field.
- C. `"api_http_requests_total"` is a metric name.
- D. `"api_http_requests_total"` is a metric type.

Answer: C

Explanation:

In Prometheus, the part before the curly braces `{}` represents the metric name. Therefore, in the metric

`api_http_requests_total{method="POST", handler="/messages"}`, the term `api_http_requests_total` is the metric name. Metric names describe the specific quantity being measured - in this example, the total number of HTTP requests received by an API.

The portion within the braces defines labels, which provide additional dimensions to the metric. Here, `method="POST"` and `handler="/messages"` are labels describing request attributes. The metric name should follow Prometheus conventions: lowercase letters, numbers, and underscores only, and ending in `_total` for counters.

This naming scheme ensures clarity and standardization across instrumented applications. The metric type (e.g., counter, gauge) is declared separately in the exposition format, not within the metric name itself.

Reference:

Verified from Prometheus documentation - Metric and Label Naming, Data Model, and Instrumentation Best Practices sections.

NEW QUESTION # 15

How would you correctly name a metric that provides metadata information about the binary?

- A. `app_metadata`
- B. `app_build_info`
- C. `app_build_desc`
- D. `app_build`

Answer: B

Explanation:

The Prometheus naming convention for metrics that expose build or version information about an application binary uses the `_info` suffix. The standard pattern is:

`<application>_build_info`

This metric typically includes constant labels such as version, revision, branch, and goversion to describe the build environment.

For example:

`app_build_info{version="1.2.3", revision="abc123", goversion="go1.22"} 1` This approach follows the official Prometheus instrumentation guidelines, where metrics ending in `_info` convey metadata or constant characteristics about the running process.

The other options do not conform to the Prometheus best practice of suffix-based semantic naming.

Reference:

Extracted and verified from Prometheus documentation - Metric Naming Conventions, Exposing Build Information, and Standard `_info` Metrics sections.

NEW QUESTION # 16

What are Inhibition rules?

- A. Inhibition rules repeat a set of alerts when another matching alert is firing.
- B. Inhibition rules inject a new set of alerts when a matching alert is firing.
- **C. Inhibition rules mute a set of alerts when another matching alert is firing.**
- D. Inhibition rules inspect alerts when a matching set of alerts is firing.

Answer: C

Explanation:

Inhibition rules in Prometheus's Alertmanager are used to suppress (mute) alerts that would otherwise be redundant when a higher-priority or related alert is already active. This feature helps avoid alert noise and ensures that operators focus on the root cause rather than multiple cascading symptoms.

For example, if a "DatacenterDown" alert is firing, inhibition rules can mute all "InstanceDown" alerts that share the same datacenter label, preventing redundant notifications. Inhibition is configured in the Alertmanager configuration file under the `inhibit_rules` section. Each rule defines:

A source match (the alert that triggers inhibition),

A target match (the alert to mute), and

A match condition (labels that must be equal for inhibition to apply).

Only when the source alert is active are the target alerts silenced.

Reference:

Verified from Prometheus documentation - Alertmanager Configuration - Inhibition Rules, Alert Deduplication and Grouping, and Alert Routing Best Practices.

NEW QUESTION # 17

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