About Debian   **Getting Debian**   **Support**   **Developers' Corner**

Debian Constitution

Constitution for the Debian Project (v1.7)

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1. Introduction

The Debian Project is an association of individuals who have made common cause to create a free operating system.

This document describes the organisational structure for formal decision-making in the Project. It does not describe the goals of the Project or how it achieves them, or contain any policies except those directly related to the decision-making process.

2. Decision-making bodies and individuals

Each decision in the Project is made by one or more of the following:

1. The Developers, by way of General Resolution or an election;
2. The Project Leader;
3. The Technical Committee and/or its Chair;
4. The individual Developer working on a particular task;
5. Delegates appointed by the Project Leader for specific tasks;
6. The Project Secretary.

Most of the remainder of this document will outline the powers of these bodies, their composition and appointment, and the procedure for their decision-making. The powers of a person or body may be subject to review and/or limitation by others; in this case the reviewing body or person's entry will state this. *In the list above, a person or body is usually listed before any people or bodies whose decisions they can overrule or who they (help) appoint - but not everyone listed earlier can overrule everyone listed later.*

2.1. General rules

1. Nothing in this constitution imposes an obligation on anyone to do work for the Project. A person who does not want to do a task which has been delegated or assigned to them does not need to do it. However, they must not actively work against these rules and decisions properly made under them.

2. A person may hold several posts, except that the Project Leader, Project Secretary and the Chair of the Technical Committee must be distinct, and that the Leader cannot appoint themselves as their own Delegate.

3. A person may leave the Project or resign from a particular post they hold, at any time, by stating so publicly.

3. Individual Developers

3.1. Powers

An individual Developer may

1. make any technical or nontechnical decision with regard to their own work;
2. propose or sponsor draft General Resolutions;

3. propose themselves as a Project Leader candidate in elections;
4. vote on General Resolutions and in Leadership elections.

3.2. Composition and appointment

1. Developers are volunteers who agree to further the aims of the Project insofar as they participate in it, and who maintain package(s) for the Project or do other work which the Project Leader's Delegate(s) consider worthwhile.

2. The Project Leader's Delegate(s) may choose not to admit new Developers, or expel existing Developers. *If the Developers feel that the Delegates are abusing their authority they can of course override the decision by way of General Resolution - see §4.1(3), §4.2.*

3.3. Procedure

Developers may make these decisions as they see fit.

4. The Developers by way of General Resolution or election

4.1. Powers

Together, the Developers may:

1. Appoint or recall the Project Leader.

2. Amend this constitution, provided they agree with a 3:1 majority.

3. Make or override any decision authorised by the powers of the Project Leader or a Delegate.

4. Make or override any decision authorised by the powers of the Technical Committee, provided they agree with a 2:1 majority.

5. Issue, supersede and withdraw nontechnical policy documents and statements.

   These include documents describing the goals of the project, its relationship with other free software entities, and nontechnical policies such as the free software

licence terms that Debian software must meet.

They may also include position statements about issues of the day.

1. A Foundation Document is a document or statement regarded as critical to the Project's mission and purposes.
2. The Foundation Documents are the works entitled *"Debian Social Contract"* and *"Debian Free Software Guidelines"*.
3. A Foundation Document requires a 3:1 majority for its supersession. New Foundation Documents are issued and existing ones withdrawn by amending the list of Foundation Documents in this constitution.

6. Make decisions about property held in trust for purposes related to Debian. (See §9.).

7. In case of a disagreement between the project leader and the incumbent secretary, appoint a new secretary.

4.2. Procedure

1. The Developers follow the Standard Resolution Procedure, below. A resolution or amendment is introduced if proposed by any Developer and sponsored by at least K other Developers, or if proposed by the Project Leader or the Technical Committee.

2. Delaying a decision by the Project Leader or their Delegate:

   1. If the Project Leader or their Delegate, or the Technical Committee, has made a decision, then Developers can override them by passing a resolution to do so; see §4.1(3).
   2. If such a resolution is sponsored by at least 2K Developers, or if it is proposed by the Technical Committee, the resolution puts the decision immediately on hold (provided that resolution itself says so).
   3. If the original decision was to change a discussion period or a voting period, or the resolution is to override the Technical Committee, then only K Developers need to sponsor the resolution to be able to put the decision immediately on hold.
   4. If the decision is put on hold, an immediate vote is held to determine whether the decision will stand until the full vote on the decision is made or whether the implementation of the original decision will be delayed until then. There is no

quorum for this immediate procedural vote.

    5. If the Project Leader (or the Delegate) withdraws the original decision, the vote becomes moot, and is no longer conducted.

3. Votes are taken by the Project Secretary. Votes, tallies, and results are not revealed during the voting period; after the vote the Project Secretary lists all the votes cast. The voting period is 2 weeks, but may be varied by up to 1 week by the Project Leader.

4. The minimum discussion period is 2 weeks, but may be varied by up to 1 week by the Project Leader. The Project Leader has a casting vote. There is a quorum of 3Q.

5. Proposals, sponsors, amendments, calls for votes and other formal actions are made by announcement on a publicly-readable electronic mailing list designated by the Project Leader's Delegate(s); any Developer may post there.

6. Votes are cast by email in a manner suitable to the Secretary. The Secretary determines for each poll whether voters can change their votes.

7. Q is half of the square root of the number of current Developers. K is Q or 5, whichever is the smaller. Q and K need not be integers and are not rounded.

5. Project Leader

5.1. Powers

The Project Leader may:

1. Appoint Delegates or delegate decisions to the Technical Committee.

   The Leader may define an area of ongoing responsibility or a specific decision and hand it over to another Developer or to the Technical Committee.

   Once a particular decision has been delegated and made the Project Leader may not withdraw that delegation; however, they may withdraw an ongoing delegation of particular area of responsibility.

2. Lend authority to other Developers.

The Project Leader may make statements of support for points of view or for other members of the project, when asked or otherwise; these statements have force if and only if the Leader would be empowered to make the decision in question.

3. Make any decision which requires urgent action.

   This does not apply to decisions which have only become gradually urgent through lack of relevant action, unless there is a fixed deadline.

4. Make any decision for whom noone else has responsibility.

5. Propose draft General Resolutions and amendments.

6. Together with the Technical Committee, appoint new members to the Committee. (See §6.2.)

7. Use a casting vote when Developers vote.

   The Project Leader also has a normal vote in such ballots.

8. Vary the discussion period for Developers' votes (as above).

9. Lead discussions amongst Developers.

   The Project Leader should attempt to participate in discussions amongst the Developers in a helpful way which seeks to bring the discussion to bear on the key issues at hand. The Project Leader should not use the Leadership position to promote their own personal views.

10. In consultation with the developers, make decisions affecting property held in trust for purposes related to Debian. (See §9.). Such decisions are communicated to the members by the Project Leader or their Delegate(s). Major expenditures should be proposed and debated on the mailing list before funds are disbursed.

11. Add or remove organizations from the list of trusted organizations (see §9.3) that are authorized to accept and hold assets for Debian. The evaluation and discussion leading up to such a decision occurs on an electronic mailing list designated by the Project Leader or their Delegate(s), on which any developer may post. There is a

minimum discussion period of two weeks before an organization may be added to the list of trusted organizations.

5.2. Appointment

1. The Project Leader is elected by the Developers.
2. The election begins six weeks before the leadership post becomes vacant, or (if it is too late already) immediately.
3. For the first week any Developer may nominate themselves as a candidate Project Leader, and summarize their plans for their term.
4. For three weeks after that no more candidates may be nominated; candidates should use this time for campaigning and discussion. If there are no candidates at the end of the nomination period then the nomination period is extended for an additional week, repeatedly if necessary.
5. The next two weeks are the polling period during which Developers may cast their votes. Votes in leadership elections are kept secret, even after the election is finished.
6. The options on the ballot will be those candidates who have nominated themselves and have not yet withdrawn, plus None Of The Above. If None Of The Above wins the election then the election procedure is repeated, many times if necessary.
7. The decision will be made using the method specified in section §A.6 of the Standard Resolution Procedure. The quorum is the same as for a General Resolution (§4.2) and the default option is *"None Of The Above"*.
8. The Project Leader serves for one year from their election.

5.3. Procedure

The Project Leader should attempt to make decisions which are consistent with the consensus of the opinions of the Developers.

Where practical the Project Leader should informally solicit the views of the Developers.

The Project Leader should avoid overemphasizing their own point of view when making decisions in their capacity as Leader.

6. Technical committee

6.1. Powers

The Technical Committee may:

1. Decide on any matter of technical policy.

   This includes the contents of the technical policy manuals, developers' reference materials, example packages and the behaviour of non-experimental package building tools. (In each case the usual maintainer of the relevant software or documentation makes decisions initially, however; see 6.3(5).)

2. Decide any technical matter where Developers' jurisdictions overlap.

   In cases where Developers need to implement compatible technical policies or stances (for example, if they disagree about the priorities of conflicting packages, or about ownership of a command name, or about which package is responsible for a bug that both maintainers agree is a bug, or about who should be the maintainer for a package) the technical committee may decide the matter.

3. Make a decision when asked to do so.

   Any person or body may delegate a decision of their own to the Technical Committee, or seek advice from it.

4. Overrule a Developer (requires a 3:1 majority).

   The Technical Committee may ask a Developer to take a particular technical course of action even if the Developer does not wish to; this requires a 3:1 majority. For example, the Committee may determine that a complaint made by the submitter of a bug is justified and that the submitter's proposed solution should be implemented.

5. Offer advice.

   The Technical Committee may make formal announcements about its views on any matter. *Individual members may of course make informal statements about their views and about the likely views of the committee.*

6. Together with the Project Leader, appoint new members to itself or remove existing members. (See §6.2.)

7. Appoint the Chair of the Technical Committee.

   The Chair is elected by the Committee from its members. All members of the committee are automatically nominated; the committee votes starting one week before the post will become vacant (or immediately, if it is already too late). The members may vote by public acclamation for any fellow committee member, including themselves; there is no default option. The vote finishes when all the members have voted, or when the voting period has ended. The result is determined using the method specified in section A.6 of the Standard Resolution Procedure.

8. The Chair can stand in for the Leader, together with the Secretary

   As detailed in §7.1(2), the Chair of the Technical Committee and the Project Secretary may together stand in for the Leader if there is no Leader.

6.2. Composition

1. The Technical Committee consists of up to 8 Developers, and should usually have at least 4 members.

2. When there are fewer than 8 members the Technical Committee may recommend new member(s) to the Project Leader, who may choose (individually) to appoint them or not.

3. When there are 5 members or fewer the Technical Committee may appoint new member(s) until the number of members reaches 6.

4. When there have been 5 members or fewer for at least one week the Project Leader may appoint new member(s) until the number of members reaches 6, at intervals of at least one week per appointment.

5. A Developer is not eligible to be (re)appointed to the Technical Committee if they have been a member within the previous 12 months.

6. If the Technical Committee and the Project Leader agree they may remove or replace an existing member of the Technical Committee.

7. Term limit:

1. On January 1st of each year the term of any Committee member who has served more than 42 months (3.5 years) and who is one of the two most senior members is set to expire on December 31st of that year.

2. A member of the Technical Committee is said to be more senior than another if they were appointed earlier, or were appointed at the same time and have been a member of the Debian Project longer. In the event that a member has been appointed more than once, only the most recent appointment is relevant.

6.3. Procedure

1. The Technical Committee uses the Standard Resolution Procedure.

   A draft resolution or amendment may be proposed by any member of the Technical Committee. There is no minimum discussion period; the voting period lasts for up to one week, or until the outcome is no longer in doubt. Members may change their votes. There is a quorum of two.

2. Details regarding voting

   The Chair has a casting vote. When the Technical Committee votes whether to override a Developer who also happens to be a member of the Committee, that member may not vote (unless they are the Chair, in which case they may use only their casting vote).

3. Public discussion and decision-making.

   Discussion, draft resolutions and amendments, and votes by members of the committee, are made public on the Technical Committee public discussion list. There is no separate secretary for the Committee.

4. Confidentiality of appointments.

   The Technical Committee may hold confidential discussions via private email or a private mailing list or other means to discuss appointments to the Committee. However, votes on appointments must be public.

5. No detailed design work.

The Technical Committee does not engage in design of new proposals and policies. Such design work should be carried out by individuals privately or together and discussed in ordinary technical policy and design forums.

The Technical Committee restricts itself to choosing from or adopting compromises between solutions and decisions which have been proposed and reasonably thoroughly discussed elsewhere.

Individual members of the technical committee may of course participate on their own behalf in any aspect of design and policy work.

6. Technical Committee makes decisions only as last resort.

    The Technical Committee does not make a technical decision until efforts to resolve it via consensus have been tried and failed, unless it has been asked to make a decision by the person or body who would normally be responsible for it.

7. The Project Secretary

7.1. Powers

The [Secretary](#):

1. Takes votes amongst the Developers, and determines the number and identity of Developers, whenever this is required by the constitution.

2. Can stand in for the Leader, together with the Chair of the Technical Committee.

    If there is no Project Leader then the Chair of the Technical Committee and the Project Secretary may by joint agreement make decisions if they consider it imperative to do so.

3. Adjudicates any disputes about interpretation of the constitution.

4. May delegate part or all of their authority to someone else, or withdraw such a delegation at any time.

7.2. Appointment

The Project Secretary is appointed by the Project Leader and the current Project Secretary.

If the Project Leader and the current Project Secretary cannot agree on a new appointment, they must ask the Developers by way of General Resolution to appoint a Secretary.

If there is no Project Secretary or the current Secretary is unavailable and has not delegated authority for a decision then the decision may be made or delegated by the Chair of the Technical Committee, as Acting Secretary.

The Project Secretary's term of office is 1 year, at which point they or another Secretary must be (re)appointed.

7.3. Procedure

The Project Secretary should make decisions which are fair and reasonable, and preferably consistent with the consensus of the Developers.

When acting together to stand in for an absent Project Leader the Chair of the Technical Committee and the Project Secretary should make decisions only when absolutely necessary and only when consistent with the consensus of the Developers.

8. The Project Leader's Delegates

8.1. Powers

The Project Leader's Delegates:

1. have powers delegated to them by the Project Leader;
2. may make certain decisions which the Leader may not make directly, including approving or expelling Developers or designating people as Developers who do not maintain packages. *This is to avoid concentration of power, particularly over membership as a Developer, in the hands of the Project Leader.*

8.2. Appointment

The Delegates are appointed by the Project Leader and may be replaced by the Leader

at the Leader's discretion. The Project Leader may not make the position as a Delegate conditional on particular decisions by the Delegate, nor may they override a decision made by a Delegate once made.

8.3. Procedure

Delegates may make decisions as they see fit, but should attempt to implement good technical decisions and/or follow consensus opinion.

9. Assets held in trust for Debian

In most jurisdictions around the world, the Debian project is not in a position to directly hold funds or other property. Therefore, property has to be owned by any of a number of organisations as detailed in §9.2.

Traditionally, SPI was the sole organisation authorized to hold property and monies for the Debian Project. SPI was created in the U.S. to hold money in trust there.

SPI and Debian are separate organisations who share some goals. Debian is grateful for the legal support framework offered by SPI.

9.1. Relationship with Associated Organizations

1. Debian Developers do not become agents or employees of organisations holding assets in trust for Debian, or of each other, or of persons in authority in the Debian Project, solely by the virtue of being Debian Developers. A person acting as a Developer does so as an individual, on their own behalf. Such organisations may, of their own accord, establish relationships with individuals who are also Debian developers.

9.2. Authority

1. An organisation holding assets for Debian has no authority regarding Debian's technical or nontechnical decisions, except that no decision by Debian with respect to any property held by the organisation shall require it to act outside its legal authority.

2. Debian claims no authority over an organisation that holds assets for Debian other

than that over the use of property held in trust for Debian.

9.3. Trusted organisations

Any donations for the Debian Project must be made to any one of a set of organisations designated by the Project leader (or a delegate) to be authorized to handle assets to be used for the Debian Project.

Organisations holding assets in trust for Debian should undertake reasonable obligations for the handling of such assets.

Debian maintains a public List of Trusted Organisations that accept donations and hold assets in trust for Debian (including both tangible property and intellectual property) that includes the commitments those organisations have made as to how those assets will be handled.

A. Standard Resolution Procedure

These rules apply to communal decision-making by committees and plebiscites, where stated above.

A.0. Proposal

The formal procedure begins when a draft resolution is proposed and sponsored, as required.

A.1. Discussion and Amendment

1. Following the proposal, the resolution may be discussed. Amendments may be made formal by being proposed and sponsored according to the requirements for a new resolution, or directly by the proposer of the original resolution.
2. A formal amendment may be accepted by the resolution's proposer, in which case the formal resolution draft is immediately changed to match.
3. If a formal amendment is not accepted, or one of the sponsors of the resolution does not agree with the acceptance by the proposer of a formal amendment, the amendment remains as an amendment and will be voted on.
4. If an amendment accepted by the original proposer is not to the liking of others, they may propose another amendment to reverse the earlier change (again, they must

meet the requirements for proposer and sponsor(s).)

5. The proposer of a resolution may suggest changes to the wordings of amendments; these take effect if the proposer of the amendment agrees and none of the sponsors object. In this case the changed amendments will be voted on instead of the originals.

6. The proposer of a resolution may make changes to correct minor errors (for example, typographical errors or inconsistencies) or changes which do not alter the meaning, providing noone objects within 24 hours. In this case the minimum discussion period is not restarted.

A.2. Calling for a vote

1. The proposer or a sponsor of a motion or an amendment may call for a vote, providing that the minimum discussion period (if any) has elapsed.

2. The proposer or any sponsor of a resolution may call for a vote on that resolution and all related amendments.

3. The person who calls for a vote states what they believe the wordings of the resolution and any relevant amendments are, and consequently what form the ballot should take. However, the final decision on the form of ballot(s) is the Secretary's - see 7.1(1), 7.1(3) and A.3(4).

4. The minimum discussion period is counted from the time the last formal amendment was accepted, or since the whole resolution was proposed if no amendments have been proposed and accepted.

A.3. Voting procedure

1. Each resolution and its related amendments is voted on in a single ballot that includes an option for the original resolution, each amendment, and the default option (where applicable).

2. The default option must not have any supermajority requirements. Options which do not have an explicit supermajority requirement have a 1:1 majority requirement.

3. The votes are counted according to the rules in A.6. The default option is *"Further Discussion"*, unless specified otherwise.

4. In cases of doubt the Project Secretary shall decide on matters of procedure.

A.4. Withdrawing resolutions or unaccepted amendments

The proposer of a resolution or unaccepted amendment may withdraw it. In this case

new proposers may come forward keep it alive, in which case the first person to do so becomes the new proposer and any others become sponsors if they aren't sponsors already.

A sponsor of a resolution or amendment (unless it has been accepted) may withdraw.

If the withdrawal of the proposer and/or sponsors means that a resolution has no proposer or not enough sponsors it will not be voted on unless this is rectified before the resolution expires.

A.5. Expiry

If a proposed resolution has not been discussed, amended, voted on or otherwise dealt with for 4 weeks the secretary may issue a statement that the issue is being withdrawn. If none of the sponsors of any of the proposals object within a week, the issue is withdrawn.

The secretary may also include suggestions on how to proceed, if appropriate.

A.6. Vote Counting

1. Each voter's ballot ranks the options being voted on. Not all options need be ranked. Ranked options are considered preferred to all unranked options. Voters may rank options equally. Unranked options are considered to be ranked equally with one another. Details of how ballots may be filled out will be included in the Call For Votes.
2. If the ballot has a quorum requirement R any options other than the default option which do not receive at least R votes ranking that option above the default option are dropped from consideration.
3. Any (non-default) option which does not defeat the default option by its required majority ratio is dropped from consideration.
    1. Given two options A and B, V(A,B) is the number of voters who prefer option A over option B.
    2. An option A defeats the default option D by a majority ratio N, if V(A,D) is greater or equal to N * V(D,A) and V(A,D) is strictly great
    3. If a supermajority of S:1 is required for A, its majority ratio is S; otherwise, its majority ratio is 1.
4. From the list of undropped options, we generate a list of pairwise defeats.
    1. An option A defeats an option B, if V(A,B) is strictly greater than V(B,A).

5. From the list of [undropped] pairwise defeats, we generate a set of transitive defeats.
   1. An option A transitively defeats an option C if A defeats C or if there is some other option B where A defeats B AND B transitively defeats C.
6. We construct the Schwartz set from the set of transitive defeats.
   1. An option A is in the Schwartz set if for all options B, either A transitively defeats B, or B does not transitively defeat A.
7. If there are defeats between options in the Schwartz set, we drop the weakest such defeats from the list of pairwise defeats, and return to step 5.
   1. A defeat (A,X) is weaker than a defeat (B,Y) if V(A,X) is less than V(B,Y). Also, (A,X) is weaker than (B,Y) if V(A,X) is equal to V(B,Y) and V(X,A) is greater than V(Y,B).
   2. A weakest defeat is a defeat that has no other defeat weaker than it. There may be more than one such defeat.
8. If there are no defeats within the Schwartz set, then the winner is chosen from the options in the Schwartz set. If there is only one such option, it is the winner. If there are multiple options, the elector with the casting vote chooses which of those options wins.

Note: Options which the voters rank above the default option are options they find acceptable. Options ranked below the default options are options they find unacceptable.

When the Standard Resolution Procedure is to be used, the text which refers to it must specify what is sufficient to have a draft resolution proposed and/or sponsored, what the minimum discussion period is, and what the voting period is. It must also specify any supermajority and/or the quorum (and default option) to be used.

B. Use of language and typography

The present indicative (*"is"*, for example) means that the statement is a rule in this constitution. *"May"* or *"can"* indicates that the person or body has discretion. *"Should"* means that it would be considered a good thing if the sentence were obeyed, but it is not binding. *Text marked as a citation, such as this, is rationale and does not form part of the constitution. It may be used only to aid interpretation in cases of doubt.*

Back to the Debian Project homepage.

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dansk   Deutsch   español   français   Italiano   日本語 (Nihongo)   polski   Português
Русский (Russkij)   svenska

How to set the default document language

Home

About	**Getting Debian**	**News**	**Support**
Social Contract	Network install	Project News	Debian International
Code of Conduct	CD/USB ISO images	Events	Security Information
Free Software	CD vendors	**Documentation**	Bug reports
Partners	Pre-installed	Release Info	Mailing Lists
Donations	**Pure Blends**	Installation manual	Mailing List Archives
Contact Us	**Debian Packages**	Debian Books	Ports/Architectures
Help Debian	**Developers' Corner**	Debian Wiki	

Miscellaneous

Site map

Search

The Debian Blog

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PLANET

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