

1.1. What is Debian?

Debian is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to developing free software and promoting the ideals of the Free Software community. The Debian Project began in 1993, when Ian Murdock issued an open invitation to software developers to contribute to a complete and coherent software distribution based on the relatively new Linux kernel. That relatively small band of dedicated enthusiasts, originally funded by the Free Software Foundation and influenced by the GNU philosophy, has grown over the years into an organization of around 1000 Debian Developers.

Debian Developers are involved in a variety of activities, including Web and FTP site administration, graphic design, legal analysis of software licenses, writing documentation, and, of course, maintaining software packages.

In the interest of communicating our philosophy and attracting developers who believe in the principles that Debian stands for, the Debian Project has published a number of documents that outline our values and serve as guides to what it means to be a Debian Developer:

The Debian Social Contract is a statement of Debian's commitments to the Free Software Community. Anyone who agrees to abide to the Social Contract may become a maintainer. Any maintainer can introduce new software into Debian — provided that the software meets our criteria for being free, and the package follows our quality standards.

The Debian Free Software Guidelines are a clear and concise statement of Debian's criteria for free software. The DFSG is a very influential document in the Free Software Movement, and was the foundation of the The Open Source Definition.

The Debian Policy Manual is an extensive specification of the Debian Project's standards of quality.

Debian developers are also involved in a number of other projects; some specific to Debian, others involving some or all of the Linux community. Some examples include:

The Filesystem Hierarchy Standard (FHS) is an effort to standardize the layout of the Linux file system. The FHS will allow software developers to concentrate their efforts on designing programs, without having to worry about how the package will be installed in different GNU/Linux distributions.

Debian Jr. is an internal project, aimed at making sure Debian has something to offer to our youngest users.

For more general information about Debian, see the Debian FAQ.