

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Upstream Tracker project?

The Upstream Tracker Project aims to be a one stop solution for tracking the upstream versions of various open source softwares. Since open source softwares are scattered all over the place, a central tracking system was needed to track version updates for packaging and other reasons. Traditionally, package maintainers would have to keep an eye out and check manually for recent updates for the packages they manage. With the help of this tracker, it is possible to automate a lot of tasks that depend on tracking upstream versions such as - informing package managers via email of a new release, comparison tables of the packages versions in a distro vs upstream versions etc.

2. How does it work?

The tracker comprises of two parts - a web based crowd sourcing engine and a python engine running in the background to process the records collected. Since there is no one way to track upstream versions, details on how to track upstream data is crowd sourced through the web interface. Once the data is collected, they are processed by the python engine and the version information collected is written back to the database. This information is then made available to the public through the web interface and the REST API's.

3. Why is this important?

Open source softwares are diverse and are spread all over the world wide web. Each of them has their own release mechanisms and version schemes. It is virtually impossible to keep track of all the new releases of all the packages released. Hence, a practical approach of crowd sourcing may be the solution. In such an approach, since anyone can contribute to the system, it is very likely that most of the commonly used packages are on record. Moreover, this system is not limited to any particular platform or distro making the target audience much larger.

4. Do other solutions exist for this problem?

Yes, another solution is the Debian External Health Status (DEHS).

5. How is this better than the rest?

The DEHS is used to check the status of upstream packages for those packages that are present in the debian repositories which have a valid watch file. Hence, packages that are not in the debian repository cannot be tracked using DEHS. Moreover, DEHS does not employ crowd sourcing. Only way to add a package to DEHS is to create a Debian package and add a watch file onto it.

The Upstream Tracker, on the other hand, sources it's information from anyone who can contribute but also restricts malicious use of the tool by preventing access to delete and revert records. Also, users are not required to sign up before adding records making the process hassle free. The tracker also provides an easy method to look at erroneous records and edit them making the task easy for administrators. Search functionality enables users to check if a package is already added to the list before adding duplicate records. Finally, by being compatible with DEHS watch files, the Upstream Tracker project enhances and expands the ability of DEHS system.

6. How can I contribute?

The project was started for the Google Summer of Code, 2012 and it has been only 3 months so far. There are a lot of things that are to be done. A major contribution to the

project would be to add records for your favorite linux softwares. For the tech savvy, a list of to do's can be found on the github page.