

Debian Constitution - Constitution for the Debian Project (v1.2) [This Document has been Superseded by v1.3]

Debian Project

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Document information:

sourcefile debian_constitution_v1.2.sst

Generated by SiSU www.jus.uio.no/sisu

version information: SiSU 2.0.5 of 2010w12/5

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http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/debian_constitution_v1.2/sisu_manifest.html

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Debian Constitution

Constitution for the Debian Project (v1.2) [This Document has been Superseded by v1.3]

[Prefix]

Version 1.2 ratified on October 29th, 2003. Supersedes [Version 1.1](#) ratified on June 21st, 2003, which itself supersedes [Version 1.0](#) ratified on December 2nd, 1998.

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 Chairman;
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 Chairman 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;

25 3. propose themselves as a Project Leader candidate in elec-
tions;

26 4. vote on General Resolutions and in Leadership elections.

27 **3.2 Composition and appointment**

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

29 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.*

30 **3.3 Procedure**

31 Developers may make these decisions as they see fit.

32 **4. The Developers by way of General Resolution or election**

33 **4.1 Powers**

34 Together, the Developers may:

35 1. Appoint or recall the Project Leader.

36 2. Amend this constitution, provided they agree with a 3:1 major-
ity.

37 3. Override any decision by the Project Leader or a Delegate.

38 4. Override any decision by the Technical Committee, provided
they agree with a 2:1 majority.

5. Issue, supersede and withdraw nontechnical policy documents 39
and statements.

These include documents describing the goals of the project, its rela- 40
tionship 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 41
day.

a. A Foundation Document is a document or statement re- 42
garded as critical to the Project's mission and purposes.

b. The Foundation Documents are the works entitled Debian 43
Social Contract and Debian Free Software Guidelines.

c. A Foundation Document requires a 3:1 majority for its su- 44
persession. New Foundation Documents are issued and existing
ones withdrawn by amending the list of Foundation Documents
in this constitution.

6. Together with the Project Leader and SPI, make decisions 45
about property held in trust for purposes related to Debian. (See
§9.1.)

46 **4.2 Procedure**

1. The Developers follow the Standard Resolution Procedure, be- 47
low. A resolution or amendment is introduced if proposed by any
Developer and sponsored by at least K other Developers, or if pro-
posed by the Project Leader or the Technical Committee.

2. Delaying a decision by the Project Leader or their Dele- 48
gate:

a. If the Project Leader or their Delegate, or the Technical 49

Committee, has made a decision, then Developers can override them by passing a resolution to do so; see s4.1(3).

50 b. 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).

51 c. 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.

52 d. 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.

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

54 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.

55 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.

56 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 59

5.1 Powers 60

The `<Project Leader>` may: 61

1. Appoint Delegates or delegate decisions to the Technical Committee. 62

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. 63

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. 64

2. Lend authority to other Developers. 65

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. 66

3. Make any decision which requires urgent action. 67

This does not apply to decisions which have only become gradu- 68

ally urgent through lack of relevant action, unless there is a fixed deadline.

- 69 4. Make any decision for whom noone else has responsibility.
- 70 5. Propose draft General Resolutions and amendments.
- 71 6. Together with the Technical Committee, appoint new members to the Committee. (See §6.2.)
- 72 7. Use a casting vote when Developers vote.
- 73 The Project Leader also has a normal vote in such ballots.
- 74 8. Vary the discussion period for Developers' votes (as above).
- 75 9. Lead discussions amongst Developers.
- 76 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.
- 77 10. Together with SPI, make decisions affecting property held in trust for purposes related to Debian. (See §9.1.)

78 5.2 Appointment

- 79 1. The Project Leader is elected by the Developers.
- 80 2. The election begins nine weeks before the leadership post becomes vacant, or (if it is too late already) immediately.
- 81 3. For the following three weeks any Developer may nominate themselves as a candidate Project Leader.
- 82 4. For three weeks after that no more candidates may be nomi-

nated; candidates should use this time for campaigning (to make their identities and positions known). If there are no candidates at the end of the nomination period then the nomination period is extended for three further weeks, repeatedly if necessary.

5. The next three 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. 83
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. 84
7. The decision will be made using the method specified in section .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". 85
8. The Project Leader serves for one year from their election. 86

5.3 Procedure 87

The Project Leader should attempt to make decisions which are consistent with the consensus of the opinions of the Developers. 88

Where practical the Project Leader should informally solicit the views of the Developers. 89

The Project Leader should avoid overemphasizing their own point of view when making decisions in their capacity as Leader. 90

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 Chairman of the Technical Committee.

The Chairman 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 Chairman can stand in for the Leader, together with the Secretary

As detailed in §7.1(2), the Chairman 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.

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

113 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.

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

115 6.3 Procedure

116 1. The Technical Committee uses the Standard Resolution Procedure.

117 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.

118 2. Details regarding voting

119 The Chairman 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 Chairman, in which case they may use only their casting vote).

120 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. 121

4. Confidentiality of appointments. 122

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. 123

5. No detailed design work. 124

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. 125

The Technical Committee restricts itself to choosing from or adopting compromises between solutions and decisions which have been proposed and reasonably thoroughly discussed elsewhere. 126

Individual members of the technical committee may of course participate on their own behalf in any aspect of design and policy work. 127

6. Technical Committee makes decisions only as last resort. 128

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. 129

7. The Project Secretary

7.1 Powers

- 132 The `<Secretary>`
- 133 1. Takes votes amongst the Developers, and determines the number and identity of Developers, whenever this is required by the constitution.
- 134 2. Can stand in for the Leader, together with the Chairman of the Technical Committee.
- 135 If there is no Project Leader then the Chairman of the Technical Committee and the Project Secretary may by joint agreement make decisions if they consider it imperative to do so.
- 136 3. Adjudicates any disputes about interpretation of the constitution.
- 137 4. May delegate part or all of their authority to someone else, or withdraw such a delegation at any time.

7.2 Appointment

- 139 The Project Secretary is appointed by the Project Leader and the current Project Secretary.
- 140 If the Project Leader and the current Project Secretary cannot agree on a new appointment they must ask the board of SPI (see §9.1.) to appoint a Secretary.
- 141 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 Chairman of the Technical Committee, as Acting Secretary.

130 The Project Secretary's term of office is 1 year, at which point they or another Secretary must be (re)appointed. 142

131

7.3 Procedure

The Project Secretary should make decisions which are fair and reasonable, and preferably consistent with the consensus of the Developers. 144

When acting together to stand in for an absent Project Leader the Chairman 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. 145

8. The Project Leader's Delegates

8.1 Powers

The Project Leader's Delegates: 148

1. have powers delegated to them by the Project Leader; 149
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. 150

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 152

decisions by the Delegate, nor may they override a decision made by a Delegate once made.

153 8.3 Procedure

154 Delegates may make decisions as they see fit, but should attempt to implement good technical decisions and/or follow consensus opinion.
155

155 9. Software in the Public Interest

156 ‹SPI› and Debian are separate organisations who share some goals. Debian is grateful for the legal support framework offered by SPI. Debian’s Developers are currently members of SPI by virtue of their status as Developers.

157 9.1 Authority

158 1. SPI has no authority regarding Debian’s technical or nontechnical decisions, except that no decision by Debian with respect to any property held by SPI shall require SPI to act outside its legal authority, and that Debian’s constitution may occasionally use SPI as a decision body of last resort.

159 2. Debian claims no authority over SPI other than that over the use of certain of SPI’s property, as described below, though Debian Developers may be granted authority within SPI by SPI’s rules.

160 3. Debian Developers are not agents or employees of SPI, or of each other or of persons in authority in the Debian Project. A person acting as a Developer does so as an individual, on their own behalf.

9.2 Management of property for purposes related to Debian 161

162 Since Debian has no authority to hold money or property, any donations for the Debian Project must be made to SPI, which manages such affairs.

SPI have made the following undertakings: 163

1. SPI will hold money, trademarks and other tangible and intangible property and manage other affairs for purposes related to Debian. 164

2. Such property will be accounted for separately and held in trust for those purposes, decided on by Debian and SPI according to this section. 165

3. SPI will not dispose of or use property held in trust for Debian without approval from Debian, which may be granted by the Project Leader or by General Resolution of the Developers. 166

4. SPI will consider using or disposing of property held in trust for Debian when asked to do so by the Project Leader. 167

5. SPI will use or dispose of property held in trust for Debian when asked to do so by a General Resolution of the Developers, provided that this is compatible with SPI’s legal authority. 168

6. SPI will notify the Developers by electronic mail to a Debian Project mailing list when it uses or disposes of property held in trust for Debian. 169

10. A. Standard Resolution Procedure 170

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

172 **10.1 A.1. Proposal**

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

174 **10.2 A.1 Discussion and Amendment**

175 1. Following the proposal, the resolution may be discussed. Amend-
ments may be made formal by being proposed and sponsored ac-
cording to the requirements for a new resolution, or directly by the
proposer of the original resolution.

176 2. A formal amendment may be accepted by the resolution's pro-
poser, in which case the formal resolution draft is immediately
changed to match.

177 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.

178 4. If an amendment accepted by the original proposer is not to
the liking of others, they may propose another amendment to re-
verse the earlier change (again, they must meet the requirements
for proposer and sponsor(s).)

179 5. The proposer or 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.

180 6. The proposer of a resolution may make changes to correct mi-
nor 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.

10.3 A.2. Calling for a vote

181

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. 182

2. The proposer or any sponsor of a resolution may call for a vote
on that resolution and all related amendments. 183

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). 184

4. The minimum discussion period is counted from the time the
last formal amendment was accepted, or since the whole resolu-
tion was proposed if no amendments have been proposed and ac-
cepted. 185

10.4 A.3. Voting procedure

186

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). 187

2. The default option must not have any supermajority require-
ments. Options which do not have an explicit supermajority re-
quirement have a 1:1 majority requirement. 188

3. The votes are counted according to the rules in A.6. The default
option is "Further Discussion", unless specified otherwise. 189

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

191 **10.5 A.4. Withdrawing resolutions or unaccepted amendments**

192 The proposer of a resolution or unaccepted amendment may with-
draw 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.

193 A sponsor of a resolution or amendment (unless it has been ac-
cepted) may withdraw.

194 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.

195 **10.6 A.5. Expiry**

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

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

198 **10.7 A.6. Vote Counting**

199 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. De-
tails 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 200
the default option which do not receive at least R votes ranking
that option above the default option are dropped from considera-
tion.

3. Any (non-default) option which does not defeat the default 201
option by its required majority ratio is dropped from considera-
tion.

a. Given two options A and B , $V(A,B)$ is the number of voters 202
who prefer option A over option B .

b. An option A defeats the default option D by a majority 203
ratio N , if $V(A,D)$ is strictly greater than $N * V(D,A)$.

c. If a supermajority of $S:1$ is required for A , its majority ratio 204
is S ; otherwise, its majority ratio is 1.

4. From the list of undropped options, we generate a list of pairwise 205
defeats.

a. An option A defeats an option B , if $V(A,B)$ is strictly greater 206
than $V(B,A)$.

5. From the list of [undropped] pairwise defeats, we generate a set 207
of transitive defeats.

a. An option A transitively defeats an option C if A defeats C 208
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 de- 209
feats.

210 a. 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.

211 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.

212 a. 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 $V(Y,B)$.

213 b. A weakest defeat is a defeat that has no other defeat weaker
than it. There may be more than one such defeat.

214 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.

215 *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.

216 *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.*

217 11. B. Use of language and typography

218 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.

219 **Metadata**

220 **SiSU Metadata, document information**

Document Manifest @:

http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/debian_constitution_v1.2/sisu_manifest.html

Title: Debian Constitution - Constitution for the Debian Project (v1.2) [This Document has been Superseded by v1.3]

Creator: Debian Project

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Publisher: SiSU <http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu> (this copy)

Date created: 1998-12-03

Date issued: 1998-12-03

Date available: 2003-10-29

Date modified: 2003-10-29

Date valid: 2003-10-29

Date: 2003-10-29

Version Information

Sourcefile: debian_constitution_v1.2.sst

Filetype: SiSU text 0.72

Source Digest: SHA256(debian_constitution_v1.2.sst)=
58e353f5ce40d3d61a6ed10123639f511aeb1abaac8a8f2d3c98c0640d0bd944

Skin Digest: SHA256(skin_debian.rb)=
65bde83faaf9ea6b516841aa984f5f970048bc9e648ceaf900a331773610727d

Generated

Document (dal) last generated: Fri Mar 26 11:30:06 -0400 2010

Generated by: SiSU 2.0.5 of 2010w12/5 (2010-03-26)

Ruby version: ruby 1.8.7 (2010-01-10 patchlevel 249) [i486-linux]

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