coreboot and the Software Freedom Conservancy

Why joining a fiscal sponsor made sense

The coreboot project has joined the Software Freedom Conservancy

As of two weeks ago, coreboot joined the Conservancy. This was a long process, and an even longer process to make the decision.

This was actually the third time we had looked at joining Conservancy

The Software Freedom Conservancy

The Software Freedom Conservancy was established in 2006 to provide Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) projects fiscal sponsorship and assistance with administration.

Services include:

- Tax-Deductible, Earmarked Donations
- Asset Stewardship
- Contract Negotiation and Execution
- Conference Logistical Support
- Basic Legal Advice and Services
- FLOSS Copyright License Enforcement
- Fundraising Assistance

Other projects in the SFC

Starting with four founding members, the Conservancy had already grown to 25 organizations by 2010. The Conservancy currently supports more than 40 projects, including:

- Busybox
- Git
- Harvey OS (GPL Plan 9)
- Homebrew
- Inkscape
- LibreHealth

- Mercurial
- QEMU
- Samba
- uCLibC
- Wine

coreboot's needs

Until coreboot joined the SFC, we had a significant problem in that we had no way to accept money or spend money as a project.

This means that the project has been privately funded up to this point. Also, all of coreboot's assets are privately owned, because there was no way for the project itself to take ownership.

Options that were considered

- Starting an open source firmware consortium
- Starting our own non-profit
- Going with another fiscal sponsor
- Continuing without an organization, as we had been

coreboot consortium / opensource firmware consortium

- The consortium was to be a non-profit trade organization 501(c)(6)
- This is similar to the Linux Foundation
- It would be more business focused, and give businesses much more control over the direction of the project.
- Goals
  - Represent the coreboot project to silicon vendors, OEMs and ODMs and other entities deploying coreboot.
  - Create and improve the public visibility of coreboot in the industry
  - Create a long-term culture and network at all involved organizations (both customers and vendors) that continues beyond personal connections
  - Enable vendors to overcome the barriers in deploying coreboot
  - Keep coreboot open and secure
  - Set up and impact a shared strategy among participating organizations

firmware non-profit

- We also looked at forming our own non-profit - a 501(c)(3)
- This was the plan a year ago at the coreboot conference in San Francisco
- We had made it fairly far down this path, consulting with lawyers, and even selecting a name - rootoftrust.org
- Tax deductible donations for US residents
- When it came time to actually start the process of forming the company and getting non-profit status, we all decided that it didn't make sense.
- Focus would have been on education about open source firmware because of a precedent that open source projects are not valid nonprofits.

Also, we don't want to run a company, we want to write software.

Other fiscal sponsors

The Software Freedom Conservancy is not the only fiscal sponsor available, so we also looked at various other groups, and considered SPI - Software in the Public Interest.

Both Conservancy and SPI seem to operate in very similar ways and offer very similar services to their member projects.

Due to coreboot's long relationship with Conservancy, we chose to join them instead of a different group.

Application Process & Timeline

- coreboot started the application process in August 2016
- The final application was submitted toward the end of October 2016
- Early in February of 2017, coreboot met with the SFC to answer additional questions about our application
- Later in February, it was announced that coreboot had been approved for membership by the Conservancy's Project Evaluation Committee.
- Mid March 2017, coreboot was presented with a preliminary FSA, which was finalized after discussing changes in mid April.
- The signed agreements were submitted back to the Consortium in May, and coreboot officially became a member of the SFC.

Changes to coreboot

Changes to coreboot leadership

- The biggest change to the project was that the leadership was formalized.
- Up to now, coreboot has been governed solely by Stefan
- Now we have a 'coreboot leadership council' and the 'coreboot advisory board'

coreboot leadership council

- The leadership council is made up of 3 members, none of whom can work at the same company:
    - Stefan Reinauer - Google
    - Marc Jones - Marc Jones Consulting
    - Werner Zeh - Siemens

- Decisions about coreboot are made by majority vote of the three.

coreboot advisory board

The advisory board has no restrictions on membership, but has no actual authority over the project.. Members are selected by the leadership council. Generally, these are going to be people who are very active in the project over a period of time.

Current members are:

- Ron Minnich
- Patrick Georgi
- Martin Roth

- Nico Huber
- Aaron Durbin
- Philipp Deppenwiese

Other changes made to the standard FSA

Conservancy has a standard Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement (FSA) which states that all software distributed by the project will be open source. Because of the blobs repository, we changed that default agreement slightly:

"The Parties further agree that the Project shall only distribute non-Free Software for the limited purpose of increasing recipients' use of Free Software, and only in a manner that both complies with an such non-Free Software's applicable license and that furthers Conservancy's charitable mission."

coreboot's documentation

All of coreboot's documentation needs to have an open-source license.

We will be slowly deprecating the wiki and putting documentation into the coreboot/Documentation directory.

After much discussion, we would like to use the CC BY 4.0 (attribution) license

Fiscal matters

coreboot is still working out how financial matters will be handled going forward.

All money coming into the coreboot project will be collected by Conservancy

Conservancy receives 10% of all money collected by the coreboot project to help with overhead. We felt that this was comparable to what would need to be spent on lawyers, accountants, and people to keep track of our money if we had started our own non-profit.

References

https://sfconservancy.org/about/

https://web.archive.org/web/20060405220652/http://conservancy.softwarefreedom.org:80/