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DAY 3 - 10:15 - Participation Stage

How to Contribute to the Open Source CONSUL DEMOCRACY Software Project?

KEYNOTE + Q&A

JAVI MARTIN - CONSUL DEMOCRACY Foundation, Rock&Ror

Session recap

At a glance

Javi Martín, a developer at Rock&Ror and one of CONSUL DEMOCRACY's core maintainers, gave a non-technical 'food for thought' talk on contributing to the project, after being introduced by a member of the Foundation team. Drawing on his hobby of card magic and his own story of joining CONSUL in 2018, he explained the many ways people can help, from simply describing how they use the software to contributing code, and stressed that communication matters more than code. A disclaimer applied to part of the talk: some views were his personal opinion, not the Foundation's position.

Key messages

- The easiest contribution is telling the core team about yourself: which version you run, why you cannot upgrade, what problems you face and what audits (security, accessibility, privacy) block adoption.
- Translations are a major contribution: CONSUL's demo offers around 40 languages thanks to volunteers using the Crowdin platform. Humans will keep the last word even if AI helps.
- Keep code contributions small (as a rule of thumb, under 50 lines at first): review time grows exponentially with size.
- Fix the small annoying things you encounter: if they annoy you, they probably annoy everyone.
- Be patient: the core team finishes current work before starting new things, so reviews can take time.
- Communication is a programmer's most important skill. Commit messages should explain why a change was made: they are 'letters to future maintainers'.
- Large developments built for one institution usually cannot be merged as they are. Instead, share why they were built so the core team can learn from them.
- Users are the core team's 'bosses': reviewing their code, testing new versions and pointing out UX flaws is very valuable.

Facts, figures and references

- CONSUL has about 6,000 automated tests (about 4,000 in 2018).
- About 40 interface languages, translated by volunteers via Crowdin.
- Some installations still run version 0.14 from 2018. Upgrading now requires a single command.
- Contact channels: the CONSUL Slack and GitHub Discussions.

Takeaways for the community

- Municipalities can contribute without coding: report versions, upgrade issues, audit requirements and translation problems.
- Developers should start with small, well-explained changes and engage with the core team early on larger ideas.
- Clear documentation of why changes are made is essential for the long-term sustainability of an 11-year-old project.