



Upstreaming

Contents

2	Where to upstream	3
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3	What can be upstreamed	4
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Upstreaming changes made to a piece of Open Source software provides distinct advantages for the author of the changes and the ecosystem of users of software. The author can expect to see:

- Reduced overhead in on-going maintenance of their code base: With the changes available in the upstream version, the author will no longer need to port changes when upgrading to a newer version of the software.
- Reduced risk of incompatible changes and/or features being added to the upstream code base: When making local modifications to a code base, there is a risk that at some future point any local changes will fail to apply without significant changes or a comparable feature will be implemented with different semantics requiring either conversion to this feature to be carried out or continuing to carry the local change with much reduced advantages.
- Greater review of the proposed changes: Open source projects tend to review changes before they are merged and whilst not perfect, such reviews tend to be carried out by developers with a good working knowledge of the code base, which results in a better review than would be achieved in many settings.
- Potentially increased testing of added features: Other users of the software either evaluating or using the upstreamed features may uncover bugs or security holes in the added features that might otherwise go missed. This results in increased robustness for your users.
- Potential for further complementary features being added: The addition of a feature may prompt other developers to add complimentary features that prove useful to either you or your users.

The upstream project obviously benefits from the addition of features as this makes the software appealing to a wider audience and thus is likely to increase adoption. Having an active community may also help to increase adoption in its own right.

Whilst there is obviously an advantages for upstream projects to accept new features, it is also important that they thoroughly review and consider such changes. Bad changes could lead to instability of the application, negatively impacting all users of the project. Additionally the [maintainers](https://apertis-website-0b3586.pages.apertis.org/policies/contributions/#the-role-of-maintainers)¹ are taking on the task of providing some maintenance for the added features. It is thus important that they ensure such changes comply with the coding conventions and other polices to ensure ease of maintenance and continued good health of the project.

¹<https://apertis-website-0b3586.pages.apertis.org/policies/contributions/#the-role-of-maintainers>

41 Where to upstream

42 As mentioned elsewhere, Apertis is a derivative of Debian, which it's self pack-
43 ages software projects from many sources outside of Debian its self. Depending
44 on the changes being made, this may present 3 options as to where to upstream
45 the changes:

- 46 • Apertis
- 47 • Debian
- 48 • Main project of the software component

49 The effort required to get changes accepted by each of these places and the
50 associated delay in seeing your changes reach a released version of Apertis are
51 going to differ, often quite drastically and is frequently inversely proportional
52 to the on-going maintenance costs.

53 As a user of Apertis, it is likely that submitting changes to Apertis may offer
54 the lowest barrier to entry and fastest route to see the changes reflected in
55 an Apertis release. There may be instances where Apertis offers the only real
56 option, for example where Apertis is maintaining an older version of the project
57 for licensing reasons.

58 It is likely that Debian will only accept very limited types of change. Some
59 changes such as security and bug fixes may be more viable for upstreaming to
60 Debian, as a general rule feature additions may be less likely to be accepted,
61 though this will depend on how “alive”the upstream project is, what the feature
62 is and how the maintainer feels about it (after all, the maintainer will be taking
63 on the burden of maintaining the patches). Any patches that are accepted by
64 Debian may take longer to be picked up by Apertis (depending on exactly where
65 the changes landed).

66 The last option is to submit changes directly to the upstream project. Clearly
67 packaging related changes can't be submitted here as these are not generally
68 handled by the upstream project. It is also possible that the version used in the
69 current Apertis is behind upstream development branch because Apertis prior-
70 itizes stability over new features. However the upstream development branch
71 is where changes would need to be submitted, even when using this branch
72 incurs additional effort to port and test. The advantage to submitting to the
73 upstream project is that the changes will require no further ongoing porting to
74 newer versions as it will be in the main code base.

75 In order to alleviate the significant delay that a user of Apertis is likely to see
76 between upstreaming to either Debian or upstream projects and the changes
77 appearing in Apertis, it is very likely that Apertis would be willing to accept
78 backported upstream changes to the version currently in use. This provides
79 the user with the advantage of being able to immediately use the functionality
80 without needing to carry local changes, whilst the Apertis developers can expect
81 to only need to carry the changes in the short to medium term until the changes
82 filter through.

83 What can be upstreamed

84 Most systems are comprised of parts that exist to provide a relatively standard
85 environment that are likely to be (or could be) common to many devices using
86 similar hardware or requiring similar functionality and parts that provide some
87 kind of unique experience or custom logic specific to the device in question.
88 It is the parts that form the standard environment where the advantages of
89 upstreaming are most commonly exploited as these are the parts most likely to
90 benefit others and which benefit the most from others usage.

91 Examples of items that would be prime candidates for upstreaming include:

- 92 • Drivers for publicly available devices, including peripheral devices and
93 architectures/SoCs previously not supported
- 94 • Previously unsupported functionality in provided by supported devices
- 95 • Extending functionality for widely usable use cases in user space libraries
96 and applications
- 97 • Bug fixes and security fixes for any upstream component

98 Ideally, such additions would be submitted to the main project in the first in-
99 stance (with a backport submitted to Apertis once accepted upstream). Should
100 upstream submission fail such patches would be considered on a case-by-case
101 basis for addition into Apertis.

102 **Note:** Upstreaming is generally a process best considered from the outset. If
103 upstreaming is planned at an early stage consider actively [working with the](#)
104 [community](#)² during development, as this may streamline and simplify the devel-
105 opment and upstreaming process.

106 Modifications and functionality that are not suitable for upstreaming will be
107 considered on a [case by case basis](#)³. Whether they will be considered suitable
108 for integration into the main Apertis repositories will depend in part on how
109 broad the usefulness of the changes will be with the Apertis user base. At a
110 minimum it would be necessary for such changes to comply with the coding
111 standards of the relevant package, not impact the operation of Apertis for other
112 users and be suitably licensed.

²<https://apertis-website-0b3586.pages.apertis.org/policies/contributions/#upstream-early-upstream-often>

³<https://apertis-website-0b3586.pages.apertis.org/policies/contributions/#adding-components-to-apertis>