

Sovrin Utility Governance Framework V3.1

Primary Document

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Summary

Sovrin Foundation is a non-profit foundation that has one mission: Identity for All. The methods that Sovrin uses to realize this mission are a utility for digital identity that can enable people and organizations to make transactions in such a way that both parties in the agreement remain sovereign, in agreement with their own rules and jurisdiction.

Sovrin Foundation also has its own 'jurisdiction', its own 'laws' and its own agreements with participants. These laws regulate the rights and duties of the Foundation and its participants.

The governance frameworks make up the lawbook of Sovrin Foundation.

They answer the following questions:

- How is the Sovrin Foundation trying to realize this mission of Identity for All? (Purpose)
- What are Sovrins pledges in all layers of our work (Principles of SSI)
- What are the objectives that must be met? (Requirements)
- What risks might prevent the Foundation from realizing the mission (Risk assessment)
- What tasks must be done to avoid or minimize these risks (Policies)
- Who is responsible for these tasks (Roles in the scope)
- How do we know that the people who take on these roles do the right thing and who will be responsible for checking that? (Trust Assurance Framework and Trust Assurance Matrix)
- Who gets to decide that "laws" need to be updated and how is this done? (Revisions)
- If the parties in any agreement, including Sovrin Foundation and it's participants, end up not agreeing, who will get to decide? (Legal Agreements)

Introduction

The Sovrin Utility is a global public service for self-sovereign digital identity and Verifiable Claims. As a public utility whose mission is '*Identity for All*', it is intended to meet the digital identity needs of everyone everywhere. The objective for the Sovrin Utility is 100% availability of the Sovrin Network.

The Sovrin Utility Governance Framework (the "SUGF") is the set of governing documents for the Sovrin Utility as a global public identity utility for Self-Sovereign Identity ("SSI"). The Primary Document directs the governance of the utility through the controlled documents as well as providing links to all other SUGF documents. The SUGF is part of the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework (the "SEGF").

The SUGF guides the Sovrin Foundation in delivering on its mission of enabling access to trusted digital identity for all, including individuals, organizations and things, by providing a digital trust ecosystem, a global public identity utility, and other infrastructure that adheres to the [Principles of SSI](#).

The Sovrin Utility Governance Framework uses keywords from [IETF RFC 2119](#)¹ to indicate requirement levels

Open and transparent governance

The SUGF is developed by the Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group (SGFWG), and it is updated from time to time as necessary. The Sovrin Foundation Board of Trustees (BoT) performs an annual review of the technical, economic and legal policies in order to secure the sustainability and availability of the Sovrin Utility. Advice is provided by the Sovrin Governing Bodies: the Sovrin Technical Governance Board, the Sovrin Steward Council, the Sovrin Steward Qualification Committee, the Sovrin ID4A Council, the Sovrin SSI in IoT Working Group, the Sovrin Guardianship Working Group, the Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group

Each new version is approved by the BoT to become the official set of governance documents for the operation of the Sovrin Utility.

The first version, called the Sovrin Provisional Trust Framework, was approved 28 June 2017. The second version, called the Sovrin Governance Framework V2, was approved 27 March 2019. Revisions to the SGF V2 legal architecture to support compliance with GDPR and other

¹ <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/html/rfc2119>

data protection regulations was approved 04 December 2019. In 2020, the SGFWG started developing this third generation of the SGF. This broadens the SGF to encompass a “Network of Networks” model that strengthens global infrastructure for SSI.

Public Comment on the Sovrin Governance Framework

All Sovrin Governance Framework documents are open to public review and comment. Every official approved PDF version includes a link to a living community version. These are hosted as shared collaborative documents where anyone can add comments or make suggestions.

Participation in the Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group

Sovrin Governance Frameworks are developed by Sovrin stakeholders. [The Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group is open to new participants](#). There is no membership requirement other than a genuine interest in decentralized governance for a global public utility for self-sovereign identity, and respect for the community. Join

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Purpose

The Sovrin Utility Governance Framework (the “**SUGF**”) is the set of the principles, rules, policies, and accountabilities for administration and operation of the Sovrin Utility. The SUGF is

designed to ensure that the Sovrin Utility operates as a sustainable and reliable global identity service that helps to deliver the Sovrin Foundation's "*Identity for All*" vision.

Scope

The Sovrin Utility as a digital Public Identity Utility maintained by a distributed computing network. Items in the Sovrin Utility include, but are not limited to, the Sovrin MainNet, Decentralized Identifiers (DIDs), schemas, DID documents, etc.

The Roles within this scope are defined in regard to Actions any Actor may perform related to the Sovrin Utility, including: reading (Reader), initiating write transactions (Transaction Author), executing write actions (Transaction Endorser), operating a distributed node for the ledger (Steward) and authorizing and publishing policy revisions (Governance Authority). The Governance Authority for the SUGF is the Sovrin Foundation.

Areas out of scope for the SUGF include other layer specific governance framework in the Sovrin Stack:

- a. Governance of the Sovrin Ecosystem, which is specified in the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework (the "**SEGF**").
- b. Governance of the Credential system, which shall be described in a future Sovrin Credential Governance Framework.
- c. Governance of the Agent system, which shall be described in a future Sovrin Agent Governance Framework.

Principles

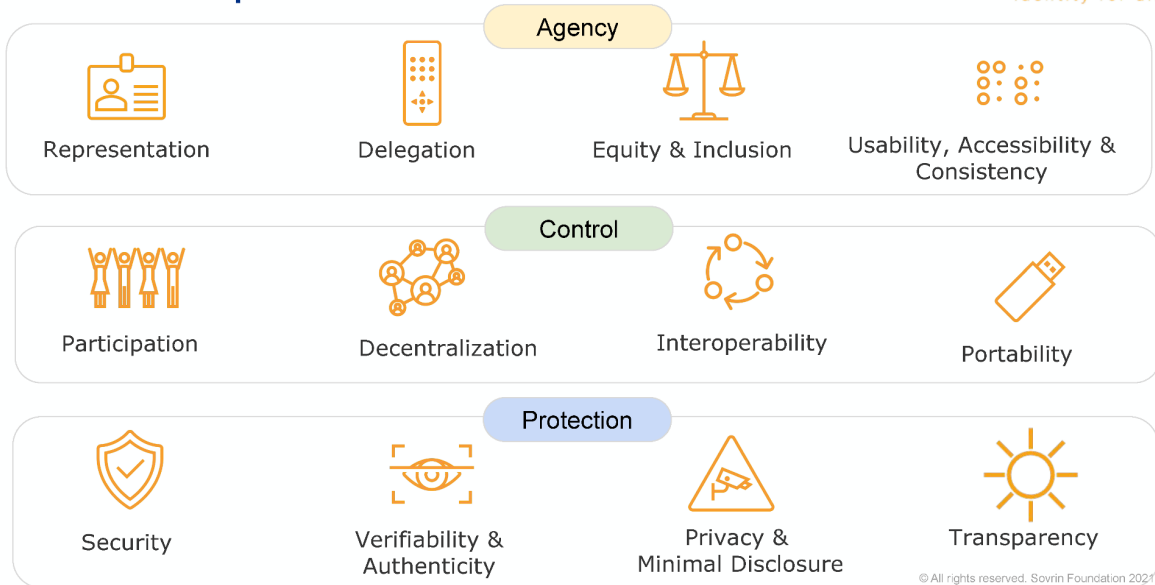
The SUGF adopts the [Principles of SSI](#) as published by the Sovrin Foundation.

The foundational principles of SSI are intended for use by any digital identity ecosystem. Any organization is welcomed to incorporate these principles into its digital identity ecosystem governance framework provided they are included in their entirety. The principles of SSI shall be limited only by official laws and regulations that apply in a relevant jurisdiction.

The Principles of SSI have been organized to provide a more human rights based perspective in the context of digital identity and identity rights holders.

The principles form a pledge that the Sovrin Foundation makes to all participants and that any participant in the Sovrin Ecosystem may attest at any time.

12 Principles of SSI



Agency

Representation

An SSI ecosystem shall provide the means for any entity—human, legal, natural, physical or digital—to be represented by any number of digital identities

Delegation

An SSI ecosystem shall empower entities who have natural, human, or legal rights in relation to their identity (“Identity Rights Holders”) to control usage of their digital identity data and exert this control by employing and/or delegating to agents and guardians of their choice, including individuals, organizations, devices, and software.

Equity & Inclusion

An SSI ecosystem shall not exclude or discriminate against identity rights holders within its governance scope.

Usability, Accessibility & Consistency

An SSI ecosystem shall maximize usability and accessibility of agents and other SSI components for identity rights holders, including consistency of user experience.

Control

Participation

An SSI ecosystem shall not require an identity rights holder to participate.

Decentralization

An SSI ecosystem shall not require reliance on a centralized system to represent, control, or verify an entity's digital identity data.

Interoperability

An SSI ecosystem shall enable digital identity data for an entity to be represented, exchanged, secured, protected, and verified interoperably using open, public, and royalty-free standards.

Portability

An SSI ecosystem shall not restrict the ability of identity rights holders to move or transfer a copy of their digital identity data to the agents or systems of their choice.

Protection

Security

An SSI ecosystem shall empower identity rights holders to secure their digital identity data at rest and in motion, to control their own identifiers and encryption keys, and to employ end-to-end encryption for all interactions.

Verifiability & Authenticity

An SSI ecosystem shall empower identity rights holders to provide verifiable proof of the authenticity of their digital identity data.

Privacy & Minimal Disclosure

An SSI ecosystem shall empower identity rights holders to protect the privacy of their digital identity data and to share the minimum digital identity data required for any particular interaction.

Transparency

An SSI ecosystem shall empower identity rights holders and all other stakeholders to easily access and verify information necessary to understand the incentives, rules, policies, and algorithms under which agents and other components of SSI ecosystems operate.

Risk assessment and Trust Assurance

The objective for the Sovrin Utility is 100% availability of the Sovrin Network. The perspective of realizing this objective while adhering to the Principles of SSI in order to realize the mission of Identity for all guides the requirements for the Sovrin Foundation at all levels: organizational, business, legal and technical.

In order to establish what these requirements should be, the Board has identified all risks that might prevent the Foundation from realizing its mission. The risk assessment tool developed in Trust over IP foundation served as a template. This tool provides a risk assessment for all parts of the organization (all layers in the Stack) and for all roles in the organization.

For the SUGF, the risks to the Sovrin Utility were identified, assessed in terms of severity and requirements to mitigate these risks were specified in the Trust Assurance Matrix. These requirements form the basis for the business, legal and technical rules that have been allocated to all Actors in the Foundations and described in the Sovrin Policies. The risk assessment is an ongoing process and task for the Board of Trustees as Governing Authority for the Utility, guided by all Sovrin Governing Bodies and Participants.

The compliance of the Sovrin Foundation with the Sovrin Policies is attested by self-assertion, internal control and public oversight.

Requirements

This section of the Sovrin Utility Governance Framework provides an indicative list of aspects which are required to be managed in order to ensure that the utility continues to be a sustainable and secure infrastructure serving the needs of the ecosystem.

The Sovrin utility is a part of the Sovrin Ecosystem. An ecosystem may face certain risks and uncertainties in realizing its objectives. Of these risks, some are natural to the very structure of an ecosystem: Participants can be collaborators, competitors, or both. Policies are needed to mitigate the risks to the survival of the ecosystem itself.

This list of aspects is not intended to be definitive but rather is an overview of the areas which are important. It is likely that the Governing Authority would determine the need to design and implement specific policies which aim to reduce the risks originating from these aspects.

- **Economic Model and Sustainability** - the economic sustainability of the Sovrin Utility is a necessary precondition for the continuation of the mission of "Identity for All". To achieve this the Governance Authority MUST have a transparent and easily understood model for Ledger fees. Additionally, the usage of such fees MUST be communicated to the stakeholders and community at a period of time determined by the Board. Additional context based understanding of this aspect can be drawn from the following statements

- The Sovrin Foundation MUST publish the Sovrin Economic Policies as a Controlled Document managed as specified by Sovrin Governing Bodies in conjunction with Sovrin Foundation legal counsel.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST publish the Steward Business Policies as a Controlled Document managed by the Steward Qualification Committee.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST publish the Sovrin Trust Mark Policies as a Controlled Document managed as specified by Sovrin Governing Bodies.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST manage the Ledger Fees and any mechanism used for paying them to ensure economic viability and sustainability for Sovrin Infrastructure in keeping with its charter as a non-profit public trust organization.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST retain a qualified Auditor to publish an annual public audit of Sovrin Foundation finances.
- **Information Security and Data Governance** - the topics of information security, data governance and infrastructure security MUST be covered through a set of documented operating protocols. This set of published documentation is intended to raise confidence in the fact that the Utility is secured and protected from adversarial attacks. The Governing Authority must also produce processes which MUST ensure that confidentiality of information is maintained. All such procedures SHOULD be designed for evidence based audit. The statements below are intended to serve as a guide for this aspect of requirements
 - Policies, practices, procedures, and algorithms governing participation of Stewards and operation of Nodes MUST follow Principles of SSI.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST specify policies, practices, and procedures for assessing conformance to the Sovrin Governance Framework by publishing and maintaining the Sovrin Trust Assurance Framework as a Controlled Document managed as specified by Sovrin Governing Bodies.
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST retain a qualified Auditor to publish an annual public audit
 - The Sovrin Foundation MUST publish Sovrin Governance Bodies as a Controlled Document managed by the Sovrin Board of Trustees.
 - Sovrin Governance Bodies MUST specify the Sovrin Governing Body for each Controlled Document.
- **Diversity, Inclusion and Interoperability** - the Governing Authority MUST design processes and policies which encourage network participants from a wide range of operating environments and geographical regions to join and participate with all aspects being in parity. This would ensure that the Sovrin MainNet is open to all qualified individuals and organizations without any exclusion for specific persons, communities or geographical regions. All necessary actions which enable the Sovrin MainNet to be interoperable with other networks SHOULD be encouraged through relevant guidance on requirements, policies and tests. The following statements provide an indicative summary of the requirements

- Access to the Sovrin Network MUST be open to all Individuals and Organizations on a comparable basis without intentional exclusion of specific persons or communities.
- In keeping with the Guardianship principle, a Guardian SHOULD: Act in the Dependent person's best interest. Exercise good judgment and carefully manage responsibilities. Avoid commingling—keep Dependent's property separate (e.g. separate DIDs, Public Keys, Wallets, Vaults, etc.). Keep detailed records of all actions taken on behalf of the Dependent. Be subject to applicable legal structures regarding the granting and revocation of Guardianships. A guardian should not engage in impersonation or false representations on behalf of the dependent.
- Developers SHOULD design for different capabilities in different contexts considering: Digital Exclusion (e.g., access to connected devices) Physical or Cognitive Exclusion (e.g., disability or incapacity) Political & Social Status (e.g., stateless individuals; being a child or a woman) Financial Status (e.g., having no income) Literacy & Language (e.g., low literacy or not speaking local language)

Revisions

Revisions to the Primary Document

These policies apply to any normative revision to the present document, exclusive of Appendix A.

1. Revisions to the SUGF Primary Document MUST respect the Principles of SSI.
2. The commencement of any revision process MUST be publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation no later than the time of commencement.
3. Participation in the revision process MUST be available to all members of the Sovrin Community.
4. Proposed revisions MUST be publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation and subject to a minimum 30 day public review period following the announcement.
5. Revisions MUST be approved by a supermajority vote of at least two-thirds of the Sovrin Board of Trustees after the conclusion of the public review period and before the revision takes effect.
6. Prior to the next major revision of the SUGF Primary Document, the Sovrin Foundation MUST put in place new governance policies.

Revisions to the Controlled Documents

These policies apply to any normative revision to the Controlled Documents. The list of Controlled Documents, as well as each Controlled Document MAY be revised independently from the Sovrin Utility Governance Framework Primary Document.

1. Proposed revisions MUST be subject to a minimum 30 day public review period publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation.
2. Revisions to a Controlled Document MUST be approved by the Sovrin Board of Trustees after the conclusion of the public review period and before the revision takes effect.
3. Controlled Documents MUST be maintained in a document management system which provides a permanent and accessible location for the documents along side a history of updates and changes.

List of Controlled Documents

Glossary

1. [Sovrin Glossary \(Linkable Version\)](#). A comprehensive glossary of over 250 terms used throughout all the SGF V2 documents and all of Sovrin infrastructure, plus eight appendices that provide in-depth explanations of core groups of terms. Also available in a [PDF Version](#).

Trust Assurance

- [Sovrin Trust Assurance Framework \(PDF\)](#) This document defines criteria and processes for assessing conformance of different Sovrin actors to the policies of the Sovrin Governance Framework.
- [Sovrin Trust Mark Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governing use of the Sovrin Trust Mark by stewards, agencies, and developers.

Governance Rules

- [Sovrin Governance Framework Primary Document \(PDF\)](#). The “constitution” of the Sovrin Network, this document defines the purpose, core principles, and core policies, and also references all other documents in the SGF V2, including all the Controlled Documents listed in Appendix A.
- [Sovrin Governing Body Policies \(PDF\)](#)—the governance policies that apply to all [Sovrin Governing Bodies](#).

Business Rules

- [Sovrin Steward Business Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governing qualification, application, activation, operation, suspension, and termination of Sovrin stewards.
- [Sovrin Economic Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governing economic incentives, fees, and regulatory compliance.

Technical Rules

1. [Sovrin Steward Technical and Organizational Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governing the security, node operation, node selection, and reporting requirements for Sovrin stewards.
2. [Transaction Endorser Technical and Organizational Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governs the security and operational policy requirements for Transaction Endorsers

Legal Agreements

The SUGF includes these legal agreements:

Steward Agreements

- [Sovrin Steward Agreement \(PDF\)](#) between the Sovrin Foundation and a Sovrin steward.
- [Steward Data Processing Agreement \(PDF\)](#) between the Sovrin Foundation and a Steward establishes the responsibilities of each for complying with GDPR and other data protection regulations.

Author Agreements

- [Transaction Author Agreement \(PDF\)](#) between the Sovrin Foundation and any person or organization initiating a write transaction to the Sovrin Ledger.

Endorser Agreements

- [Transaction Endorser Agreement \(PDF\)](#) between the Sovrin Foundation and any organization requesting permission for write access to the Sovrin Ledger.
- [Transaction Endorser Data Processing Agreement \(PDF\)](#) between the Sovrin Foundation and a Transaction Endorser establishes the responsibilities of each for complying with GDPR and other data protection regulations.
- [Sovrin Ledger Access Policies \(PDF\)](#)—governing reading and writing to the Sovrin Ledger and processing [Sovrin Ledger Transaction Data](#).