Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework V3.1 Primary Document

2023 August



This is an official document of the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework V3 approved by the Sovrin Board of Trustees. If you have comments or suggestions, we invite you to contribute them to the living community version of this document—access is open to anyone. If you are interested in joining the Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group, please visit our Meeting Page.

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1. Summary

Sovrin Foundation is a non-profit foundation that has one mission: Identity for All. The principal method that Sovrin uses to realize this mission is by providing a global utility for digital identity that may enable humans to exercise their human rights¹.

Sovrin Foundation aims to provide and support technical and governance mechanisms that allow people and organizations to make transactions in such a way that both parties remain sovereign, and in agreement with their own rules and jurisdiction².

Sovrin Foundation also has its own 'jurisdiction', its own 'constitution' and its own agreements with participants. These documents regulate the rights and duties of the participants in the Sovrin Ecosystem. The governance frameworks make up the rulebook of the Sovrin Foundation.

They provide answers to the following questions:

The cascade of the SEGF

What is our main purpose?	Mission	Identity for All
What are our guiding principles in all layers of our work?	Principles	The Principles of SSI
What are the objectives that must be met?	Objectives	Ecosystem is A. Sustainable B. Able to grow C. In keeping with its principles
What risks might prevent the Foundation from realizing its mission and achieving its objectives in keeping with its principles?	Risks	Risks to A. Sustainability B. Growth C. Abiding with its principles
What tasks must be performed to avoid or mitigate these risks?	Requirements	
Who is responsible for these tasks	Roles	
How is accountability for the tasks allocated to specific roles?	Policies	
What are the rights and duties of the parties, Sovrin Foundation and its participants and how are disputes settled?	Legal Agreements	

¹ <u>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</u>

² For additional information refer to Parties, Actors and Actions - https://essif-lab.github.io/framework/docs/terms/pattern-party-actor-action

How do we know that the people who take on these roles carry out their responsibility and who will be responsible for checking that?	Assurance	
Who gets to decide that policies and agreements need to be updated, and how is this done?	Revisions	

2. Introduction

The SEGF is the set of governing documents for the Sovrin Ecosystem. This Primary Document specifies the purpose, scope, principles and policies of the SEGF, as well as provides links to all other SEGF documents. The SEGF is part of the Sovrin Governance Framework (see section 3 Scope).

Open and transparent governance

The SEGF 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 and other community WGs, councils and Task forces.

Each new version is approved by the Sovrin Foundation Board of Trustees (BoT), following open public review and comments, to become the official set of governance documents for the operation of the Sovrin Ecosystem.

The first version of the SGF, called the Sovrin Provisional Trust Framework, was approved on 28 June 2017. The second version, called the Sovrin Governance Framework V2, was approved on 27 March 2019. Revisions to the SGF V2 legal architecture to support compliance with GDPR and other data protection regulations were approved on 04 December 2019. In June 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 officially approved PDF version includes a link to a living community version. These are hosted by Sovrin, 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 with no pre-qualification or requirements. There is no membership requirement other than respect for the interests of the global SSI community and a genuine interest in decentralized governance that supports the services,

products and infrastructure which adhere to the Principles of SSI.

Use of the Sovrin Governance Frameworks

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³ https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode

3. Definitions

To understand the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework (the "**SEGF**"), it is necessary to understand three key terms: Ecosystem, Governance and Framework. The following definitions from the Sovrin Glossary provide a basis for understanding the SEGF:

An economic system of competitors and collaborators organizing themselves in order to realize a collective objective.
An Ecosystem that enables digital Identity services.
A Digital Identity Ecosystem that encompasses the use of digital Identity services and Sovrin Infrastructure, all of which follow the Principles of SSI in order to realize its mission of "Identity for All"
The establishment and enforcement of rules and processes for the development and operation of systems.
A set of principles, policies and agreements that guides actors.
The set of governance principles, policies and legal agreements which guide participants in the Sovrin Ecosystem.

4. Scope

The Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework (the "**SEGF**") governs activities of Entities operating within the Sovrin Ecosystem.

The objective of the Sovrin Ecosystem is to be a global ecosystem that facilitates self-sovereign identity services for every human being. Sovrin Foundation is established to provide a utility to facilitate such a service. The Sovrin Network is a public, permissioned network, maintained and governed by Sovrin Foundation in pursuit of its mission of Identity for All.

The Sovrin Foundation is established as the Governance Authority of the Sovrin Utility and its Ecosystem.

The primary job of the Governance Authority is to develop, publish, and maintain the Governance Framework on behalf of the stakeholders in the Sovrin Ecosystem. A primary purpose of the Sovrin Governance Framework is to provide a foundation for the business,

legal, and technical policies required by any Governance Authority seeking to publish a Domain-Specific Governance Framework.

The SEGF is complemented by the following governance frameworks:

• The Sovrin Utility Governance Framework (the "SUGF"), which governs the Sovrin Utility;

These two governance frameworks, the SEGF and SUGF, make up the Sovrin Governance Framework (the "*SGF*").

The objective for the Sovrin Utility Governance Framework is 100% availability of the Sovrin Network.

The objective for the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework sustainability of the Sovrin Ecosystem.

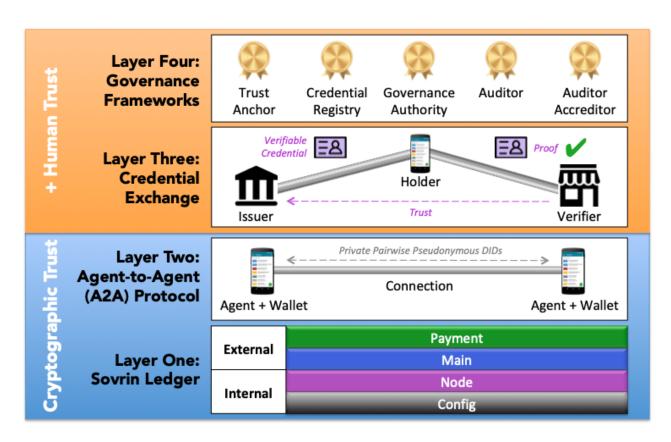


Fig 1: A representation of the Sovrin Stack (see Sovrin Glossary Appendix D)

The Sovrin Ecosystem is made up of global Participants, which are Entities that include Individuals (humans), Organizations (e.g. companies, governments, etc.) and Things (IoT devices, animals, etc.). These Entities utilize products and services from various providers that support the SSI model of digital identity, including the Sovrin Utility and similar Identity Utilities,

various types of wallets for holding and managing Verifiable Credentials, and infrastructure for issuance and verification of Verifiable Credentials.

An Actor in the Sovrin Ecosystem is an Entity which may assume one or more of the following Roles at any time:

Ecosystem Layer

- Trustee
- Auditor Accreditor
- Auditor
- Sponsor (of code, funds or expertise)
- User (consumer)

Credential Layer

- Issuer
- Holder
- Verifier

Agent Layer

- Agency
- Developer

Ledger Layer

- Trustee
- Steward
- Transaction Endorser
- Transaction Author

The Governing Authority (GA) of the Sovrin Ecosystem is the Sovrin Foundation, Board of Trustees.

The SEGF is composed of a set of controlled documents, as listed within this Primary Document, that describe the establishment and operation of the Sovrin Ecosystem. Controlled documents include the principles, policies, rules, procedures and accountabilities of Roles within the Sovrin Ecosystem.

5. Principles

5.1. Background

The principles for the SEGF, as presented below, are developed by global SSI contributors convened by the Sovrin Foundation.

The introduction of the principles was incorporated in the Sovrin Governance Framework V2.

The Principles of SSI V1 was a list of the principles accompanied by a pledge per principle (November 2020).

The Principles of SSI V2 have been organized to provide a more human rights-based perspective in the context of digital identity and identity rights holders with the ultimate goal to enable humans to exercise their rights to work, study, and travel while having freedom of choice and being protected (September 2021).

The Principles of SSI V3 concepts of "control" and "protection" were replaced respectively by "autonomy" and "integrity" in order to better refer to fundamental rights (September 2022).

The principles may serve as guidelines to enable a discussion between all participants in the Sovrin Ecosystem, with a transparent view of the potential benefits and harms of digital identity systems.

The foundational principles of SSI are intended for use by any digital identity ecosystem. Any organization is welcome 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



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.

Autonomy

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.

Integrity

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.

6. Risks and Requirements

The governance framework of the Sovrin Ecosystem consists of a set of policies and agreements. In these documents, accountabilities are allocated to certain roles in the ecosystem.

In order to ensure that the policies are equipped to guide the Sovrin Foundation in achieving its mission, the requirements for these policies need to be established.

So before it is decided **WHO** should be responsible for doing something, it is necessary to know **WHAT** should be done.

In this section, we, therefore, analyze the **risks to the objectives** and the derived **requirements for the policies**.

6.1. What kind of policies are needed?

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 existence of the ecosystem itself while keeping in line with its principles.

The policies mentioned in this section enable measurable guidelines along a specific set of dimensions in the Sovrin Ecosystem. These policies are derived from the principles and are applicable to all entities participating in the Sovrin Ecosystem.

The table below lists the dimensions of the policy framework with explanatory text added separately.

6.1.1. Sustainability

An identity system will have the potential to provide agency for essential services and to large communities. Risks to the sustainability of the ecosystem may have rigorous consequences and must be mitigated.

Objective	Risks	Policy Requirements
"The ecosystem is designed for long-term economic and operational sustainability in keeping with its principles"	 Lack of funding Lack of persistent technology Adoption of business models that conflict with principles 	"A transparent and outcomes-based approach to design a system fit-for-purpose" Economic policies MUST provide funding to secure availability of the utility
	The ecosystem cannot define and establish itself	Governance policies MUST refer to a clear mission
	The ecosystem does not have a diverse range of applications and services built around SS	Charters MUST provide clear voting rules for participants
"The ecosystem provides a viable model for all participants."	The ecosystem cannot incentivise participants: - Fails to provide influence - Fails to provide financial rewards	Governing body policies MUST provide sufficient voting power
	Creates barriers for adoption by service providers	Economic policies MUST provide a system of incentives and operating rules for all participants
	The ecosystem does not acknowledge competitors	

6.1.2. Ecosystem Growth

The sustainability of the Sovrin Ecosystem is predicated on addressing the emerging needs of the participants and being able to take the necessary steps to create mutually beneficial systems which help in growing the number of participants and volume of transactions.

Objective	Risks	Policy Requirements	
	The ecosystem is asymmetric and dominated by a few large participants	 MUST include public disclosure of all economic incentives in order to stimulate preferred choice MUST include public disclosure of all operational indicators 	
"The ecosystem grows and stimulates the growth of other ecosystems that adhere to the same principles."	The ecosystem is less credible and thus not the first choice to participate in	in order to establish reliability attribute SHOULD include governance structure which provides procedural opportunities to all participants for	
	The ecosystem is less reliable and thus not preferred	providing input SHOULD make available a set of specifications, tests and documentation to facilitate establishing 'network of networks'	
"The ecosystem advances the understanding and adoption of SSI"	The ecosystem participants use the trustmark while not adhering to the principles, thereby diluting trust in the mark	 SHOULD make available tools and instructions to facilitate compliance with the principles SHOULD make available evidence of Trust Criteria to enable independent assessment of ecosystem 	

The ecosystem fails to sha the adoption of SSI	MUST provide publicly available documentation for governance of systems which can be easily adopted to build SSI based networks
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6.1.3. Responsible Usage and Participation

The future success of the Sovrin Ecosystem is determined by the cooperative participation of the Sovrin Foundation and the participants. The Sovrin Foundation's mission of 'Identity for All' requires a clear understanding of the conditions under which the Sovrin Utility provides services to participants in the Sovrin Ecosystem.

Objective	Risks	Policy Requirements
"The ecosystem contributes to the adoption of SSI by setting an example of good membership practices and behavior."	The ecosystem fails to convince the participants of collective responsibility ⁴ .	 MUST include a set of guiding principles contributing to a wider understanding of SSI SHOULD include terms of Service which establish service level assurance provided to applications and services SHOULD include Acceptable Usage Policies to encourage a broad scope of offerings in the Sovrin Ecosystem

The policies in this section are derivative of SEGF principles and provide measurable guidelines for how any Entity should function within the Sovrin Ecosystem. The SEGF also provides unambiguous directions on how Entities must operate to be compliant with the Principles of SSI and local legal jurisdictions⁵.

⁴ Ostrom, E.: *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press, UK, 1990

⁵ Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development : Toward the Digital Age (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/213581486378184357/Principles-on-identification-for-sustainable-development-toward-the-digital-age

Р	rinciples	Explanation	Objective	Risks	Policy Requirements
	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	The ecosystem recognizes all entities and enables all such entities to be represented by at least one digital identity.	The ecosystem excludes certain entities	MUST provide at least one method by which any entity can use any number of digital identities
Agency	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.		The ecosystem does not provide the means to recognise a legal entity to represent another and act for or on their behalf	MUST provide an agent method that will enable the enforcement of legal arrangements of guardianship and delegation roles.

	Equity & Inclusion ⁶	An SSI ecosystem shall not exclude or discriminate against identity rights holders within its governance scope.	The ecosystem recognizes all entities as identity rights holders regardless of their geographic location	The ecosystem is organized around a set of qualifying criteria which create a structure of exclusion of entities.	MUST be written in precise, clear and unambiguous language that promotes inclusion and highlights the need for collective best interest
	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.	The ecosystem requires that the design of applications and services developed should enable accessibility, including any special requirements for all identity rights holders	The ecosystem creates barriers to adoption using technical or other means.	MUST be written such that the requirements are easily understood by those offering applications and services under this governance framework
Autonomy	Participation	An SSI ecosystem shall not require an identity rights holder to participate.	The ecosystem allows for an identity rights holder to opt-out of participating within the ecosystem and being recognised as a member	The ecosystem forces an identity rights holder to participate and access the underlying ledger.	Requirements which are not specifically relevant SHALL be dealt with in the appropriate layer. For example, Identity Rights Holders shall not be required to use the Sovrin Ledger , directly or indirectly.

⁶ Social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/final_joint_inclusion_report_2003_en.pdf

	Decentralization	An SSI ecosystem shall not require reliance on a centralized system to represent, control, or verify an entity's digital identity data.	The ecosystem is based on a principle of decentralization at all levels	The design of the ecosystem forces the creation of centralized systems for the delivery of outcomes.	The requirements of the design principle SHALL influence additional layers to include protection against risks of centralisation and/or resistance to censorship and coercion. As an example, the agent layer should be able to enable censorship resistance for the issuer, holder and verifier.
	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.	The ecosystem provides documentation about methods which enable the complete movement of data across systems	The ecosystem creates vendor lock-in	MUST enable portability between service providers within the system
	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.	The ecosystem is interoperable with other digital ecosystems	The ecosystem creates barriers to interoperability	MUST use or create open standards

	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.	The ecosystem provides a secure method for identification	The ecosystem does not adopt necessary operating procedures for securely managing the exchange of data	MUST include technical designs that offer secure methods to exchange data including reducing the surface area for attack vectors
Integrity	Verifiability & Authenticity	An SSI ecosystem shall empower identity rights holders to provide verifiable proof of the authenticity of their digital identity data.	The ecosystem provides at least one method for identification that by its design can verify authenticity and provenance	The method does not provide verifiable proof	MUST provide technical specifications that offer at least one method to receive, store and share verifiable proofs.
	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.	The ecosystem strives to protect sensitive and personal data through privacy by-design approaches	The ecosystem creates data leaks of private and sensitive information	MUST enforce data protection agreements on participating parties as required by the local jurisdiction.

	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.	The ecosystem is 100% transparent	The ecosystem fails to be guided by common objectives	 MUST establish clear criteria indicating actions that constitute Sovrin Ecosystem participation violations, and resulting consequences, which must be made publicly available. MUST include a Conflict of Interest policy for participants in governing bodies activities of the Sovrin Foundation MUST include well-defined and clearly articulated Sponsorship plans with associated fees and benefits, rights and duties MAY create visual badges or marks to indicate status as Sponsors in the Sovrin Ecosystem MUST make publicly available a verified registry of sponsors/contributors of the Sovrin Ecosystem MUST have policies which are explainable
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7. Revisions

7.1. Revisions to the Primary Document

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

- Revisions to the SEGF Primary Document MUST respect the Purpose and Principles of SSI.
- The commencement of any revision process MUST be publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation no later than the time of commencement.
- Participation in the revision process MUST be available to all members of the Sovrin Community.
- Proposed revisions MUST be publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation and subject to a minimum 30 day public review period following the announcement.
- 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.
- Prior to the next major revision of the SEGF Primary Document, the Sovrin Foundation MUST put in place new governance policies implementing the Sovrin Decentralization by Design principles.

7.2. Revisions to the Controlled Documents

These policies apply to any normative revision to the Controlled Documents listed in Appendix A.

- The list of Controlled Documents in Appendix A, as well as each Controlled Document on that list, MAY be revised independently from the Sovrin Ecosystem Governance Framework Primary Document (the present document).
- A Controlled Document MUST be stored in and use the change control mechanisms established by the official Sovrin Code Repository at the permanent location for the document published in Appendix A.
- Proposed revisions MUST be subject to a minimum 30 day public review period publicly announced by the Sovrin Foundation.
- 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.

Appendix A

Schedule of Controlled Documents

Glossary

1. <u>Sovrin Glossary</u> (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

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

Governance Rules

- <u>Sovrin Governing Body Policies</u> (PDF)—the governance policies that apply to all <u>Sovrin Governing Bodies</u>.
- Sovrin Bylaws governance rules for the (Board of) Trustees

Charters

- Sovin Technical Governance Board Charter
- Sovrin Steward Council Charter
- Sovrin Steward Qualification Committee Charter
- Sovrin Governance Framework Working Group Charter
- Sovrin Guardianship Working Group Charter

Business Rules

 <u>Sovrin Economic Policies</u> (PDF)—governing economic incentives, fees, and regulatory compliance.

Legal Agreements

The SEGF includes these legal agreements:

Trustee Agreements

 Sovrin Conflict of Interest Policy (PDF) between the Sovrin Foundation and a Sovrin Trustee

User Agreements

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Source code and related artifacts produced at the Sovrin Foundation are available from the version controlled code repository and are appropriately licensed under OSI-compliant licenses.