

DebConf15 Finances Final Report

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Budgeting and finance

DebConf15 was the largest DebConf so far, with more than 550 people attending, and you may also want to refer to the statistics for some more numbers.

Despite the unwavering support we received from our sponsors year after year, DebConf does not operate with a dependable cash flow. Moreover, without ticket sales, the number of actual attendees is also not known well ahead of time. Given those circumstances, we approach financial planning in a highly conservative manner and remain flexible with respect to non-critical expenses, such as the social programme.

We set out fundraising earlier than in the past years and thereby made it possible for our sponsors to choose whether to book DebConf support into the 2014 or the 2015 fiscal year. This approach proved very successful as we managed to meet the critical budget limit even before the end of 2014 and could head into 2015 knowing that DebConf15 was going to take place with certainty.

Budgeting for DebConf remains an iterative process, and as additional funds came in, we were able to successively unlock more and more optional, nice-to-have perks for our attendees, such as additional swag items, or the conference dinner.

The main organising entity of DebConf15 was the German non-profit association DebConf e.V. (<http://debconf15.debconf.org/verein.xhtml>), which we created mainly for this purpose. However, DebConf e.V. was supported by Debian Switzerland and Software in the Public Interest, Inc., USA, both of which are similarly non-profit entities. The following tables give an overview of the consolidated financial result of our conference.

Income

Category	Budget (EUR)	Actual (EUR)	Difference
Fundraising & sponsors	165,450	193,636	+17.04%
Attendance fees	13,000	30,100	+131.54%
Donations	0	6,122	n/a
Sales of merchandise	0	1,620	n/a
Sums	€ 178,450	€ 231,478	+25.38%

Apart from raising more funds than planned (thank you, sponsors!), the most notable in this table is the huge increase in income from attendance fees. We attribute this in part to the popularity of the conference, but also to our efforts to encourage attendees to pay these fees, if they can. We communicated clearly our expectations, and then provided benefits for those people who chose to support the conference this way.

We did not expect donations. Nevertheless, we published information about donations to the conference website, gave people the opportunity to donate during the registration process, and finally did cash collection on site. With fairly little effort, we thus managed to raise a good amount of money.

Surely, the income situation could be further improved through a more organised approach to merchandise sales, but this has not been a priority so far.

Expenses

Category	Budget (EUR)	Actual (EUR)	Difference
Room & board, venue	73,587	76,456	+4,90%
Travel sponsorship	44,000	27,468	-37,57%
Video, network, infrastructure	10,000	3,764	-62,36%
Fulfillment	12,500	15,027	+20,54%
Social programme	16,000	22,214	+40,37%
Miscellaneous	18,500	4,278	-81,07%
Taxes (expected)	2,363	3,491	+47,74%
Wrap-up costs (expected)	1,500	1,500	0,00%
Sums	€ 178,450	€ 154,198	-13,59%

Generally, the largest expense blocks of DebConf are room & board, and venue rental. Given the good prospects resulting from our early start into fundraising, we budgeted to pay for room & board for 55% of the attendees, which is more than ever before. In the end, only about 35% of attendees took us up on the offer. The larger-than-expected number of total attendees still pushed us slightly over budget.

We were able to keep the costs for infrastructure very low thanks to support by the venue, as well as in-kind donations from Cisco and other companies, such that the only required purchases were consumables (such as cables), as well as shipping costs for the video equipment.

The favourable income situation allowed us to increase expenditures on sponsor fulfillment, as well as some of the optional social programme (such as inviting a band to play, or installing a karaoke set on site).

The miscellaneous costs didn't reach anywhere near the highly conservative plan. In part, this was due to locals lending materials (printer, office supplies), but we were e.g. also able to negotiate better deals with insurances and the youth hostel, helping to keep the costs down. A consolidation plan regarding international income and payments allowed us to minimise money transfer costs.

Thanks to pro-bono advice from PricewaterhouseCoopers, we were able to avoid tax pitfalls in Germany and maintain a good balance between running a non-profit event and selling services to sponsors.

DebConf relies entirely on the gracious donation of time and energy by volunteers running the conference. Apart from (a very conservative) 1,000 € set aside for the finalisation of accounts by a professional tax advisor, no other personell costs were incurred.

Summary

Income	€ 231,478
Expenses	€ 154,198
Surplus	€ 77,280

The surplus has been committed to Debian accounts and will be used towards the organisation of future DebConf. Taking place in different parts of the world each year, DebConf does not always run a balanced budget. The surplus from DebConf15 will be available to seed future conferences, but also help to provide a necessary buffer against future budgeting uncertainty.

We would also like to improve our approach to travel sponsorship and thereby enable more people to attend, who are currently financially unable. This includes regular contributors, as well as the various facets of outreach that we are exploring with the goal to open our project further to the needs of our users.

Thanks to all your financial contributions.