ict hub

Sampling Survey of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in the Voluntary and Community Services Sector

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Summary

The ICT Hub is a partnership of national voluntary and community organisations, providing a range of services to help voluntary and community sector organisations benefit from ICT. The ICT Hub is part of the Home Office's Change Up programme in the voluntary and community services (VCS) sector.

The core members of the ICT Hub - iT4Communities, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), AbilityNet and the London Advice Services Alliance (Lasa) – are supported by other contractors supplying specialist input into the Hub's programme. The National Computing Centre (NCC) is providing such support in the specific area of free and open source software (FOSS) technologies.

This report is the result of survey work commissioned by the NCC in the early summer and summer of 2006. The purpose of the survey is to inform and guide the future work of the Open Source project within the ICT Hub.

The majority of the data used in this report was gathered in a sampling survey exercise. The insights gained from the survey were complemented by separate work undertaken to define FOSS training content needs and some of the feedback from that work is included here.

The high level findings are that the main priorities driving use of ICT in the VCS sector are its cost/ value benefits and its usability and utility for information delivery/ communications and client management. VCS sector organisations say they would respond positively to improvements in FOSS usability, learnability, (less) complexity and support, and would like to be able to consider using FOSS in key business area such as client management, financial management, organisational administration, information/ communications, knowledge management, media and website content management.

It also becomes clear that services and training for technical staff must be available as part of introducing FOSS technology. There is the potential to build on the common interests and good will between the FOSS and VCS communities to establish a VCS-friendly support network and meet this need more than adequately.

SWOT analysis of FOSS for the VCS sector

STRENGTH	• Support throughout the UK • Can be highly effective and robust • Interoperability with proprietary products can be achieved • Good return on investment potential	• Not widely used in VCS sector but some use is unrecognised by the users • Fear, uncertainty and doubt exists - some would rather just avoid any interoperability and additional training issues • Gaps in FOSS application coverage	WEAKNESS
OPPORTUNITY	• Good return on investment • Highly customisable to VCS requirements – especially accessibility and language areas • A more VCS sector sympathetic development and support model could emerge through joint actions	• Inertia acting against change within VCS organisations and their funding agencies • Relative weakness of FOSS marketing activities compared to conventional proprietary services models • 'Geeky' image of FOSS in the minds of organisation decision makers	THREAT

Lessons for the ICT Hub open source project can be summarised thus:

- The ICT Hub open source project must cope with a baseline position of diverse knowledge and little experience of FOSS technologies in the VCS sector.
- FOSS can be a significant change from current practices and expectations: some will find this a problem.
- The merits and demerits of FOSS for the VCS sector have to be elucidated and illuminated.
- Conventional ICT can be complemented and supplemented by FOSS - it does not always have to be replaced by it.
- Ready access to the latest FOSS information and case study/ best practice feedback is needed.
- The ICT Hub open source project can help VCS sector organisations' managers and directors by appropriate use of language and directly addressing business concerns such as risk management, value for money and return on investment.
- ICT Hub open source project should seek to take advantage of the marketing efforts made by some leading FOSS services and product suppliers while being careful to not, or be seen to appear to, align itself with any FOSS or commercial faction.

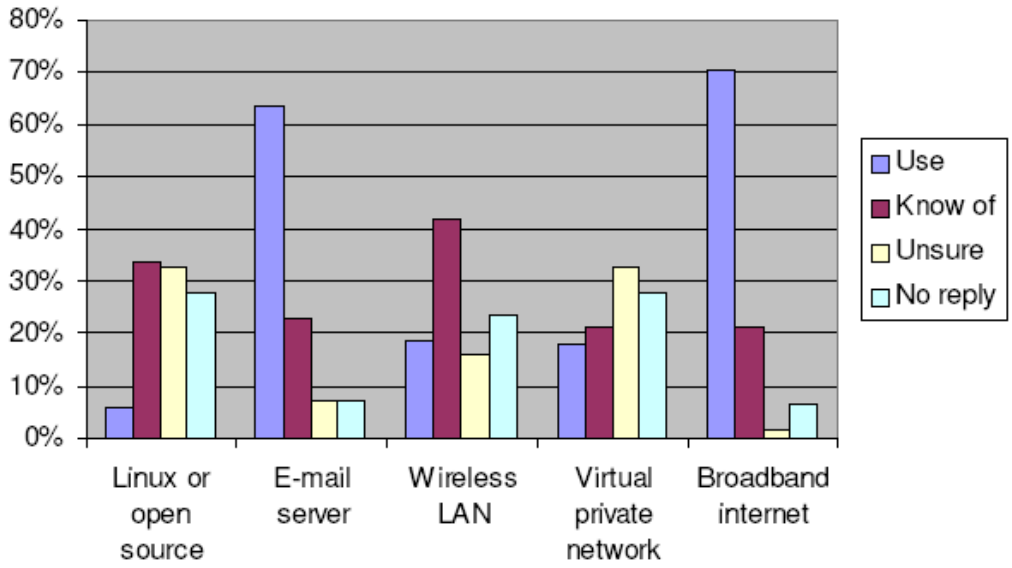
The ICT Hub's Open Source project will take these findings and the many specific comments made by respondents and incorporate them in its work. This work will further improve understanding and awareness of the practical and strategic benefits of FOSS ICT options for VCS organisations, improve VCS sector access to FOSS technologies and suppliers/ support providers, and raise awareness and technical capability in the VCS sector's ICT pro bono and circuit riders communities.

Findings - VCS sector and FOSS supplier/ support surveys

Previous work in the sector

A previous study[1] of ICT usage in the VCS sector in 2004 reported the following result for 'Linux or open source' awareness:

Figure 10: Use and knowledge of specific technologies



It was apparent that while approximately 2/3 of their respondents had either heard of or were unsure about FOSS (there defined as 'Linux or open source') very few (5%) were practicing users of these technologies.

Since 2004 there has been considerable development of FOSS products and increased awareness of their availability and potential through the popular and specialist media. The potential benefits of FOSS for individuals and organisations in the VCS sector are well known and readily apparent to FOSS advocates but less so to the strategic direction setters and day to day technical support mechanisms in the VCS sector.

This new survey, carried out in the summer of 2006, sampled knowledge and attitudes in two populations: (1) VCS sector workers' knowledge and attitudes towards FOSS and (2) FOSS support suppliers' awareness and offerings to the VCS sector. The full text of the questionnaires utilised in the survey and tabulated results from the survey are presented in the Appendices section.

Some findings from this sampling survey in the VCS sector

The results from the VCS sector suggest that actual usage of FOSS remains at a low level.

When asked 'What would make it your first choice?' the top three suggestions were:

- more usability/ more learnability/ less complexity
- cost (i.e. nil or low cost of acquisition)
- better support.

[1] *ICT Consortium Report on Baseline Research and Evaluation Framework*, P Ticher and A Eaves, Sept 2004

Interestingly, it's in 'more usability/ more learnability/ less complexity' and 'better support' that the FOSS community and services businesses have focused their efforts in recent years in order to increase their market share - e.g. the Ubuntu and OpenCD pre-packaged Linux operating system and FOSS applications distributions, the Firefox web browser and the OpenOffice office productivity applications suite.

When asked, 'What are the main priorities driving organisations' use of ICT?' the top four responses were:

- cost/ value
- information delivery/ communications
- usability
- client management.

It's a priority of the ICT Hub's open source project to target awareness of FOSS potential and capability in meeting these needs.

In terms of what are the kinds of software technologies VCS organisations want/ need, examples were suggested by respondents in the following categories:

- Client Management (e.g. enquiry management systems, case management systems, contact management systems)
- Financial Management (e.g. specialist accounts systems for grant funded projects)
- Organisational Administration (e.g. office productivity suites, timesheet tools, audit tools)
- Information/ Communications (e.g. e-mail and data/ voice over IP systems)
- Knowledge Management
- Media (production tools)
- Website Content Management systems.

When asked how effective FOSS has been, some replied "effective and reliable for our needs" and "we have had no problems with it". Others comment on the need for having appropriate skills and training available and the need for careful research and trials before commitment.

Document format compatibility issues with the more common Microsoft Office formats give rise to the need for some extra staff training to overcome these.

<u>Some findings from sampling the FOSS supplier sector</u>

FOSS supplier/ support providers do offer services UK-wide and often with special rates for VCS sector clients. A number make no charge.

The top three services areas listed were Communications, Network Management and Web Development – reflecting the typical significance of the World Wide Web, internet communications and internal network services to IT-enabled organisations today.

SWOT analysis

The responses to the survey questionnaire contain many observations about the practical utility, problems of and potential for FOSS in the VCS sector. These were used to perform a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and summary.

Strengths of FOSS

- Support for FOSS in the VCS exists throughout the UK, particularly with regard to its use in communications, network management and web development.

- Users of FOSS describe it as highly effective and robust. It is used for back office server work through to desk top office tools. Many praised the fact that FOSS interacts successfully with proprietary software.

- FOSS is seen as good value for money. Even technically focussed respondents reported this to be of prime importance to VCS organisations.

- Some users explicitly welcomed the different business model for FOSS, notably the release from paying for and upgrading licenses. This is an even greater strength when the reduced need to buy new hardware to run new versions of software is considered.

Weaknesses of FOSS

- FOSS is not reported as being widely used in the VCS, significantly less so than in other sectors. It is worth noting that some users will be unaware of the fact that they are using FOSS.

  Note: A major difference was found between the FOSS use rate reported by the YouthNet respondents (4-10%) and the data from NCC's industry wide studies (e.g. c. 40% using some Linux, 2006). However it's likely that the NCC's respondents are more technically aware of the nature of the software they are using.

- An informed understanding of FOSS is not widespread within the VCS and myths, both positive and negative towards FOSS, abound. Although support for FOSS in the VCS does exist across the UK, it is neither comprehensive nor very visible.

  Note: Generalised FOSS events can easily draw a mixture of ardent enthusiasts and people who wish to be introduced to the topic. This needs to be addressed in the project planning.

- There are gaps in the provision of FOSS business solutions, for example sector-appropriate accounts packages and video editing software.

- Interchange of data between FOSS and proprietary software can be an issue in some circumstances, and while solutions are available it can lead to difficulties for new users.

- The lack of mature FOSS users in many offices means that casual support from 'super users' is rarely available.

- Organisations seek simplicity in their ICT provision and the choice that FOSS offers can be seen as problematic and confusing.

Opportunities of FOSS

- The cost and value of ICT. FOSS has a different finance model to proprietary software which can lead to significant benefits for VCS organisations.

- End user software needs to be highly usable. FOSS, while being different from much software that people have been immersed in since school, has great potential for being adapted to the specific needs of organisations and the VCS 'audience'.

- ICT is required to improve communications and information delivery in a wider context. There are high quality FOSS applications in some of these application areas which could be presented to the VCS as low-cost, high-quality technology.

- Widespread difficulties in obtaining ICT support under terms that the VCS considers reasonable, whatever the software, have been reported. In addition to support structures which resemble those found in the proprietary market, FOSS has the potential to develop innovative value-based ICT support structures.

- The open nature of FOSS has the potential for increased incorporation of accessibility models and tools. While this is being exploited in some places (to provide local language services for example), the potential is yet to be realised in full.

Threats that face the use of FOSS in the VCS

- Inertia to change within VCS organisations. This is reflected in the sector's relative under-use of ICT. There has to be a compelling business case and the transmission of these benefits remains a challenge to those looking to have FOSS as an option.

- Inertia to change in the VCS environment extends to trusts and other funders. Funders have expectations of "legitimate" budgets for ICT and different financing models, even with much lower total costs, have been misunderstood and rejected. Some may insist on using closed format forms to collect monitoring information or to accept bids.

- The status-quo includes extensive marketing and education initiatives by vendors of proprietary products. Such vendors have marketing and sales staff as well as incentives to maintain their market presence. FOSS has relatively little market development resources.

- One image of FOSS focuses on the 'geeks', and stresses the difficulty business and user-oriented people have communicating with these technical experts. Over the last 5 years this has been changing, indeed the survey identified companies that worked closely with the sector and were able to offer a range of support options.

Additional feedback from FOSS training development

A separate workshop identified items of training course content that would make the planned 'FOSS in the VCS' training most valuable and useful to individuals. Some feedback from that workshop is relevant to the present purposes:

- The cost of proprietary software is the main issue for many VCS organisations, even with already discounted prices in some cases. This is even more strongly stated when there is the need to buy new hardware to run new versions of software.

- Not having well informed users who are able to use IT, and better still to contribute to its introduction, is the next most commonly reported issue.

- Funding for medium term IT strategy was reported as the 3rd most common issue. This is addressed to funders but links in with the reported lack of understanding by managers required to address IT strategy.

- The growing complexity of IT infrastructure is a very important issue for some having to integrate diverse software and diverse hardware.

- The availability of suitably priced support services with relevant understanding was commonly reported as an issue. Retaining their technical staff is an issue for many VCS organisations.

- Accessibility is an issue for several organisations

Lessons for the ICT Hub open source project

One might expect that the VCS sector has diverse knowledge and experience of FOSS technologies and this is indeed bourne out in the small sample that forms the basis of this study.

1. Those who have learned and persevered generally report a satisfactory outcome but that very need to learn and persevere can be a significant hurdle for those unwilling or unable to change from current practices and expectations.

2. Pushing FOSS technologies at the VCS sector is not likely to be a productive exercise, rather, as with any new opportunity for change, the merits and demerits of the new option have to be elucidated and illuminated for all to see and draw their own conclusions about appropriateness now.

3. For those who have some ICT knowledge and experience – perhaps gained in a conventional working environment which is then applied to their VCS work, i.e. the 'accidental techie', the spectrum of potential uses of FOSS-based products and services is wide and often under appreciated. The task therefore for the ICT Hub open source project is to show that conventional ICT can be complemented and supplemented by FOSS; it does not have to be replaced by it. Simultaneously, where there is a green field opportunity and new ICT is to be selected and established, raising awareness of the pros and cons of both the pure-FOSS, mixed and pure-proprietary approaches should be of great benefit to those trying to make informed choices.

4. For those who have ICT technical experience and knowledge in depth, e.g. the technical support staff in the larger VCS sector organisations and the Circuit Riders, some awareness and experience of FOSS options can be expected. In these communities what is needed is ready access to the latest FOSS information and case study/ best practice feedback so that new developments or options for them can be quickly found, assimilated and added to their individual and collective knowledgebases.

5. For the funding managers and organisational managers and strategists tasked with steering their VCS organisation/ community, ICT matters often appear in their 'In Tray' as part of larger resource requests or business plans. They are often concerned with matters of minimising risk and maximising return on investment. The ICT Hub open source project can help these individuals by talking the same language and addressing risk, value for money and return on investment head on. There will be few instances of a clear choice, rather there will be pros and cons for and against FOSS options in the short, medium and long terms which the project can help be drawn out and examined in a fair and productive light.

6. The relative imbalance of information made available to the consumers of ICT in the VCS sector between the marketing spend in the pure proprietary marketplace and in the voluntary/ donated effort driven FOSS communities is a major relative disadvantage for FOSS advocates. In recent years some in the FOSS community have addressed this by taking a more commercial approach to their product and services offerings, including more sophisticated marketing and sales activities. This is something the ICT Hub open source project should seek to take advantage of in furthering its work.

7. On the other hand some in both the VCS and FOSS communities take a fundamentalist approach to not engaging in or promoting commercial (profit making) involvement their activities. These too need to be served by the ICT Hub open source project so the project itself must not, or be seen to appear to, align itself with any FOSS or commercial faction else it risks alienating some part of its target beneficiaries.

Appendices

Survey questionnaire for VCS/ FOSS using organisations

RAPID SURVEY OF FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE USE AND SUPPORT IN UK VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The ICT Hub is looking to collect details of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) use in the UK. We are looking for details of need, existing use, technical support and awareness. Examples would be organisational use of Firefox and OpenOffice, Plone development or using Linux servers for Web publishing.

There are two short survey forms, one for VCS organisations and one for any Technical Support and Advice Providers (from any sector) that are supporting voluntary and community groups. Please complete or send on for completion the appropriate survey and return to the ICT Hub.

To add to the excitement we are offering a Nokia 770 Internet tablet as a prize (or a cash equivalent charity donation in your name) to one lucky respondent.

This is a short, sharp baseline assessment so please let me have the completed .pdf forms back by 10th May.

Name of organisation
Address
Contact
Contact email

Using Free and Open Source Software…

- How do you use FOSS in your organisation?
- How effective (i.e. reliable, appropriate and value for money) is it in meeting your organisation's needs?
- What other needs could FOSS potentially meet given time, money or intention?
- What would FOSS have to offer to make it your first choice of ICT technology?
- What are the 3 main priorities driving your organisation's ICT use?
- What software would you invent for your organisation if you could?
- Who is available to support (i.e. through technical, training or advice support) FOSS in your area?

Please pass copies of this email survey form on to other organisations in your networks that may be using FOSS.

Survey questionnaire for FOSS support organisations

RAPID SURVEY OF FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE USE AND SUPPORT IN THE UK VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The ICT Hub is looking to collect details of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) use in the UK. We are looking for details of need, existing use, technical support and awareness. Examples would be organisational use of Firefox and OpenOffice, Plone development or using Linux servers for Web publishing.

There are two short survey forms, one for any Technical Support and Advice Providers (from any sector) that are supporting voluntary and community groups and one for VCS organisations. Please complete or send on for completion the appropriate survey and return to the ICT Hub.

To add to the excitement we are offering a Nokia 770 Internet tablet as a prize (or a cash equivalent charity donation in your name) to one lucky respondent.

This is a short, sharp baseline assessment so please let me have the completed .pdf forms back by 10th May.

Name of organisation
Address
Contact name
Contact email

Supporting Free and Open Source Software…

- What free or Open Source solutions do you offer or support?
- To what level do you help organisations?
- What business models do you use for support?
- Do you offer 'special rates' for charities and community groups?
- Do you offer sector specific software or develop custom software?
- What is the catchment area you cover?
- Do you offer Windows support in addition to FOSS support

Please pass copies of this email survey form on to other organisations or companies in your networks that may be using or supporting FOSS.

VCS/ FOSS using organisations' responses to survey

Responses

34

How effective is it?

Very

1. 100% effective. We have found FOSS to be more reliable, it has greater longevity is adaptable
2. Absolutely robust, free of charge – ideal
3. Excellent on all counts
4. Extremely reliable, in terms of not crashing, but needs some attention every so often when confused by incoming e-mail
5. Extremely, MRBS has been very robust and the two SME Servers equally so.
6. Extremely. Low set up cost, Low admin costs, system as good as maintenance free, user confidence high, all our software needs are covered. Compatibility not an issue in the six years we have been MS free.
7. For our purposes it is more stable, more flexible and more user friendly than commercial software. It is definitely more cost effective to install and maintain.
8. Ideal.
9. It is effective and reliable for our needs and we have had no problems with it
10. It is highly effective: reliable performance, appropriate functionality, and we have never paid any money for software licenses.
11. LAMP - extremely cost-effective in terms of delivery - our web server performs many roles (CRM, communications...) crucial to the running of our organisation.
12. Meets need
13. Reliability is excellent, value for money is excellent, the video is excellent but the recording of individuals details could be improved
14. Very useful but we would like to make better use of FOSS
15. Very
16. Very effective
17. Very, using Plone we can construct pretty much anything we want regarding thru-the-web applications
18. We find this software to be very reliable

Mostly

1. As a framework, fine but we need affordable high-quality affordable content for the VLE
2. It is quite acceptable for all except the necessary accounting/bookkeeping programs which we store on treasurer's MS Windows software using a commercial program
3. Low entry level cost, poor reliability, high maintenance, secure - matches MS for value for money. Need good technical skills
4. Many of these tools are highly reliable and are most appropriate. Less reliable has been some multimedia software such as kino for video editing
5. Quite effective as the package that we use (Spybot S & D) is reliable in detecting security threats to our computers
6. Unreliable when the internet connection goes down, appropriate in meeting and identifying a need in the community. By providing this training it helps us support the cost of the premises
7. Very appropriate, fairly reliable (some issues with OpenOffice Calc stability/compatibility), good value for money

8. Very effective after some careful configuration, the addition of a few extensions/plug ins. Needs careful research and trials to make sure it does exactly what you want

Partly

1. As a web designer PHP, MySQL etc are the default technologies that I'd be using anyway but I use Macromedia products to create interactions with them. Tried to use Linux but found that whilst it's easy to initially install, things that are simple plug and play in WinXP like installing a wireless dongle are a techie headache in Linux – gave up. OpenOffice is easy for people to pick up and we recommend people try it - but we also tell them about charity discounted Microsoft software and they usually choose what they are familiar with. The documentation is rarely well-written or simply explained
2. Most of is very reliable and easy to use. However, we have found that staff find OpenOffice to be confusing (particularly with respect to its file format - not realising that files need to be saved in MS Office format before being emailed to other people). Some staff have quite limited IT skills and find that trying to understand a new software package causes more difficulty
3. Not bad
4. Not bad
5. OpenOffice, Moodle, PHPBB very good and suitable to our needs. Other software useful. We need to use Windows and MS Office for training purposes and because most people are familiar with this (but can't afford to update). Takes time to learn new software
6. Open source is OK for the bulk of staff and the cost is good. However, staff members who interact with outside organisations, particularly for bids, are finding that formatting is a problem when other people receive the bids. Also, PowerPoint is better than OpenOffice and we do sometimes have problems when we send PowerPoint presentations as the receiver can not always open them

What do you use it for?

Entirely

1. All desktop apps (Linux, various Window Managers, various browsers, OpenOffice.org – everything), X-terminal server, File, Print and scanner server, intraweb server, web server, remote file server. We use no proprietary software, except (rarely) Real Player and Acrobat Reader
2. All our software is open source. We use umbeto, thunderbird and OpenOffice as standard. Although some staff members are moving back to Microsoft office
3. We have a community-wide wireless project based entirely on FOSS, including wireless thin-clients, applications servers and community intranet content management. The project, which is in an ex-mining community, is receiving funding from Objective 1 (South Yorkshire) and the Big Lottery Fund and is now to form part of a wider scheme in Rotherham (Rotherham Connected Communities Pilot).
4. We only use FOSS. All software support for our working process is FOSS. We also use lots of FOSS when developing software for use by clients within their working processes.
5. We run almost entirely on open source software and use it wherever possible (mostly SUSE Linux)
6. We use Linux as the operating system, StarOffice for the newsletters and VLC is used for the video coaching
7. We use Linux operating software, (SuSE OSS) with open source browser, e-mail and office programs (OpenOffice .org) on old second hand computers.

Mostly

1. Admin use, promotional material, website. Firefox, OpenOffice are both used in the office. The web server runs Linux, MySQL, PHP, and Apache. Scribus under investigation.
2. Apache, PHP, MySQL, Firefox, OpenOffice
3. As a web platform (LAMP stack) - This performs multiple roles within our organisation, from fulfilment through to supporting core operations; we use Firefox, putty and winscp widely. Other that we occasionally use OpenOffice to perform certain tasks.
4. Client and Server Operating Systems, Office Apps, Server Apps
5. Firefox and Thunderbird for security and functionality; Custom Content Management System for our website (including blog and directory based functions), using LAMP
6. Linux based web servers Standardising on use of Firefox Limited but growing use of OpenOffice (some users using it exclusively) Linux based firewalls Some file and print serving (Samba) Use of Linux distributions such as dyne:bolic for public workshops General use of Gimp for image manipulation In the process of moving main website to drupal (on LAMP) Management tools such as Ethereal
7. Provide OpenOffice with reconditioned PCs supplied to our small member groups in the South West of England. Online courses created in Moodle (VLE) Message Board on interactive website uses PHPBB Have once had Linux installed on 2 PCs for demonstration purposes - caused problems in reverting to Windows. Cutepdf Ad-Aware Belarc Acrobat Nero Realplayer Google Earth - for students
8. Samba file server, PostgreSQL/Apache/PHP for intranet and database, Sendmail for Email
9. We use Firefox and Thunderbird for internet access and email. We use Filezilla for ftp and SciTE for editing web pages. We are experimenting with the use of OpenOffice.
10. We use FOSS e-mail, web browsers, news-readers for internet needs, OpenOffice for word processing, spread sheets and databases, EDA (Kicad) for electronic design and Quanta for web design.
11. We use it at server level and on the desktop. We run our websites on it, use it for mail serving and have written our own software under GPL. We also use Firefox for web browsing, the GIMP and OpenOffice (under Windows and Linux) and some desktop PCs run an OSS desktop. We have used it to setup a temporary training facility (thin terminals)
12. We use open source for web development - Linux servers, Apache, MySQL
13. yes - lots mostly OpenOffice, but have desktop, proxy, web-filtering, etc

Partly

1. Anti Spyware
2. Current website is FOSS based, including the Backstage management db/wiki systems
3. Email client and outsourced web & mail server is FOSS based
4. Linux-based mail server
5. Moodle as a VLE
6. offer training in IT to the community
7. OpenOffice, Browsers
8. OpenOffice, NeoOffice Firefox Thunderbird
9. SME Server, Meeting Room Booking System and are looking at Joomla and Ruby on Rails
10. Zope, Plone, Firefox
11. Small applications running on a Microsoft environment, i.e. PDF Creator

What would make FOSS your first choice?

	What would make it your first choice?	What did make it your first choice?
More Usability/ more Learnability/ less Complexity	11	0
Cost	9	2
Better support	6	1
Suitability	5	2
Reliability	4	1
Better Compatibility/ Migration	4	0
Security	2	0
Training availability	2	0
Distrust of proprietary companies	2	0
Wider use	1	0
Management buy-in	1	0
Users experiencing OS	1	2
Existing corporate applications	1	0
Adaptability	0	1

What are the 3 main priorities driving your organisation's ICT use?

Cost/ value	18	Empowering members	3
Information delivery/ Communications	10	Reliability	3
Usability	10	Financial reporting	3
Client management	6	Avoiding lock-in	2
Standards/ Compatibility	4	Accessibility	1
VCS developments	3	Ethics	1

What would you invent?

"*I don't want to invent anything, just be more aware of what's out there and for it to be documented in plain English not geek language"*

"*All been invented"*

Client Management

- Client recording system to support telephone based enquiries which would allow rapid recording of the details of telephone enquiries and advice for later input into our central case management system
- Box Office/Management System Backstage booking management system
- Customer Case File Management Suite
- Contact management software
- Application to track visitor numbers and record volunteer hours
- Web based course/attendance management and booking system
- Contact Management Database
- Light-weight membership management/contact system
- Equivalent of Outlook Web Access with manageable contact folders and integrating the equivalent of a CRM solution so we can all know what has been communicated to whom

Financial Management

- Finance management
- Financial package for project management of VCS that are grant funded
- Accounting/bookkeeping program that imports from proprietary accounting databases correctly to remove cost of commercial software while holding past records, and will hold and keeps data for more than 6 years records as IR requirements
- Allotment site specific accounting suite
- Easy to use accounts system for charity finances

Organisational Admin

- Integrated package to incorporate organizational, financial and beneficiary information
- Timesheet Software for the voluntary sector which includes flexi-time capabilities
- Word processor readable by everyone
- Acceptable Use Policy Monitor which monitors web use and reports via e-mail any suspicious (i.e. porn) activity
- Automatic audit reporting tool which would run on any client OS and send a customisable report back

Information/ Communications

- Secure email-based query management system to allow clients to securely and confidentially contact us via email
- Standard template for recording and transmitting data about allotment sites
- Communications/ data/ voip

Knowledge Management

- Web-based task/ project/ knowledge management system
- Integrated Information System with remote access

Media

- DTP package acceptable to commercial printers that could also convert to other formats e.g. for website, email

Website Development

- Fully and easily usable website CMS

Software Development

- Better support for requirements analysis and reuse. better support for application service provision. better support for agile software development
- Currently developing in house database using PostgreSQL/Apache/PHP
- We have our own developer and can invent as we go along

Sector Development

- Funding management suite which all public funding bodies were obliged to adopt. This would ensure a common reporting framework for public projects and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort by those volunteer organizations responsible for project delivery, thus allowing them to focus their efforts on their real VolCom targets

FOSS support agencies' responses to survey

Compared to the detail provided by FOSS users, the suppliers' responses to the survey were less informative than hoped.

Open source services offered

Communications	13
Network Management	11
Web development	11
Security	4
Strategic Development/Project Management	4
Advocacy/ Awareness raising	4
Office applications	3
Integration	3
Hosting	2
Software development	2
Databases	2
Customer Relations	2
Media	2
Training	2

Location of respondents by region

NE	3
NW	2
YH	7
WM	1
EM	1
E	2
SW	1
SE	2
L	2
Scotland	2
UK wide	7

Do you offer special rates to VCS organisations?

None	7	Only work with VCS	5
Discretionary	6	Free	2
Yes	6		

Ad hoc comments given in responses to survey

The reader will see that a number of the ad hoc comments below refer to the survey document format and similar matters of software and technology choice.

In response for the project, FOSS formats are not widely used in the target survey population at present (at least the VCS component of the sample) and the choice to use the current 'most widely used' format benefited the survey overall.

Nevertheless, the element of frustration in some of the comments is recognised. It arises out of the 'chicken and egg' problem FOSS advocates face concerning (1) continuing widespread use of technologies that are not as 'open' as they would want while (2) their technologies struggle to gain equally widespread acceptance as being 'conventional' too.

- *I'm sure you all mean well, but to those of us who are already committed to free and open source software, your survey vehicle is quite peculiar indeed. My primary workstation is running Ubuntu Linux; Web browser, Firefox. The PDF viewer is called Evince. All are FOSS -- but this survey is not. In the future perhaps you could look at some data capture alternatives from the FOSS universe? Even surveymonkey.com would be a viable alternative.*

- *I am an open source developer. I have read your questionnaires, and they all seem rather general. One of the main items that always comes up when considering open source, is the problem of migrating from the current closed source application to a new open source application. It would really help the open source community if you were able to build up a list of applications that only work in proprietary closed source environment. One would then prioritise them based on feedback from the users, and the open source community could then target development efforts towards those applications that most prevent users moving to using open source software.*

- *Is there a version of the survey which I can use with open source software? I'm a supplier who would love to fill it in, but I use evince rather than Acrobat. Could you save the form in OpenOffice.org format or something?*

- *I tried to fill in the survey forms but the fields didn't work very well on my Mac and the buttons also didn't work. I've done the best I could.*

- *Very sorry for my last email. My point about not having Adobe's Acrobat Reader was more oriented towards .pdf format. I had the belief that it was closed. This is far from being true.*

- *I've completed and attached your survey of organisations that provide FOSS support to the voluntary sector. I hope you can read it as I'm still using Acrobat 6 but it seemed to more or less work. One thing your survey didn't ask was what might support organisations offer to the sector, and one thing we'd really like to do is run a portal that provided information and support resources for particular applications identified as useful for voluntary orgs because one of the problems that we identify for organisations taking up FOSS applications is the poor quality of support materials - e.g. help systems, tutorials, technical advice on installation, configuration etc. A lot of*

stuff is written for geeks by geeks and although it's friendly enough it doesn't take end users sufficiently into account. We're not running this type of portal as yet because we don't have the time to do it properly but if there's any way some of that time could be paid for, we'd be delighted to run the service.

- *I am interested in volunteering to help promote the use of Open Source by the voluntary and community sector. Can you put me in touch with anyone in the Aberdeen and Deeside area?*

- *I was asked to pass your survey address on to organisations that I know. However, I am surprised to see that readers are told they "require version 7 of Acrobat Reader" in order to participate.*
  1. *Can you publish instructions for participating with free/open source software? My copy of GNU Ghostscript gave an error on the PDFs which I can forward on request if it would help.*
  2. *Do you agree that requiring use of non-free/open software will bias the responses you receive?*
  3. *Are you aware of the history of Acrobat's publisher Adobe, the DMCA and Dmitry Sklyarov?*
  4. *I see that a prize of a Nokia Internet Tablet is offered. Are you aware of Nokia's support for European software patents, which would threaten free/open source software?*
  5. *Do you think these links to the Adobe and Nokia corporations will further bias the responses you receive?*

- *E-mail surveys would be better made using html forms rather than with a proprietary, closed source program.*

- *Good luck. There are many niche markets in the sector (i.e. membership management, conference organizing) that are ripe for a collaborative effort (several competing efforts?) to produce viable alternatives to the expensive, closed source, boutique software systems that many charities have to use.*

- *Government agencies national and local must broadcast the message that FOSS software is approved for use and is acceptable for transactions.*

- *I believe progress on establishing a common standard for documents is fundamental to giving FOSS mainstream appeal (as well as the usability argument).*

- *I would like to see the provision of free (or minimal cost) training for VCS groups and organisations on topics such as Using Linux, Setting up & Installing Linux desktops & servers, Developing using Ruby on Rails, Setting up and using LAMP web services, Using CMSes (such as Joomla). Other areas that need resources and time directed towards them are establishing consultancy & support groups/organisations for Linux*

and Open Source applications as current the lack of these is an inhibitor to many organisations adopting their use.

- *I'd love to move people on into use of open source. Any help you can give, through surveys, advice, etc., gratefully received.*

- *Just the one issue. You ask us to fill-in this form on use of FOSS and yet the form cannot be used in FOSS pdf readers (kpdf, xpdf etc.) because it requires Adobe Reader to send the content back to you. Seems a little daft to exclude people using FOSS in a survey about FOSS use in the VCS :o). I am aware that Acrobat reader & is available for Linux but I prefer to use FOSS where possible not proprietary clients running on a FOSS desktop. Would a web form have not made more sense - even with the potential viral marketing you are hoping for - indeed I received notice of this survey by e-mail but nobody sent me the pdf so it kind of gets on ones nerves if I go to a web site to do a survey only to have to then download and fill in a proprietary form! :o)*

- *Most open source software relies on input from users to improve it and many potential users will not have the time, interest or technical skills to do this. You seem to need to work out how to do things for yourself (although I understand the message boards supporting these are very helpful we don't all understand the language!)*

- *Need some funding to explore this in our region - we have identified a need for a professional reliable means of delivering FOSS to the VCS - the ability to provide a complete package of support including training.*

- *Perhaps (maybe you are doing this already) you should have a documentation library as well as developers forums for the many F.O.S.S. strands that exist that we could tap into as documentation is hard to find sometimes.*

- *Why when asking about FOSS do you set up your questionnaire to require proprietary software to e-mail it back to you. I know that I can run Acrobat Reader under SuSe Linux but I prefer to keep to all OSS.*