



Free and Open Source Project Fund Playbook

Johns Hopkins University - Open Source Programs Office

The Free and Open Source Project Fund (FOSSProF) is a grant program run by the Johns Hopkins University Open Source Programs Office (OSPO) that provides funding and support to open source software projects and practitioners at JHU.

This playbook is provided as a resource for JHU OSPO staff as well as staff at academic OSPOs or similar offices who would like to run a grant program similar to FOSSProF in support of campus open-source software development.

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Introduction

The OSPO is a center of competency for open source at JHU, committed to fostering an engaged open source community among faculty, researchers, staff, and students in the JHU ecosystem. The OSPO provides support, resources, tools, consulting, and training for those engaged in creating, advancing, and sustaining open source initiatives.

FOSSProF is a funding program that is open to faculty, researchers, staff, and students at the University that are working on creating, developing, or contributing to open source projects. Through FOSSProF, the OSPO works with OSS practitioners on campus to identify, design, and execute projects that: improve software quality, functionality, or documentation; increase visibility, adoption, or community engagement; and establish or evolve project governance.

The FOSSProF program can assist OSPO staff in answering questions such as:

- What challenges are faced by OSS projects created in the campus environment?
- What are the factors that contribute to the success of OSS projects on campus?
- How can the OSPO best support the needs of OSS projects on campus?

The first iteration of FOSSProF, held during the 2023-2024 academic year, was generously funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Successful execution of a Free and Open Source Project Fund requires clear definition of roles and responsibilities among staff members. While organizational structure will vary across institutions, several key functions need to be covered throughout the program lifecycle, including OSPO management, finance and/or grants administration, institutional leadership, and communications/outreach.

Suggested roles and associated responsibilities:

- Program Director - overall program oversight, budget approvals, final funding decisions, main point of contact for senior leadership and funders.
- Program Manager - day-to-day program operations including marketing and outreach, main point of contact/communication for reviewers, submitters, and awardees, meeting and event planning
- Review Committee - evaluate proposals, provide feedback
- Financial Manager - budget tracking, grant compliance, financial reporting

A “RACI” chart, short for Responsible / Accountable / Consulted / Informed, is an easy way to show who is doing what on a project. A sample RACI chart for FOSSProF is below:

Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Program Manager Review Committee Financial Manager	Program Director	OSPO Advisors Funders Communications	Dean, Provost, VP (senior leadership for the OSPO's broader organizational unit) External affairs

Program Design

Phase 1 - Planning

The planning phase lays the groundwork for a successful project. During this phase, OSPO staff should establish the focus and goals of the program, determine success metrics, create a communications and outreach plan, and ensure all stakeholders are informed and prepared.

Financial planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Determine the overall budget for the program, including awards, OSPO staff time, travel (e.g. conference presentations), technology, event planning, and overhead● Determine the total amount available for FOSSProF awards and the financial structure of the program.● Answer questions such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What is the maximum amount of funding available to each applicant?○ What are the limitations on what will be funded (e.g. no tuition reimbursement)?
Program focus	<p>What is the focus or theme of this iteration of FOSSProF? What is in and out of scope? Potential themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● OS roles: creators, maintainers, contributors● OS themes: security, sustainability, documentation, diversity, reproducibility, etc.● Career stage: Early career students or postdocs vs senior researchers and teaching faculty
Goals and objectives <i>(specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound)</i>	<p>Identify the specific end goals of this iteration of FOSSProF. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● How will this funding help OS projects on campus?● How will funded projects be able to define, increase, and measure the impact of FOSSProF funding; for example, by increasing adoption, building community, citation growth, etc.● How will this iteration of FOSSProF advance the mission of the OSPO, the OSPO's broader organizational unit, the University, etc.● How will the OSPO define and measure success?● What questions will FOSSProF allow the OSPO to answer?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the definition of success for the FOSSProF initiative?
Schedule planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review playbook to identify key milestones and dependencies ● Meet with departments whose work intersects with FOSSProF (e.g. finance, HR) to share project activities that require their input or resources and determine reasonable time estimates ● Map out approval process and timelines for senior leadership ● Build a draft schedule based on playbook activities and partner department estimates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A suggested timeline based on a 24-month cycle is provided below. ● Share timeline with stakeholders for feedback and revise as necessary
Outreach and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify the target audience for outreach. Contacts can be gathered from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individuals, departments, lists, groups ○ Previous grantees ○ Data mining shared research platforms such as code repositories and research information datasets ○ University colleagues in the library (subject experts), technology transfer, and research administration ○ List or catalog of campus open source projects ● Share schedule and plan with senior leadership, finance, and external affairs (grants) ● Identify and invite reviewers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mix of division colleagues, subject matter experts, and/or previous grantees ○ Provide enough detail about time commitment and timeline so invitees can make an informed decision
Documentation <i>Write or review existing</i>	<p>Create or update the following program documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding announcement - web, email, shareable PDF ● Proposal guidelines ● Application webform ● Review invitation and rubric ● Review webform

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Award letter, Terms and conditions, financial information● Final report template |
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Note: in this and the following phases, documents for which a template is provided are **bolded** and highlighted in **blue**.

Phase 2 - Outreach and Review

The Outreach and Review phase includes all activities from the initial funding announcement to the final award decisions. The core goals of this phase are to effectively promote the opportunity, facilitate a fair and thorough review process, and select projects that align with the program’s goals.

<p>Announcement distribution & applicant communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Post proposal guidelines and application form ● Distribute funding announcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Email distribution channels ○ Social media ○ OSPO website, Broader organizational unit website/blog ● Schedule and hold open houses for Q&A ● Schedule 1:1 meetings as requested
<p>Proposal intake & review preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add all proposals to shared folder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Naming format: Date Submitted_PI Name_Proposal Short Name ● Create a proposal register with Contact/PI name, title/summary/link to full proposal, budget request, assistance requested (e.g. staff, travel, hardware), notes, and checklist for next steps ● Check proposal for completeness, return to contact/PI with any questions, clarifications, or requested revisions ● OSPO Staff perform initial review, hold back from reviewers any proposals that do not fit the funding call ● Determine final list of proposals to share with reviewers
<p>Reviewer guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create reviewer instructions/rubric based on the elements in the program proposal and overall program goals and objectives. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Proposal element</i> - Problem Statement: Please provide a clear and concise description of the problem or need that your project is addressing or the research topic you are considering. ○ <i>Review rubric</i> - Is the problem well-defined and relevant to the open source community at Hopkins?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To keep the review process simple, use a mix of Likert scale answers (1-5, strongly agree-strongly disagree) and free text.
Review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create PDF versions of all proposals ● Depending on the number of proposals, assign whole group or batches to reviewers ● Hold reviewer kickoff meeting, share instructions/rubric and review web form ● Collect and compile reviewer feedback and scores ● Meet with reviewers for feedback session, ask for any clarifications, additional thoughts
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyze review committee recommendations ● Think about total budget available, schools/divisions/departments represented, project relevance to FOSSProF goals ● Make funding recommendation to senior leadership ● Finalize funding decisions
Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share with successful applicants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Award letter - requesting acceptance of award ○ Terms & conditions ○ Final report template ● Share with finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Awardee list with PI and total amount awarded ○ Budget breakdown for each project with expenses by general line item (e.g. postdocs, faculty, hardware) ● Share with unsuccessful applicants
Outreach and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share list of funded projects with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ OSPO website, Broader organizational unit website/blog ○ Social media ○ Suggest for University PR, newsletters, etc. ○ OSPO Advisors ○ Organizational unit announcement lists
Financial planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finance to create billing codes for all projects ● Share financial information with projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approved budget with line items

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Cost center / billing code○ Process for requesting budget reallocations● If projects are student-led, confirm ability to hire, submit reimbursements, etc.
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Phase 3 - Execution

The Execution phase focuses on managing project grantees throughout their project lifecycle, including funding disbursements, tracking project progress, documenting project outcomes and impact, and holding a summative event to showcase awardees' work.

<p>Outreach and communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create new Slack, Teams, or other real-time chat channel for FOSSProF iteration ● Create email list with all contacts and PIs
<p>Project kickoff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with all awardees to go through award letters, answer any questions, confirm reporting schedule, establish communication standards (e.g. Slack for chit chat, email for official communications) ● Presentation from finance, especially for new PIs - what the codes are, how to use them, who to contact for help
<p>Reporting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Request bi-monthly updates from each project, include schedule in award letter ● Send email reminders for regular status reports ● Share status reports with program leadership via shared space such as a wiki or shared Team or Drive folder. ● Share final report template ● Send email reminders for final reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reminder 60 and 30 days out to submit final reports ● Collect final reports
<p>Financial planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and approve (or not) budget reallocation requests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review request ○ Confirm approval with Program Director ○ Respond to PI ○ Update budget worksheet ● End of project budget reminders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reminder 60 and 30 days out to submit final budget requests ● Collect final budget reports

Summative Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Determine format of event - in person, online, or hybrid?● Schedule event● Develop event program, including a mix of:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Presentations from grantees○ Talks or conversations with senior leadership, open-source advocates, and/or invited outside guests○ Ample time for community building, networking, and information conversations among attendees● Develop and execute outreach campaign for event<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Invitation template● Manage event logistics:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Identify and book space or online platform○ If in person, identify and book catering○ If in person, identify and book technical support○ Determine collateral needs, e.g. printed agendas, information about funded projects, or promotional materials for OSPO services● Hold event
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Phase 4 - Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation phase is to assess the overall success of the program against the metrics established in Phase 1. During this phase, the program team should gather feedback from program participants, analyze program impact, and document lessons learned.

Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Retrospectives<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Create/review feedback questions for awardees○ Hold “exit interviews” for each project to discuss final reports, ask feedback questions, etc.○ Hold retrospective meeting with finance and external affairs○ Hold retrospective meeting with OSPO staff and FOSSProF team● Collate metrics, analyze, and assess<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Suggested metrics/questions to answer:○ Types of activities proposed in all submitted projects. Were resource gaps centered around specific activities? Did certain types of activities result in improved sustainability or additional impact?○ Funding amounts requested across all submitted projects. What was the range of funding requested? Where did most proposals fall across this range? Was there a connection between funding requested and resulting impact?○ Success rate of funded projects. To what extent did each project achieve the goals laid out in their proposals? Did the most “successful” projects have any common characteristics? What might it look like to target projects with these characteristics in a second funding round?○ Common roadblocks or challenges. Were similar obstacles encountered across projects? How did different projects overcome obstacles? What can we learn from their experiences?○ Impact of FOSSProF funding on community engagement. For projects that wanted to use FOSSProF funding to improve engagement, what results did they see and how are they measuring/identifying that improvement?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Long-term sustainability of projects and/or FOSSProF-funded activities. Do projects feel FOSSProF funding improved their project's prospects for long-term sustainability? If so, how are they measuring that sentiment? Are there specific activities they would like to continue? What could the OSPO do to continue to support projects after the funding period? ● Identify insights, conclusions
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Receive and review final reports from awardees ● Create final report for FOSSProF iteration (internal or external if outside funding)
Outreach and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share final results of project with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ OSPO website, Broader organizational unit website/blog ○ Social media ○ Suggest for University PR, newsletters, etc. ○ OSPO Advisors ○ Organizational unit announcement lists

Suggested Timeline

From initial planning through final evaluation, the full FOSSProF cycle fits well into a 24 month period, but can be condensed if needed. To ease student hiring, it is recommended to align the timeline with the academic calendar. It is important to allow sufficient time for each phase; a rushed process may not allow projects time to complete their goals and objectives or recover from unexpected roadblocks.

Sample Schedule - one iteration aligned to the academic calendar

Year 1 Fall	Year 1 Spring	Year 1 Summer	Year 2 Fall	Year 2 Spring	Year 2 Summer
Phase 1 Planning	Phase 2 Outreach and Review	Phase 3 Execution	Phase 3 Execution	Phase 3 Execution	Phase 4 Evaluation

Sample Schedule - successive iterations aligned to the academic calendar

Year 1 Fall	Year 1 Spring	Year 1 Summer	Year 2 Fall	Year 2 Spring	Year 2 Summer	Year 3 Fall	Year 3 Spring
Round 1 Phase 1 Planning	Round 1 Phase 2 Outreach and Review	Round 1 Phase 3 Execution	Round 1 Phase 3 Execution	Round 1 Phase 3 Execution	Round 1 Phase 4 Evaluation		
			Round 2 Phase 1 Planning	Round 2 Phase 2 Outreach and Review	Round 2 Phase 3 Execution	Round 2 Phase 3 Execution	Round 2 Phase 3 Execution
						Round 3 Phase 1 Planning	Round 3 Phase 4 Outreach and Review

Lessons Learned

The following list includes specific, practical lessons learned from the first iteration of FOSSProF at Johns Hopkins University. Institutional contexts will differ, so playbook users are encouraged to adapt the lessons learned as needed and document new lessons as FOSSProF is executed.

- Make sure to allow enough time for each phase of the program. Get finance (and/or other departments you will depend on) early on to fully understand how much time they'll need for each element of the plan.
- Provide instructions for grantees on how to spend their grant money - are there specific budget codes, how do reimbursements work, etc. Potentially hold an information session with finance or HR to answer any questions. Students and new faculty especially may not be familiar with all the processes.
- The initial iteration of FOSSProF had a rolling deadline for proposals, this led to some folks reaching out early on and then not submitting a proposal once a final deadline was added. It's better to set the schedule in advance and let everyone know.
- Be sure to provide a budget template and require budget numbers with each proposal.
- Clarify in the budget section of the proposal guidelines what types of line items are *not* allowed (e.g. tuition reimbursement).
- Clarify with grantees how they should / should not account for overhead in their budgets. Make sure accounting systems and budget updates are accounting for overhead.
- Send all proposal materials to reviewers at once instead of as they're received.
- Ask for project background information with proposals so reviewers don't have to search for it, e.g. project website, GitHub repositories, articles.
- Ensure proposal forms include questions about how grantees plan to sustain the project in the longer term.

Document Templates

All document templates are available for download on the JHU OSPO website:

<https://ospo.library.jhu.edu/services/free-and-open-source-software-project-fund-fossprof/playbook/>

- A. Funding announcement / RFP
- B. Proposal guidelines
- C. Reviewer invitation
- D. Reviewer rubric
- E. Award letter
- F. Terms and conditions
- G. Final report template
- H. Summative event invitation template
- I. Feedback questions for awardees