Early Insights on Aligning FOSS and Funders

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FOSDEM 2026 - DevRoom: Funding the FOSS Ecosystem

RI. SE Bitergia Creighton UNIVERSITY

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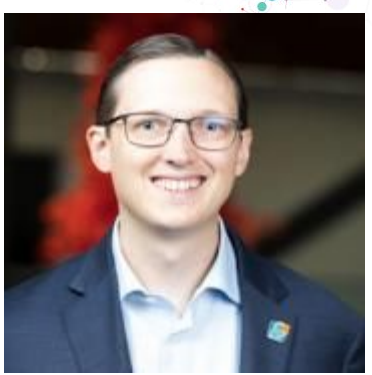

Georg Link

Open Source Strategist and Director of Sales at Bitergia

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Vision, strategy, and Impact Logic

- The way we talk about impact isn’t neutral—it shapes what gets funded, what gets measured, and ultimately what work is valued
- Funders’ visions shape everything—including what “counts” as impact
- Impact follows a funder-defined “logic chain,” **not** neutral outcomes

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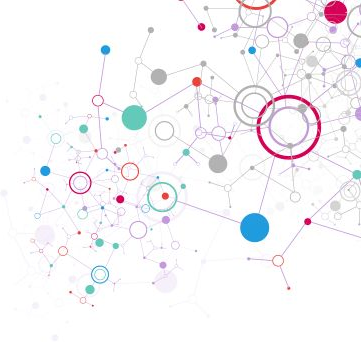
Vision, Strategy and Impact Logic - Workshop reflections



- “Trust Model—and Its Fragility”
  - Many funders explicitly aim to donate to people they trust to do the work, not to tightly scoped deliverables.
  - This can create fragility - when trust is personal rather than institutional, organizations become vulnerable to staff turnover, retirements, or relationship breakdowns.
- Goal - Signal - Metric model
  - Can be used to create an impact logic, breaking down goals into questions to ask and signals to look for, and then definite metrics appropriately

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Operationalisation of impact

- Short-term deliverables dominate how impact is operationalized
- Sustainability work is undervalued because success often looks like “nothing happened.”
- Funding structures bias what can be measured
- Strategic flexibility is needed—but hard to reconcile with stakeholder accountability

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Operationalisation of Impact - Workshop reflections

- There are Scaling Limits for Trust-Based Models
  - Reliance on personal trust becomes a bottleneck, pushing systems toward proposal-writing and performative reporting
- Shifting Definitions of Success
  - Funding priorities are highly dynamic—moving from security to AI to the next “hot topic”—while structural problems remain unresolved. Each shift brings new actors who must relearn old lessons, leading to repeated cycles of rediscovery rather than cumulative progress.
- Continuity Problems in Funding
  - Administrative turnover and policy shifts, undermine long-term continuity and reinforce short-term framing of success.

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Types of impact

- **Financial ROI**: Funders value economic impact framing, but open source lacks shared methods to translate proactive maintenance and security work into clear financial terms.
- **Security & Sustainability**: Security and sustainability are key impact signals, though difficult to quantify
- **Downstream Use & Adoption**: Adoption (broad or targeted) is a primary marker of impact, acting as a multiplier for security risk and supply-chain value.
- **Innovation & Public Good**: Open-sourcing new technologies and meeting standards like DPG can itself constitute ROI by delivering high-quality public goods.

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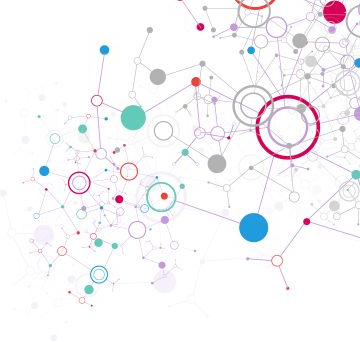

Types of impact - Workshop reflections

- Adoption as a Central Metric of Impact
  - Adoption (downstream use) is consistently viewed as the most important signal.
  - Niche projects may still warrant funding if they underpin critical verticals.
  - Impact ≠ number of users alone:
    - Community contributions
    - Downstream dependencies
    - Project responsiveness and governance maturity

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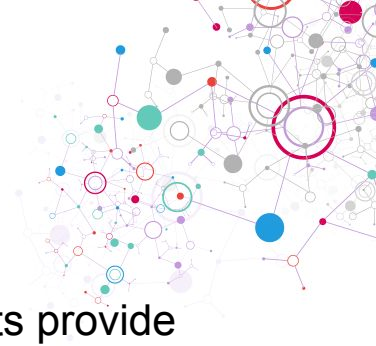
Types of impact - Workshop reflections



- Security impact is inherently hard to quantify
  - Vulnerabilities prevented or avoided are invisible; Security audits provide value even if nothing is found - evidence of attention.
- Audits as ROI
  - For many funders and foundations, audits are the primary visible output - How quickly projects respond to CVEs? Whether issues recur? Whether projects have security processes (mailing lists, procedures)?
- Rapid security reviews & proxies
  - Organisations use proxies: release cadence, CVE lifetime, responsiveness, etc.

Measurement approach

- Quantitative metrics support credibility—but narratives carry meaning
- Establishing a baseline is critical for demonstrating progress
- Overly generic frameworks risk erasing important forms of impact, however, funders need some degree of common structure to aggregate results
- Infrastructure impact is easier to measure than human sustainability

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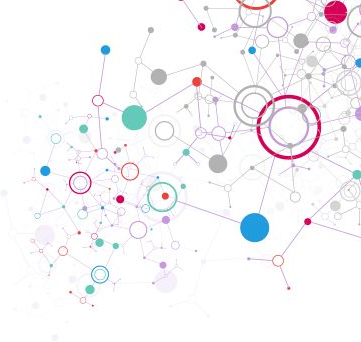
Measurement approach - Workshop reflections



- Maintainer health is a critical blind spot
- Burnout, capacity constraints, and leadership continuity issues often precede security or sustainability failures.
- Suggestion: a maintainer burnout survey, similar to wellness surveys in eldercare, run continuously.

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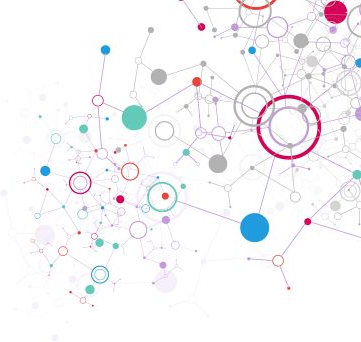
Impact reporting



- Long-term impact is acknowledged but not captured
- Reporting formats privilege short-term success over ecosystem learning
- Impact communication must be audience-specific
- Impact reporting is often about legitimacy

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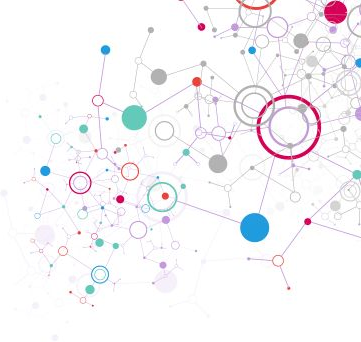
Impact reporting - Workshop reflections



- Impact often emerges too late for funding cycles
  - Annual budget cycles make long-term impact hard to demonstrate.
- Impact needs to be defined up-front
- Reporting must be proportional
  - Heavy reporting burdens (e.g., NSF-like) discourage projects from applying.
  - Funders need clearer upfront expectations:
  - “Tell me what to report so I can show it next year.”

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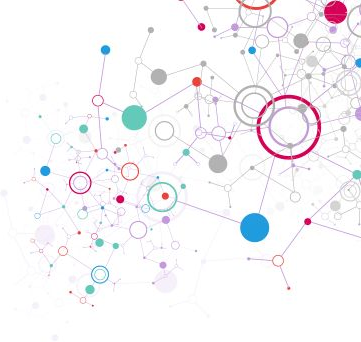

Opportunities for Collaboration

- Maintainer burnout survey
- Measurement and impact options - list of proxy signals
- Setting expectations with donors (budget owners)
- Setting expectations with projects

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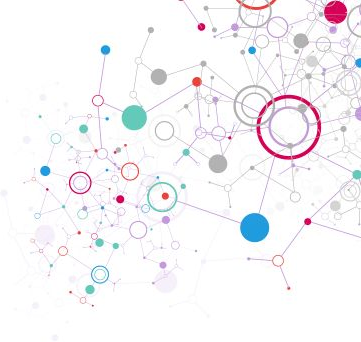
Thank you!



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