

Making Impact Visible in Funding of Open Source Software: A Study of the Funders Perspective

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Open Source funding needed but heavily limited

- Open Source Software (OSS) is critical digital infrastructure underpinning modern systems
- Over 90% of proprietary software includes OSS components.
- Despite its importance, OSS remains significantly underfunded
- Demand for funding exceeds available resources across the ecosystem
- Improving how funding impact is understood is essential for sustainability.



Difficult to capture and communicate funding impact

- Funding impact is difficult to define, measure, and communicate effectively.
- Existing approaches are fragmented and highly context-dependent.
- Metrics often rely on ad-hoc narratives from individual projects.
- This limits transparency and comparability across initiatives
- As a result, sustaining and scaling funding remains challenging.



How do funders conceptualise funding impact?

- The study investigates how OSS funders conceptualize funding impact.
- It examines how impact is measured and reported in practice.
- It also explores implications for long-term sustainability
- A key aim is to understand funder decision-making and evaluation
- Ultimately, the goal is to improve effectiveness, accountability, and availability of funding.



Research approach

- The study is based on qualitative research methods.
- It includes 25 interviews across funders, recipients, and researchers.
- Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.
- Findings were validated through a multi-stakeholder workshop at FOSDEM.
- The approach captures diverse perspectives across the OSS ecosystem.



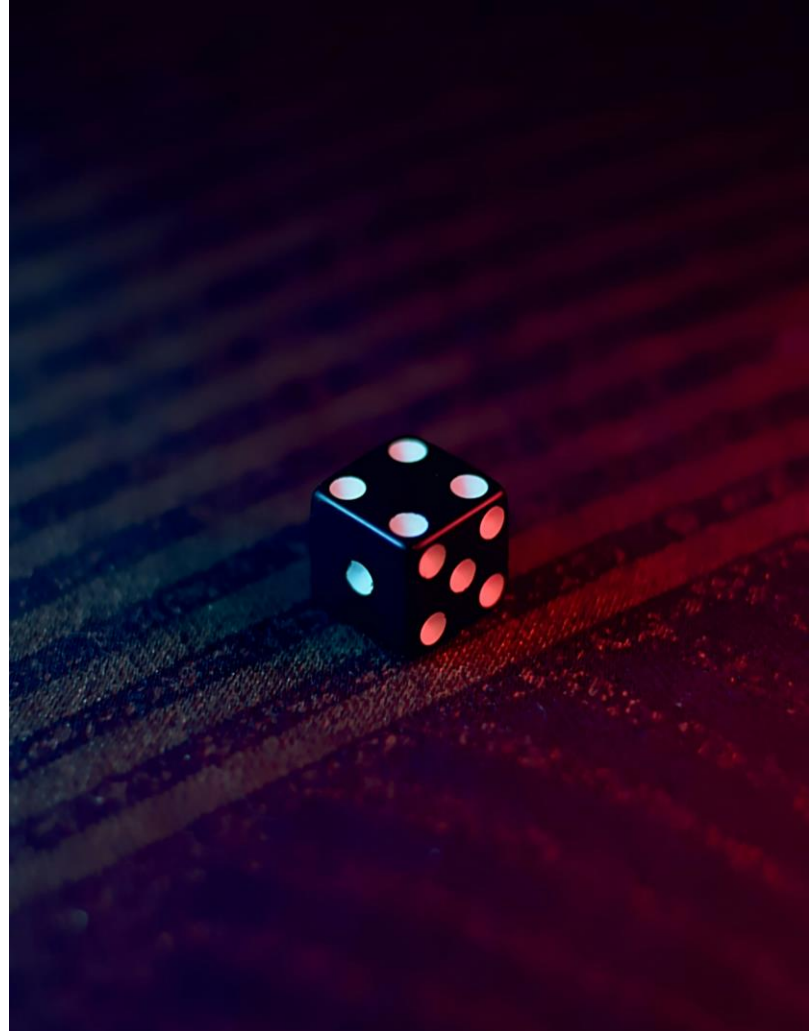
Key insights

- Measuring funding impact is a shared and complex challenge.
- Current practices emphasize short-term, milestone-based outputs.
- Qualitative narratives play a central role in evaluation.
- Long-term sustainability impacts are rarely captured systematically.
- This creates gaps between funding goals and outcomes.



Six aspects of impact capture and reporting

- Impact is shaped by six key aspects identified in the study.
- These include vision, strategy, and underlying impact logic.
- Operationalization defines how goals are translated into actions.
- Measurement and reporting shape how impact is communicated
- Together, they determine how funding impact is understood.



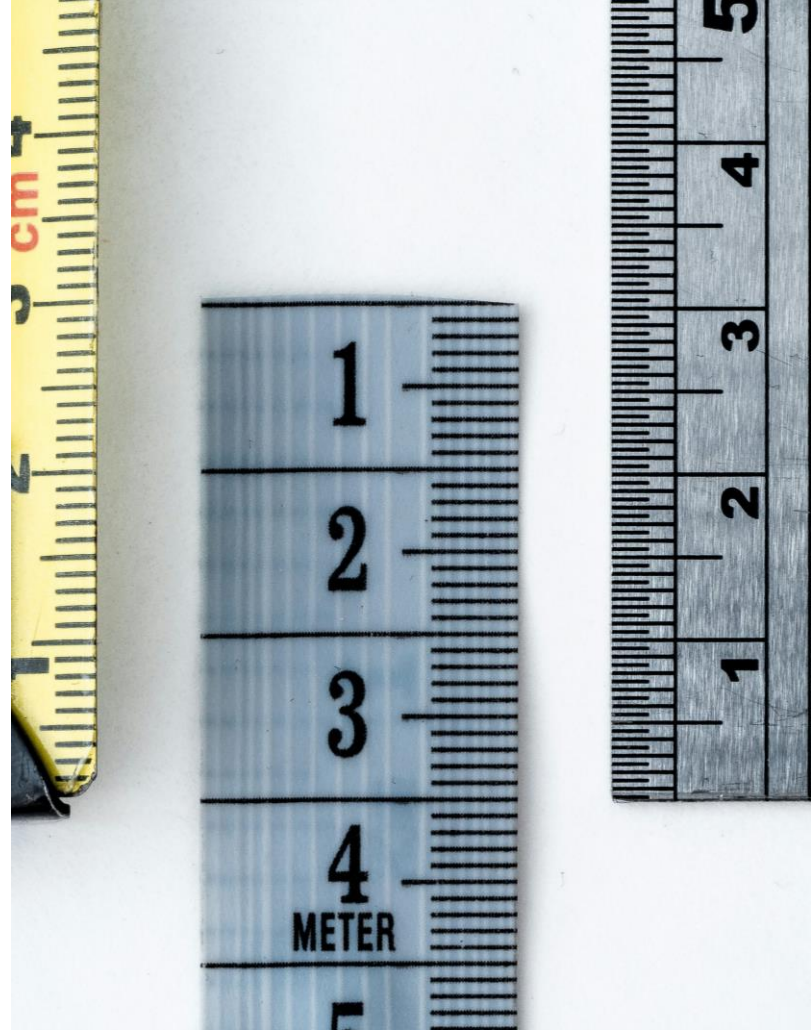
Structural bias to what is measured and communicated

- Funding evaluation is biased toward short-term deliverables
- Milestones such as audits, features or issues closed are prioritized.
- These outputs are easier to measure and justify.
- Long-term sustainability and risk reduction are harder to capture.
- As a result, important impacts remain undervalued.



Different types of impact

- Funders consider multiple dimensions of impact.
- These include technical, financial, social, and public-good aspects.
- Security, adoption, and ROI are commonly emphasized.
- Maintenance and human factors are less visible but critical.
- Goal-Signal-Metrics approach requested, tying impact logic with



Measurement challenges

- No shared framework exists for measuring OSS funding impact.
- Metrics are often tailored to individual projects.
- Quantitative indicators used (e.g., OpenSSF Scorecard, Security audits) but alone are insufficient.
- Qualitative context is needed to interpret results.
- Comparability and aggregation across projects are limited.



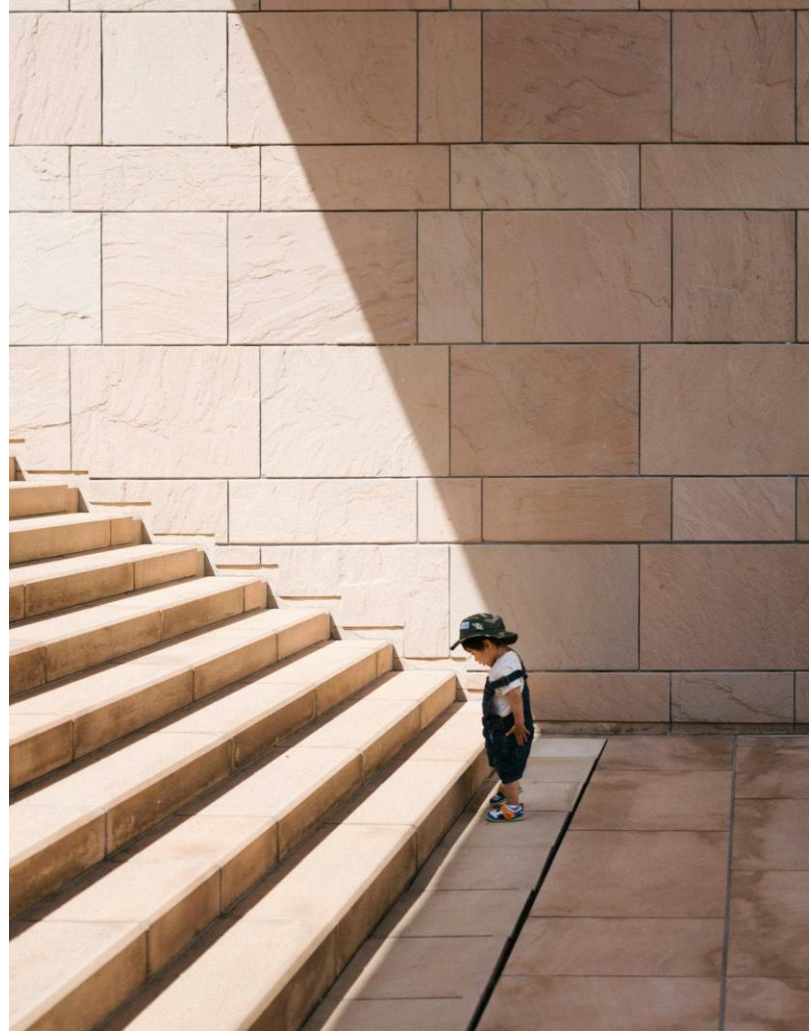
Impact reporting in practice

- Reporting focuses on communicating impact to stakeholders
- It often relies on narratives and case-based storytelling.
- Reports vary depending on target audience.
- Quantitative metrics support but do not replace narratives.
- Reporting helps justify continued funding.



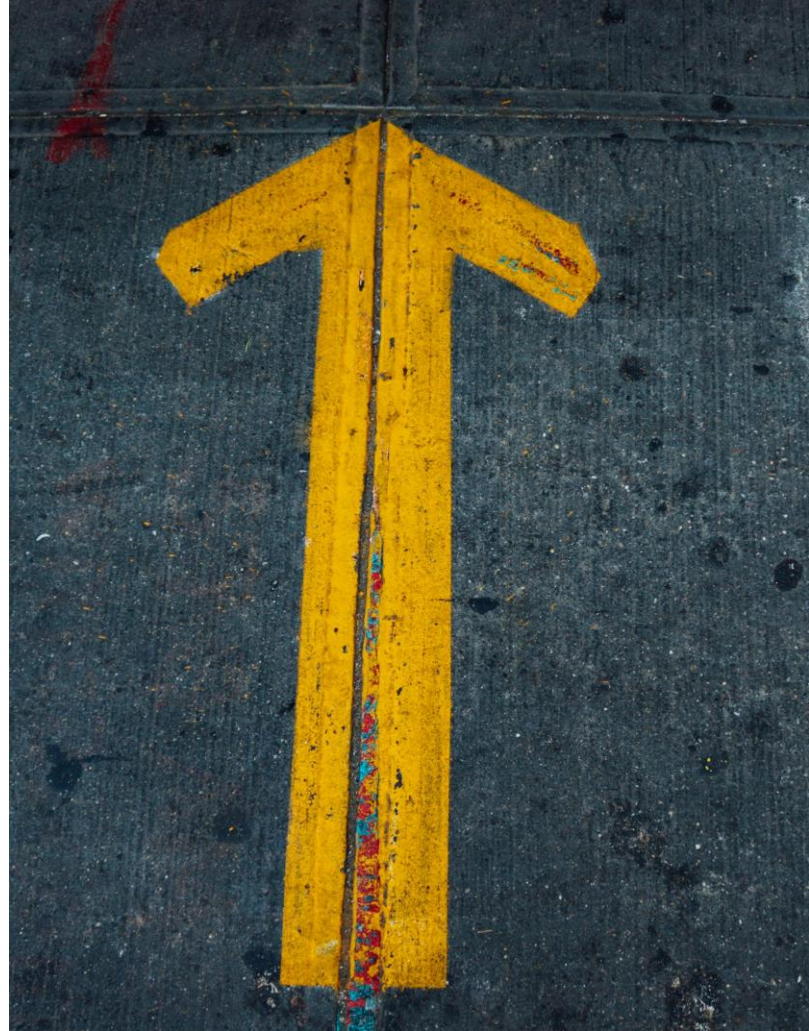
Key challenges faced at large

- There is misalignment between strategy, funding design, and impact logic.
- Funding structures incentivize short-term outputs.
- Human-centered sustainability is underrepresented
- A lack of shared language complicates communication.
- These issues limit systemic improvement.



Conclusions and implications

- Impact measurement requires more explicit conceptual frameworks.
- Shared meta-frameworks are preferred over universal metrics
- Better alignment can improve funding effectiveness.
- Stronger impact narratives can support funding justification.
- Ultimately, this supports the sustainability of OSS ecosystems.



Thank you!



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