

Nonprofit Use of FOSS Survey, 2008

The Survey

The survey was conducted during January of 2008. It was sent out on a variety of mailing lists that have subscribers in a wide range of roles in nonprofit organizations. One hundred and one completely filled out the survey (we only report results from those 101.)

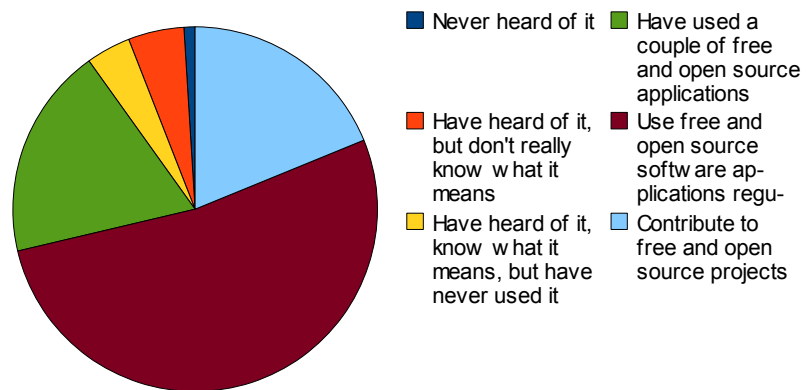
The respondents

Those that responded to the survey came from a very wide variety of types of organizations (and many organizations with multiple focus areas). The leading types were educational organizations (40%), advocacy organizations (35%) and “other” (34%.)

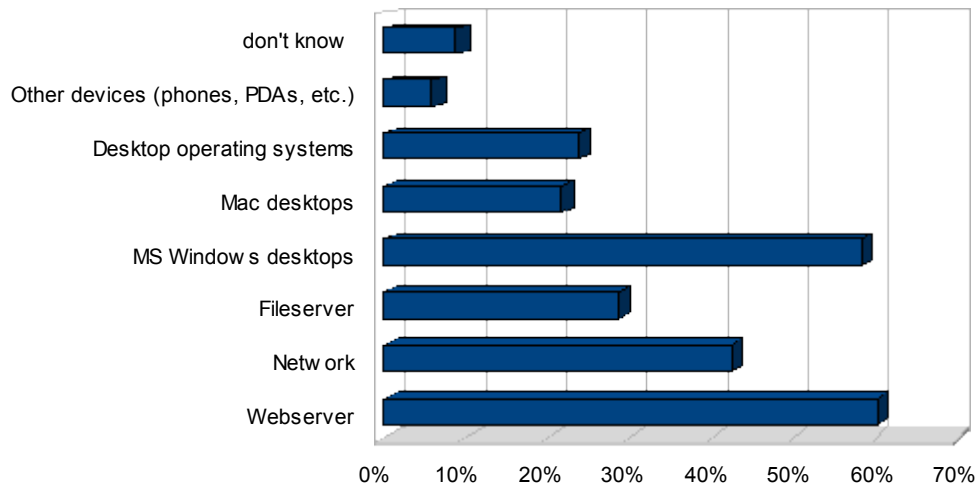
Open Source Knowledge

More than half of the respondents (53%) had a role (either part time, or full time) as technology staff. However, 93% roles in their organizations that were not technology related.

Most of the respondents were familiar with FOSS. 52% used FOSS applications regularly, and 19% contributed to FOSS projects. Interestingly, almost 30% of respondents (28.71%) were infrequent or non-users of FOSS.



Use of FOSS in nonprofits



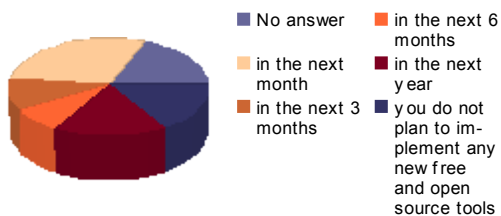
The organizations of the respondents used FOSS in a wide variety of contexts. 60% reported using it on their web servers, and almost 60% reported using it on MS Windows desktops. Many fewer used FOSS operating systems, such as Linux (23%).

(used in 80% of the respondents organizations,) Linux (44%), MySQL (50%), OpenOffice.org (38%), and Drupal (28%).

Specific applications used include Firefox

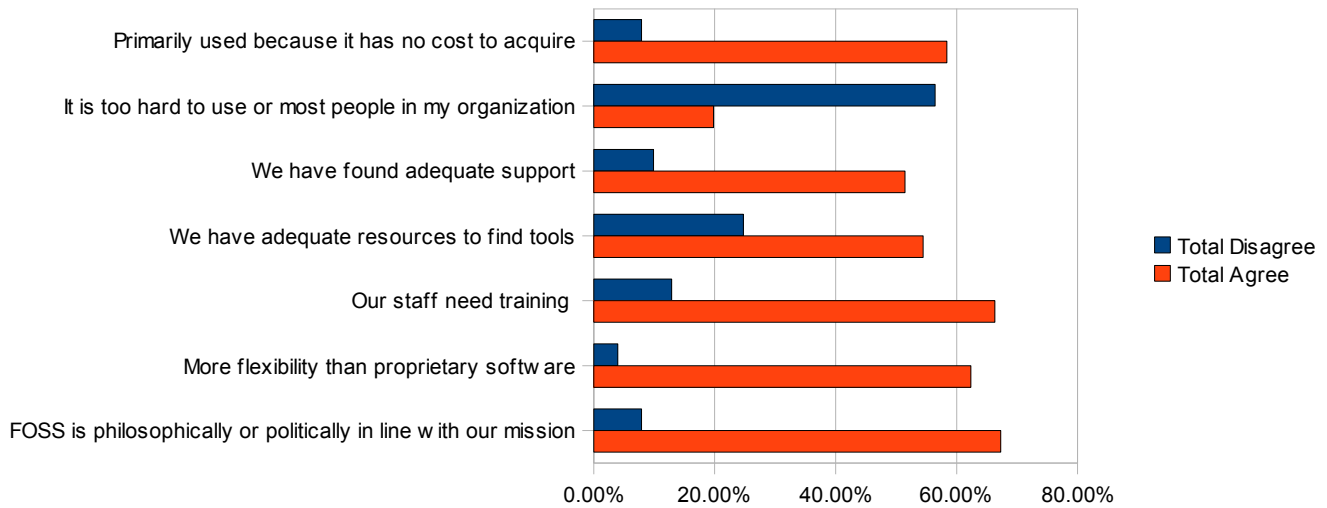
In organizations where FOSS is used, 72% of respondents used FOSS daily, while about 10% used FOSS once in a while or never. In most organizations that use outside vendors for technology support, those vendors support FOSS (62%).

Most respondent's organizations were going to implement new FOSS tools in the next year (65%).



Attitudes toward FOSS

In general, respondents agree that one primary reason their organizations use FOSS is because it has no cost to acquire (58% either Mostly Agree or Strongly Agree.) Most disagreed that FOSS was too hard to use (56%), and most respondents have found adequate support and resources to find and implement FOSS. Most respondents felt that their staff needed training in FOSS (66.33%). Most respondents find FOSS to be more flexible than proprietary software (62%). Surprisingly, 67% either mostly agreed, or strongly agreed, that the use of FOSS was philosophically or politically in line with their organization's mission.



In terms of what the most important reasons were for their organizations to implement FOSS, most said that a primary reason was that it was without cost to obtain (68%.) Other reasons included flexibility, feature set, and commitment to FOSS or open standards. A smaller number (21%) felt that support was a primary reason.



Organizational and Sector Barriers for FOSS

Respondents did indicate that there were still significant barriers to adoption of FOSS, both within their organizations, and in the sector as a whole. The primary barriers, both organizationally and sector-wide, was both the familiarity with proprietary tools (48% and 61% respectively), and the lack of expertise of organization staff with FOSS (56% and 52%

respectively). Lack of information (34% and 53% respectively), and lack of support 37% and 35% respectively) were two other barriers that were significant to respondents.

Comments from Respondents

There were some interesting comments from respondents that are worth quoting.

In terms of barriers, both organizational and sector-wide:

“There’s always someone ready to explain a proprietary tool to you so they can make a sale; it takes more effort to get a knowledgeable explanation of a FOSS tool relevant to one’s specific needs.”

“not in home computers”

“Lack of reasonably-priced and qualified consultants”

“Proprietary tools have plenty of advocates (i.e., salespersons). FOSS tools lack advocates to “pitch” them in terms that are specific and relevant to time-strapped NGO staff.”

General comments:

“It seems like there is still a lot of misconceptions about open source software in the non-profit sector. Also, with such a large number of accidental techies, it seems like there would be a general lack of knowledge about the idea.”

“... the biggest problems with open source software are the same problem with fee software: discovery, support, documentation, integration, maintainence. “

Summary

Our sampling wasn't sufficient to allow us to draw firm conclusions about software choices in the nonprofit sector as a whole, but our responses did come from a broad range of organizations. These groups are diverse both in size, mission and their use of free and open source software, and it is clear from their responses that FOSS is actively used in the nonprofit sector. FOSS is common on web servers, and while FOSS desktop operating systems are still uncommon, many nonprofits use free and open source applications on proprietary desktop operating systems. Many people in the sector use FOSS everyday, or at least quite frequently. Nonprofits do have a clear understanding of the strengths of FOSS, and at least some organizations have made organizational commitments to open source and open standards.

Organizations expressed a clear need for and interest in support and training services for FOSS applications, and, in general, organizations need more information about FOSS to facilitate decisions about FOSS implementation. NOSI provides and has provided some of these resources to the sector over the past several years, and we plan to continue this work by continuing to revise and update our primers, Through this ongoing work and by adding webinars and other

training opportunities to our repertoire, NOSI hopes to continue to fill gaps revealed by the responses to our survey. We also recognize the importance of bringing together the larger nonprofit technology assistance and free software communities to help address these needs.

To find out how you can help us make free and open source software a real option for nonprofit organizations, join our announce list. To be an active part of the NOSI community, join our low volume discussion list, where nonprofit staff and technology assistance providers help each other make technology decisions and troubleshoot the software they're using.

Announce list: <https://lists.mayfirst.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/nosi-announce>

Discussion list: <https://lists.mayfirst.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/nosi-discussion>