

# Study of Practices

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Summary of key findings from Fulbright Scholarship

Annette Stewart - Fulbright Scholarship 2016  
**Improving the *practice* of conservation  
by improving the *management* of conservation**

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Conservation Measures Partnership



## Study of Practices

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This report summarises key learnings from a Fulbright scholarship project “Improving the *practice* of conservation by improving the *management* of conservation”<sup>1</sup>. The aim has been to study how organisations are using the Open Standards and Miradi (OS/M), look at the challenges they are facing and the approaches they are using to overcome them, and then to identify potential improvements to the standards and software. A specific focus has been to look beyond the role of conservation practitioners and consider the interests and needs of management and support staff. Key activities have included –

- Detailed case studies with 4 organisations - Puget Sound Partnership, EcoLogic Development Fund, International Crane Foundation, and Nature Conservancy Canada - all of whom are using Open Standards and Miradi to varying extents, and are interested in expanding their usage. The case studies provided opportunities for insightful discussions with the leadership teams, fundraisers, finance managers, and HR managers, in addition to the conservation practitioners.
- Conversations with conservation practitioners and systems people who have had experience with Open Standards or Miradi in an organisational context, or who are thinking about adoption – including FOS, JGI, Asian Species Partnership, IFAW, MI, several WWF groups, several TNC chapters.
- Conversations with several academics with experience in change management.
- Conversations with several funders of conservation programs.

The barriers to adoption of the Open Standards are well known<sup>2</sup> so are not repeated here. This study has tried to look at adoption from different angles, beyond the practitioners’ perspective, to assess the broader business benefits and identify some options that might help pave the way for obtaining those benefits.

### Key findings

- Use of Open Standards provides a mechanism to improve organisational performance, well beyond its immediate aim of improving conservation projects. However this is not widely recognised.
- There is little awareness of the broader business benefits available through use of Open Standards, but once awareness is raised, particularly through demonstration of real-world examples, the level of interest amongst organisation leadership and support staff increases significantly.
- There is even less awareness of the need for, and business benefits from, systematisation of conservation project information.
- Leaders are always looking for ways to maximise organisational performance, but generally prefer to seed and support a groundswell of change rather than “mandate” particular practices.
- Practitioners are highly committed to their projects but are generally under-resourced, so many take a very focused and often minimalist view of Open Standards; very few have the time or the “integration mindset” to leverage the information-management capabilities of OS/M or to consider or promote the broader business benefits.

These factors create a negative feedback loop – there is little awareness of the broader benefits from OS/M and there are few practitioners with the time or scope to help generate this broader awareness, yet leaders are more likely to respond when awareness is raised and there is a broad ground-swell of support.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to [Fulbright Scholarship application](#) for details.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to recent [CMP-CCNet Summative Evaluation](#) Main Report, p20, 30

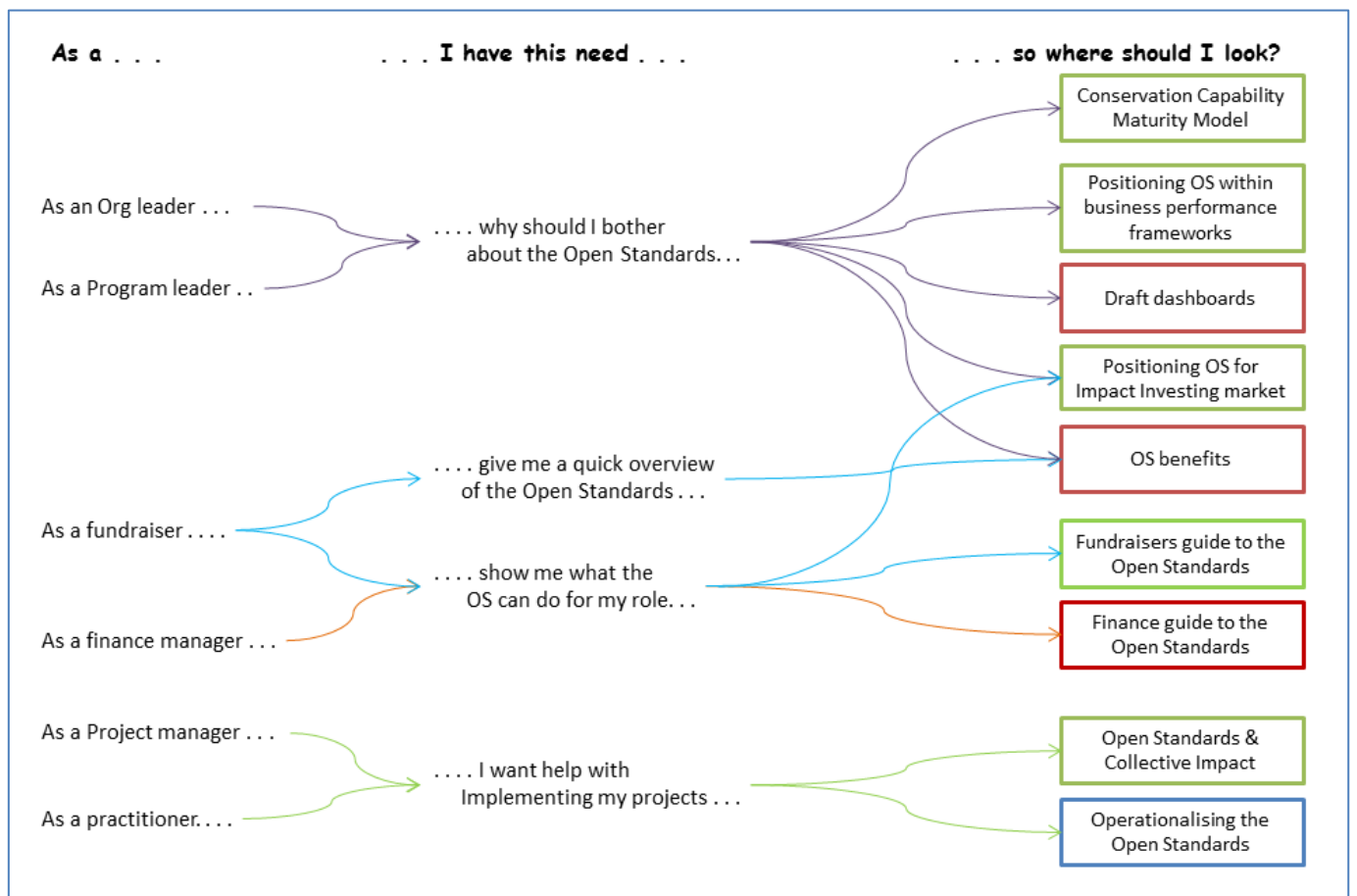
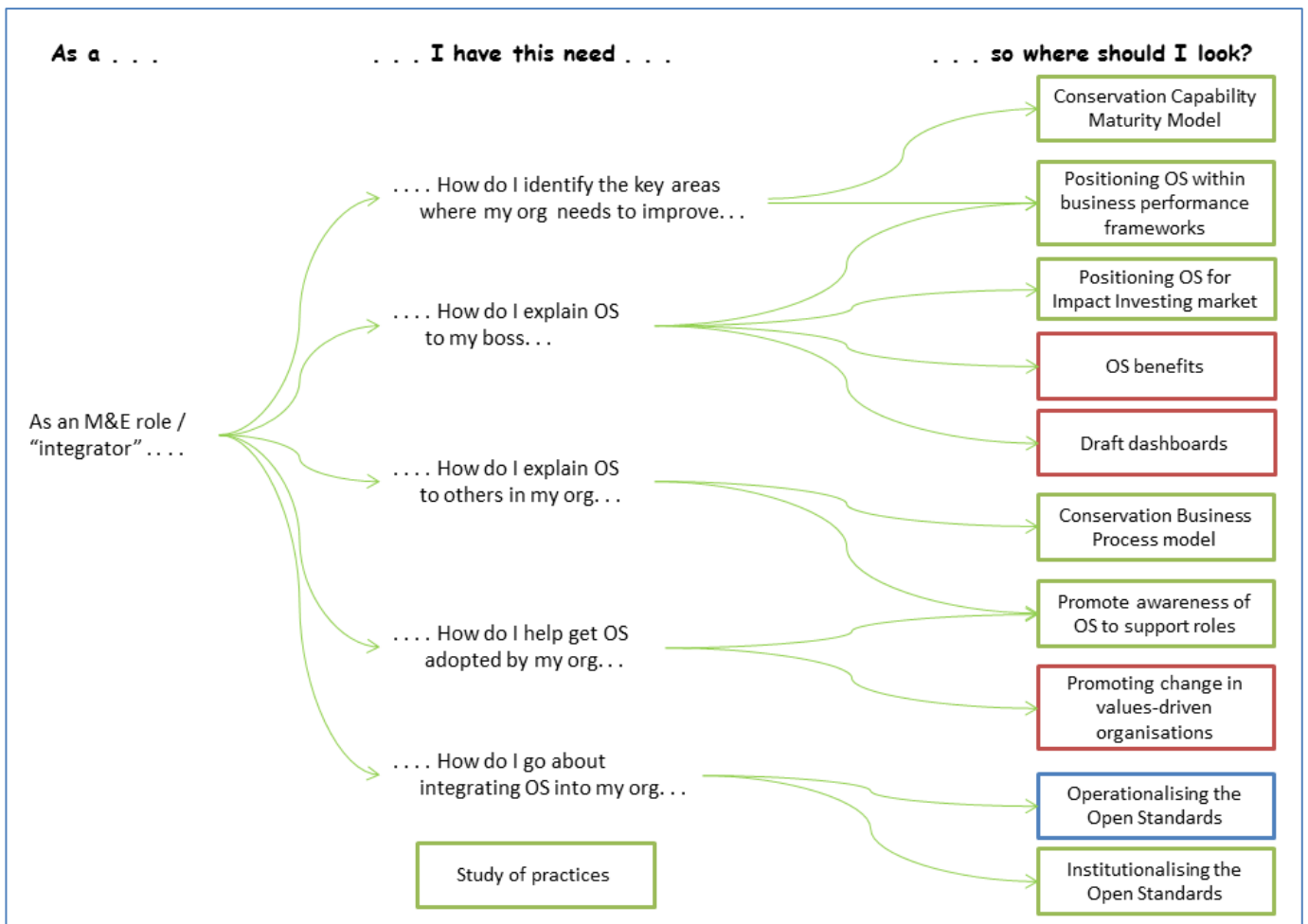
The rest of this report looks at options for addressing these factors and refers to other documents containing more detailed information. The table below provides a summary.

Barriers	Options to overcome the barriers
There is little awareness of the broader business benefits available through use of Open Standards	Position OS within commonly-used business frameworks that promote high performance and clear reporting Illustrate how OS provides the fundamental capabilities required to tap into the Impact Investing market Use a Capability Maturity Model to demonstrate what a high-performing conservation business might look like Demonstrate how OS information informs key organisational decisions Create case studies illustrating the business benefits from OS
There is even less awareness of the business benefits from systematisation of conservation project information	Use a business process model to show how OS/M streamlines key organisational processes and decisions Develop guidance for institutionalising OS/M Build collaboration amongst “integrators” within conservation organisations, to share expertise and support capacity within smaller organisations.
Leaders generally prefer to seed and support a groundswell of change rather than “mandate” particular practices.	Address items below to generate the groundswell Address items above to create the case for support Consider options for promoting change in cause-driven organisations
Many practitioners do not fully leverage the Open Standards or its information-management capabilities	Use the business process model to position conservation work within the broader organisational context Develop better guidance for operationalising the OS; to support the Implementation phase (OS Step 3) and illustrate how information management helps projects to routinely move around the cycle Promote awareness of the benefits that OS/M offers roles supporting conservation practitioners, to generate peer pressure for broader adoption Seek additional investment to improve the functionality and usability of the software & resolve identified deficiencies

Each of these options is summarised on the following pages, with links to other documents that describe them in more detail and provide guidance on when and how the option could be used.

These documents are stored in a [Toolkit](#), which aims to provide a range of options that might be useful in different circumstances.

The charts below might help to locate useful references within the Toolkit –



## Build awareness of the business benefits of Open Standards

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### Position OS within business frameworks that promote high performance and reporting

There are many frameworks aimed at helping non-profit organisations achieve high performance. Several that are currently promoted and broadly supported have been identified; Open Standards concepts clearly support all of these frameworks, illustrating its utility to any organisation leadership seeking to analyse and improve their performance. Communicating this alignment is one potential way to build awareness of the broader business benefits available through adoption of the Open Standards. The key frameworks, and the support provided by the Open Standards, are summarised below. See “[Positioning OS within business performance and reporting frameworks](#)” for further details.

- **The Performance Imperative**

The [Performance Imperative](#) model was developed by some recognised leaders from philanthropic, non-profit and consulting organisations. It sets out the characteristics of high-performing non-profit and public sector organisations, and aims to increase expectations of the level of performance that organisations ought to be achieving. Since its publication, many more organisations have “signed up” to the Performance Imperative challenge; to date there are no conservation organisations on the signatories list.

The Performance Imperative documents the characteristics of 7 core disciplines and encourages non-profit leaders to build their capabilities to meet these characteristics. The Open Standards provide guidelines for meeting more than half of the detailed characteristics. Pillar 1 – Leadership – is seen as the “pre-eminent pillar”; it places strong emphasis on the need for leaders to foster a performance culture in order to “manage to outcomes”. This provides a strong complement to the Open Standards, which by design is focused on practitioners and sometimes struggles to get leadership support.

- **Bridgespan organisation effectiveness and performance measurement**

[Bridgespan](#), a consultancy, provide guidance to philanthropic and non-profit leadership on organisational effectiveness and performance measurement. They are also a key contributor to the Performance Imperative. One of their frameworks – the organisation wheel – emphasises the need for work processes to be “*clearly defined and enabled by tools and systems*”; a need which can be met through use of open Standards and related tools. A second framework – on performance measurement – outlines a performance cycle that closely resembles the Open Standards cycle and its results-based management focus. Framing the Open Standards in the context of these types of business guidance materials can help to demonstrate its broader applicability.

- **Good to Great in the social sector**

“[Good to Great](#)” is a highly regarded book about what distinguishes great companies; its concepts were subsequently adapted for the social sector. The key characteristic of greatness “the relentless culture of discipline—disciplined *people* who engage in disciplined *thought* and who *then* take disciplined action” resonates well for anyone familiar with the Open Standards.

- **External Reporting Frameworks**

Non-profit organisations continue to come under increasing pressure to report their performance and impact. The pressure is coming from several different angles, including charity ratings agencies and regulators, accounting standards boards, and major government and philanthropic funders. All have different but similar requirements based on reporting efficiency and effectiveness measures, through analysis of inputs, outputs and outcomes. All have a particular emphasis on being able to show a robust theory-of- change for the work of the organisation. Open Standards helps to generate this information for projects and programs, some of which can be rolled up to inform the organisation-wide view.

## Illustrate how OS positions organisations to capitalise on the Impact Investing market

The Impact Investing market offers a potential new source of significant funding to protect global biodiversity. Several recent reports have analysed this market and concluded that the issue is not one of a shortage of funds, but a shortage of investable projects. They also conclude that the conservation sector is around 10 years behind other social sectors in being able to leverage this market. Adoption and institutionalisation of the Open Standards provides a means for developing the capabilities required to tap into this market - particularly project management, impact measurement, and scaling up of projects.

### • Metrics for external reporting

The above two trends are driving development of standardised metrics for external reporting of organisation performance. The standard that seems to be gaining most traction, especially amongst Impact Investors, is [IRIS](#), which has a well-structured catalogue of metrics including a few for Land Conservation. IRIS promotes a results-based management philosophy. Making use of some IRIS metrics in reporting is one way to communicate an organisation's improving performance to external stakeholders. While it is difficult to come up with metrics that cover the breadth of conservation work, the impact investing market is increasingly demanding such measures, and will likely invest elsewhere if measures are not offered.

Further details are available in the "[Positioning OS for the Impact Investing market](#)".

## Use a Capability Maturity Model to demonstrate high-performance in conservation

Capability Maturity Models are used in many industries and disciplines, as a way to depict the progression of stages that organisations typically move through as they build competency in their particular field. The models can be used by an organisation to do a high-level review of their current operations and identify possible improvements. In some industries, capability maturity models are highly evolved and provide a comprehensive method of assessing and certifying an organisation's capability.

An initial Conservation Capability Maturity Model has been developed. This initial version could be used by organisations to gain some insights into its current capabilities relative to a model high-performing conservation organisation, and to trigger internal conversations about potential areas for improvement. It is hoped that the quality and comprehensiveness of the model can evolve over time based on usage. Practitioners need to use common sense in interpreting the model for their organization. The model should be used in the same way that engineers and architects use models: as a learning tool, a communication tool, and a means of organizing thoughts. The tool is much less important than the conversations it can generate.

Details of this tool are available in the "[Conservation Capability Maturity Model](#)" document.

## Demonstrate how Open Standards informs key organisational decisions

Open Standards is often seen as "just something that planners use", yet the project information developed using Open Standards can inform broader organisational decisions, at project and program / portfolio levels. Breaking down this barrier requires a few actions -

- translating or explaining key Open Standards terms in plain language
- aligning the information produced through the Open Standards with the business cycle (eg strategic planning, annual financial planning) and the decisions that organisation leadership need to make.
- creating some case studies of organisation leadership talking about how they use this information.

See the Organisational Decisions section of the "[Conservation Business Process Model](#)" document.

## Build awareness of the business benefits from systematisation of OS information

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Many small-to-medium sized conservation organisations haven't had access to systems to manage conservation information, so there's a high degree of comfort with using static documents rather than databases. Contrast this with other roles in these organisations, such as fundraising or financial management, where systems are routinely used; for people in these roles it's almost unthinkable that finances would be managed on paper.

The options below aim to change these perceptions, so that ultimately organisation leadership demand and expect that their core business has at least the same level of systems support as other areas, and that technology is exploited to streamline workflows and improve access to information.

### Conservation Business Process Model

Business process models, often depicted in the form of "swim-lane diagrams", show how different processes interact, and the information that passes between them. A model has been developed to portray conservation work within its broader organisational context, showing the key interactions with other business processes of fundraising, finance, and people management.

The model can be used with people in these support roles to identify the OS information that can inform and streamline their own processes. The model also shows the differing performance and reporting expectations in these processes. The insights can inform conversations about using systems to store and exchange information across the organisation, streamlining processes and aiding decision-making.

Refer to the "[Conservation Business Process Model](#)" document.

### Institutionalising<sup>3</sup> the Open Standards & Miradi

Broader adoption and use of Open Standards and Miradi generally depends on someone within the organisation seeing the potential benefits then building support for change. These people are generally in a Monitoring & Evaluation role of some description, or have an "integration mindset" and can see the bigger picture and the inefficiencies within it. Some adoption / institutionalisation projects have been developing during the Study of Practices, which have led to insights that might be useful to others.

Refer to the related documents "[Operationalising the Open Standards](#)" and "[Institutionalising the Open Standards](#)" for an initial compilation of "how-to" guidance.

### Build collaboration amongst "integrators" within conservation organisations

People working on integration in small-to-medium organisations are often working alone or in small teams, and generally with little capacity to bring in external support. Opportunities to collaborate and share experiences should provide some support for this work. The aim is to reinvigorate the CMP "Implementation" working group to create regular forums to share experiences and continue to build up the "how-to" guide.

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<sup>3</sup> Institutionalisation generally means "the building of infrastructure and culture that supports practices so that they are the ongoing way of doing business. The result is the deployment and implementation of processes that are effective, usable, and consistently applied across the organization. Institutionalisation implies that the process is ingrained in the way the work is performed and there is commitment and consistency to performing the process."



## Create a path that makes it easier for leaders to support OS

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The options above might help to build awareness amongst organisation leadership of the value of Open Standards and build the case for support. But discussions to date suggest that's not enough to lead towards adoption. Even when leaders agree that there's value in using OS, they are reluctant to "mandate" any single approach, and see "voluntary compliance" as the way to go. This reflects understandable and strong support for the work of practitioners who remain highly committed to their work despite often being under-resourced and working in difficult circumstances.

However these leaders see the increasing pressure for results and do want to see improvements in their organisations (better reporting, more efficiency, knowing whether projects are really achieving impact, etc). It appears that they would respond to a "groundswell" of support for improved practices, and help push it along, but are reluctant to initiate it.

Providing support to the "integrators" (outlined above) and addressing the "Practitioner" options below might help to build this groundswell.

### Consider options for promoting change in cause-driven organisations

Adopting any new process is a challenge in cause-driven organisations like conservation. In the words of one HR manager, it generally involves "shepherding them in the right direction; you can't direct them or they'll disengage". Most of the standard change-management advice is directed at for-profit organisations, and much of it isn't appropriate for organisations where people have a heart-felt commitment to their work.

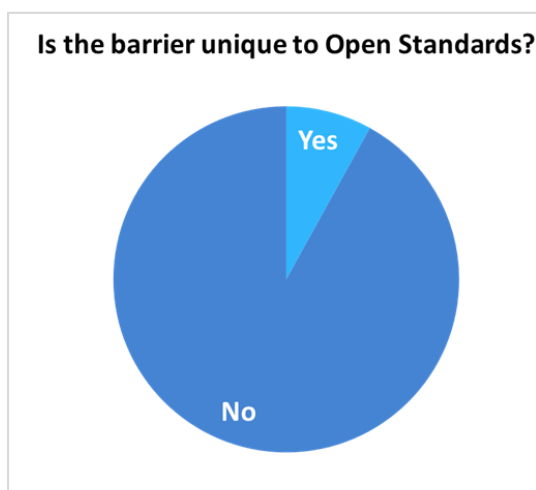
Organisation leaders and their HR managers are the best judges of how to go about change in their organisations, and any efforts at broader OS adoption should start there. A few insights have been drawn from conversations during the Study; refer to "[Promoting change in cause-driven organisations](#)" for details.

## Help practitioners fully leverage OS and its information-management capabilities

The CMP/CCNet Evaluation identified factors that affect adoption of Open Standards and Miradi (OS/M) by practitioners; this study has analysed those factors and identified a few more. In summary –

- practitioners are highly committed to their projects and are generally under-resourced, so take a “just get it done” attitude to their work; OS is generally viewed as helping to produce a quality plan, but project implementation often then takes the most expedient route; relatively few have systems experience or an “integration mindset” to leverage the information-management capabilities of OS/M or to consider or promote the broader organisational benefits.
- many users of the Open Standards are coaches who have responsibility for helping teams develop quality plans, but are often not involved in, or can’t influence, the later implementation stages where systematised information management offers the most value.

Analysis of the barriers identified in the CMP/CCNet Evaluation<sup>4</sup> is shown below. The first chart shows that relatively few of the barriers relate directly to specific issues with the OS/M; they’re barriers that apply to any major organisational change. The second chart groups the identified barriers into possible areas for action. Many of these are covered by the types of actions outlined above.



The options below might help to address issues around process, training and technology. Dealing with all of these issues is critical for generate the “groundswell” of support for OS/M that organisational leadership can leverage.

### Use a process model to position conservation work within an organisational context

The **Conservation Business Process Model** described above illustrates how other organisational processes are dependent on information from the conservation process, and that having this information in systems is more functional than having it in documents or spreadsheets. Incorporating these concepts into training and general communications might help to build this awareness.

<sup>4</sup> [CMP-CCNet Evaluation](#) Appx 11 - List of major barriers to adoption of the OS; Appx 8 - responses to Why full-cycle use of OS is not achieved.

## Improve guidance for the Implementation phase (OS Step 3)

The first two steps of the Open Standards are well catered for in terms of guidance and training materials. The other steps are not well served, so it's not surprising that usage of these steps falls away. This chart simply shows the number of pages in the Open Standards v3 document providing guidance for each step.

More detailed guidance for the Implementation phase (OS Step 3) is required, particularly to illustrate how information management (e.g. through Miradi) helps projects to routinely move around the cycle. The chart below indicate the number of pages devoted to each step within Open Standards v3



Specific requirements identified through the study include –

- more support for stakeholder analysis, or at least recommendations for tools and templates, with ability to track related information
- similar support for project risk management
- more support for capacity assessment, particularly around assessing the capacity of partners
- “better” access to the guidance that flows around on the CCNet listserv (such as collecting this onto the CCNet or OS websites and making it searchable)
- much more training materials for using Miradi, with preference for short videos that demonstrate how to do particular functions

A Miradi User Group is being established to help with this last point. Requirements have been identified for a range of “how-to” guides, which will be gradually developed and made available online.

The document **“Operationalising the Open Standards”** provides some initial guidance for leveraging the OS systems – Miradi and Miradi Share - for project implementation.

### - Collective Impact model

A recent Rally session discussed current issues with Implementation and looked at options for improving this area. The group endorsed the Collective Impact model as useful tool for co-ordinating projects involving multiple parties and improving the success rate of implementation. While the original Collective Impact model is pitched as applying to major multi-sector initiatives, the group saw the principles as equally applying to projects at smaller scales.

See **“Open Standards and Collective Impact”** document for further details showing how Collective Impact principles and open standards information are well aligned.

## Promote awareness of OS/M amongst support roles

The study included discussions with staff in support roles such as fundraising, finance and HR. Most had no knowledge of OS, or had heard of it but didn't understand its potential value beyond the immediate use by conservation teams. Once the potential information flows between processes were discussed, and reports from Miradi were shown, there was a lot more interest in the approach. Promoting awareness of the benefits of OS/M to these roles will help to generate internal discussions with conservation practitioners, and lend support for broader adoption. Fundraisers in particular could readily see how easy access to up-to-date high-quality project information would streamline their workflows.

See “[Promoting awareness of OS to support roles](#)” for details of the benefits offered to these roles by OS/M, and some of the actions that could be taken to build their support.

See “[A Fundraisers guide to the Open Standards](#)” for guidance specifically designed for fundraisers.

## Invest in improvements to software functionality and usability

During the study there were many comments made about the difficulty of using Miradi to support Open Standards information. Some key findings -

- There are varying degrees of IT literacy amongst practitioners. Some are comfortable with technology and readily pick up new tools and learn how to use them; others seem reluctant to learn new software, perhaps partly due to lack of time, but also due to insufficient training materials and lack of awareness of the value of having information stored and shared in systems, rather than sitting in documents.
- Some insights can be drawn from analogies with other software –
  - o Use of GIS software is often relegated to a specialist so that most project staff do not need to learn it; this works ok for spatial work as spatial analysis doesn’t occur frequently;
  - o in contrast Miradi is intended for regular active use for running a project; a closer analogy is with Finance systems that are used for managing an organisation’s finances – all finance staff are expected to routinely use the system, and training is offered where necessary
- in practice, some organisations have developed resident experts in using Miradi so that project staff don’t need to use it, but this reduces its usefulness and makes the information more static
- there seems to be a generational aspect to this issue; a survey of students who had just learnt OS/M were generally comfortable with the software, and very comfortable with using diagrams (e.g. results chains) to create and communicate projects
- regardless, usability is an issue that needs work
- current reporting capabilities are also a barrier – people find it easier to understand how to enter data into a system, and are more inclined to use it, when they can see the end results that it can produce; everyone wants the narrative reports produced by Miradi Companion / XSL templates

The requirements raised during discussions have been collected for discussion and prioritisation with developers – [details are here](#).

Miradi / Miradi Share does not yet cater to all of the information products created through the Open Standards - [this document](#) maps Open Standards products to Miradi support, to help identify and prioritise additional support required in the systems.

None of these improvements can happen without investment. The original funders of Miradi development wanted to see more up-take before considering any further contributions. A path forward may be to seek collaboration amongst the small-medium sized organisation in CMP, ideally through their leadership, and make a collective case to potential funders.