



APSR Project Overviews 2007
Collections Services and Infrastructures (COSI) Projects

**Repository Technical Support Service
(COSI-D)**

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Repository Technical Support Service

This service aims to improve the level of technical and management support for education and research institutions that have implemented a repository service. In particular, a *Repository Support Service* has been established as a step towards sustainable support for the open source repository software that has emerged from the APSR test-beds (i.e. DSpace and Fez/Fedora). Technical support is funded by APSR until the beginning of 2008, by which time sustainable market-driven service models should begin to emerge. This work will benefit the education and research sector by ensuring reliable technical support after the initial wave of repository adoption and, in the longer-term, help establish market-driven support services for open source repository software.

The use of open source software in the tertiary sector is becoming more prevalent, particularly in areas where ideas, requirements, and (consequently) systems are still evolving rapidly. The open source option allows flexibility of low initial capital investment in unknown waters. If customisations are not required, open source software can be used "out of the box" and the only major costs involved are the system administrators (who are likely to be already maintaining other enterprise systems anyway). System administrators are required for commercial software too, unless a hosting solution is offered.

If customisation is required, then the code base of open source software is public and can be adapted to local needs at the cost of having programming expertise on staff. This expertise is likely to count as an asset in an age where information systems are so critical to a university's mission. The cost of programming time is often regarded as money that would have been spent on licensing proprietary software anyway, with the difference being the amount of power one has to respond flexibly to local needs in fast changing areas. An added bonus is the ability to share customisations and innovations made by other institutions in similar circumstances.

Institutions need to weigh up these benefits and costs for their particular situation. And nothing is ever written in stone. Once the field is better understood and more stable, then perhaps proprietary software vendors will be able to provide a clearly superior service.

Institutions also need to ascertain their projected support needs before adopting open source solutions. Experience from existing users will be a good source of intelligence. Support for open source software differs from commercial software in that there is no designated vendor to speak to. Mature open source software projects do however have active technical discussion lists and tend to form supportive communities in the higher education sector. For many adopters of open source software this kind of support is more than enough.

There are also service providers that offer commercially-based support services for open source software. Another popular hybrid model is for a service provider to offer hosted services for open source software. This provides a turn-key solution, with a great exit strategy, as the digital assets and the software are all open. Some open source projects even offer central support in return for membership fees.

These are all sustainable support and business models for open source software. An institution that adopts open source software obviously makes a commitment to put in some resources of its own to run the software and participate in the community. Support for open source software can be "free" (reciprocally-based) or can be "paid" (commercially-based). What distinguishes open source software from proprietary software is not the dollar values, but rather the free access to the source code of the software and the consequent flexibility that puts in the hands of the adopter.

Goals and Objectives

The Repository Support Service is a seed program that is a step towards sustainable support for the open source repository software that has emerged from the APSR testbeds. APSR funds are being used to:

- Improve support for the initial wave of adoption and take up; and

The Repository Technical Support Service

- Enable a market-driven support service to develop around our open source software.

The particular focus of this service will be to encourage the adoption of Fez and DSpace by ensuring appropriate technical support. APSR will fund that initial support for adopters so that the set up and configuration of the base systems is robustly supported at no cost.

In 2008 maintenance, ongoing support, hosting services and consultancies for software customisation will be provided both out of the open source community and by third party service providers.

Project Titles

DSpace Community Services

Fez Community Services

Description

Given the different maturity of Fez/Fedora and DSpace, the appropriate services to be provided by APSR will be quite different in either case.

The DSpace user community already has a well-established set of mail lists, global software development initiatives and regular international user groups. The DSpace adopters in Australia will typically need advice on installation and configuration.

Given Fez's position on the project life cycle, a broader suite of services will be needed. The APSR Fez Community Services is establishing mailing lists, user meetings, and providing support for installation and configuration. There will also be need for timely response to bug fixes and critical code updates, which can only at this stage be realistically provided by UQ, despite the growing international adoption of Fez.

New adopters in the Australian higher-ed sector will not all have the technical expertise to develop functionality within Fez or DSpace, and the Repository Technical Support Service will fund APSR partners to develop functionality critical to new adopters, such as RQF related updates. In general, the ad hoc software development in DSpace and Fedora that was previously funded in APSR as "test-bed activities" will now be funded through these community services programs and will be based on the needs of new adopters in the Australian higher education and library sector.

Methods and Approaches

- This service will ensure new adopters have access to technical expertise to assist with: installation; initial configuration; bug fixes; critical changes to functionality
- This service will encourage the development of ongoing support models from 2008.

Partner Capabilities

APSR partners taking part in this service have intimate knowledge of the Fez and DSpace systems and the technical capabilities to provide efficient support.

APSR Strategic Approaches

This service will use several of the strategic APSR approaches: collaboration, working closely with communities of practice, training skills and outreach, focus on sustainability, and focus on the immediate needs of key stakeholders

International Reference Projects

JISC Repository Support Project

JISC EPrints Community Services

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