

# Conceptual Draft for GovFOSS

## The Idea

This is the envisioned framework for a project I'm tentatively calling GovFOSS (Government-Free and Open Source Software). GovFOSS would give government agencies a means for acquiring more open source software instead of continuing to rely on the slow, costly and low-quality development bred by the existing contracting model.

It would also let citizens--volunteer developers--engage their democracy at a level beyond politics, giving them a role in their daily governance by helping bureaucracies run more efficiently. With government systems running open source software, many core government functions would become more transparent. And gaining a foothold in government environments would be a major victory for the open source movement.

## The Organization

I envision GovFOSS as an intermediary between government agencies and the open source developer community. This intermediary would serve a few purposes:

- Trust. Many in government are skeptical of adopting software that anyone may contribute to. In terms of security, open source is viewed more as a risk than a benefit. The intermediary would vet developers with a low barrier to entry, such as proof of identity or citizenship. GovFOSS's products would therefore be developed completely by trusted programmers.

- Project management. GovFOSS employees would work with government officials to produce software specifications, would market new projects to the development community, and would help deploy products onto government systems.

- Legal entity. Government agencies will probably be unwilling to work with a group of individual developers. Instead, there must be a single organization with the appropriate tax status and a fitting banner that allows that organization to market itself as a trusted agent. This entity would also be the recipient of any grants, government funding, or revenues incurred.

The right entity will have marketing reach in both directions: it will be able to sell itself to government officials as a trusted organization working in the public interest, and at the same time have sufficient presence in the development community to marshal talented coders.

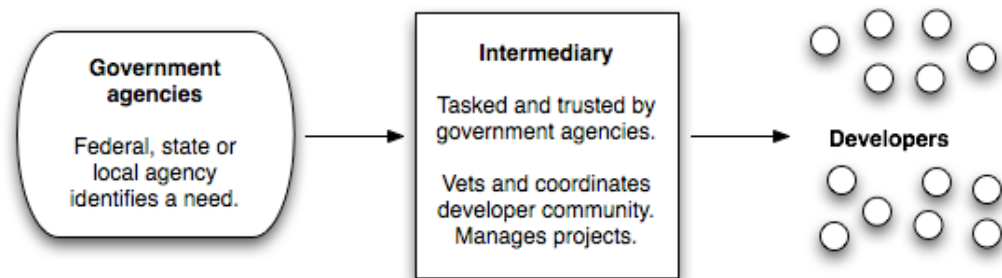
Because of these two needs, it may behoove the project to latch onto an existing organization. In addition to marketing presence, the project would also benefit from the parent organization's already established legal and accounting infrastructure.

## Case Study

Here is the lifespan of a hypothetical GovFOSS project. I'll use the example of a new election system.

The New York Secretary of State determines that its election system is outdated. It would like a new ballot infrastructure that includes an electronic ballot. The Secretary of State's office approaches GovFOSS and outlines its needs. GovFOSS then creates a set of specifications for the ballot system and explains to the SoS how such a system would practically work.

GovFOSS then notifies its developer community of this new project. GovFOSS prioritizes and requests development of each aspect of the software. As the software comes together, it is available over the Web for public testing. The code is also available for public review and contribution.



Throughout this time, GovFOSS will keep the NY SoS abreast of its progress. Once the state is satisfied with its product and it has undergone sufficient public scrutiny and testing, GovFOSS will assist the state in deploying this software. The software will continue to be freely available for reading, and contributions will continue to be accepted from vetted developers. Any individual or entity may download the software and deploy it for their own purposes.

To support its project management, marketing and miscellaneous expenses, GovFOSS would be funded by its parent organization, third party foundations, and donations (in the vane of shareware). Government funding is another option, but likely introduces complications. Selling post-deployment software support services to the government or third parties is likely not an option. Such sources of funding violate federal procurement laws.

Until the project has an organizational sponsor, I am seeking a small amount of funding to pursue this as my primary project. Unanswered questions might be addressed in [this interview](#).

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