



# PROGRESS REPORT

AN EVALUATION OF  
THE SCOSS PILOT PROJECT

MARCH 2019

## Introduction

The Global Sustainability Coalition for Open Science Services (SCOSS) launched in early 2017 with a Pilot Project. The initiative, which was initially backed by a large body of organisations including original members, the Council of Australian University Librarians, EIFL, LIBER and SPARC Europe, had as its mission to help secure vital Open Access and Open Science infrastructure.

SCOSS is not the only pathway or means to invest in open infrastructure; it is experimental and is evolving as part of a larger ecosystem that is working toward a common goal. SCOSS runs parallel to a range of important, ambitious efforts aimed at investing in and supporting open infrastructure. Currently underway are projects seeking to identify the total cost of Open Science, to map OS infrastructure and spend; and to help develop strategic priorities on what areas to invest in – and why. Though our approaches may differ, our goal is the same. There is still much to be done before we have a global answer for how best – most efficiently and effectively -- to secure the future of Open Science infrastructure. Working together on this as a community is essential. *Invest in Open Infrastructure* has great potential to help ensure a collective effort. SPARC Europe is an active and proud member of this group and has been on board from the start.

SCOSS is consistently following developments in new approaches to sustaining Open Access and Open Science infrastructure. Through conversations with various stakeholders and through learnings gained during SCOSS's pilot life-cycle, we are consistently addressing some of the complexities of the SCOSS model and adapting it accordingly to help reach the goal of helping essential, at-risk services onto a more stable path to sustainability. Exploration of different solutions is a necessary part of discovering what ultimately works.

### *The Pilot Project*

Two services were invited to apply for consideration for funding for the Pilot Project: SHERPA/RoMEO, a service that runs a database of academic journals' policies on copyright and self-archiving; and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), an online directory that indexes and provides access to quality open access, peer-reviewed journals. Following the thorough review of an extensive Application Form, both were presented to the global academic and library community for consideration for funding, in a crowd-funding style approach, via the SCOSS framework.

As of March 2019, more than 1 million Euros had been pledged by over 135 institutions globally for both services collectively. [See the SCOSS website for the complete list.](#) The SCOSS Board is pleased with these results. This shows considerable uptake in channeling investment to an expert-selected number of global-reach services. For this reason, the Board has decided to continue after the pilot. As a result, 38 services submitted Expressions of Interest following SCOSS's latest call for Expressions of Interest, from most continents (18 from Europe, 9 from North America, 8 from Africa, 2 from Oceania and 1 from South America). Of these, six have been short-listed to apply for SCOSS endorsement in 2019.

### *The Evaluation*

Over the course of two months, ending in January 2019, members of the SCOSS Board and representatives of DOAJ and Sherpa/RoMEO individually completed a written evaluation of the Pilot Project assessing progress made until December 2018. The SCOSS Board then came together for two meetings. During this convening, responses were jointly discussed and consensus reached on a collection of key themes which are shared below as actionable learnings which we'd like to share with the community.

The purpose of this Progress Report is to provide a summary of the Board's findings: both positive and negative.

We hope to expand our efforts in a number of areas covered below. While some areas will be addressed immediately, others will be addressed once more operational funding has been raised.

## 1. The Pilot: A look at what worked

Overall, the Board was satisfied with the organisation of the SCOSS Pilot, and with its results.

### 2.1 Results

The Board agreed that we have clearly set up a new working global co-ordinated cost-sharing framework to help fund services on unstable financial footing. SCOSS global membership has increased during the pilot. We now have representation on most continents, and awareness of the initiative has grown markedly even in areas where we have yet to gain organisation membership. Throughout the pilot phase, we have consistently taken lessons learnt to progress forward. The Board noted the unique nature of SCOSS, it being steered by large national and international library and research user / network organisations. It is also unlike other collective action models such as Knowledge Unlatched or OLH in that funds are not collected centrally. Despite this fact, within one year, SCOSS has been successful in helping obtain distributed funding amounting to more than € 1m from the user community for 2 non-commercial services within one year. NOTE: Funding duration is limited to 3 years.

Thus far, funds have been primarily raised in academic library communities in North America, North-West Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Consortium deals have proven to take months to come to fruition; at the time of the writing of this report, several are in the pipeline. Numerous deals have been agreed together with national consortia mainly in Australia, New Zealand and Europe to date. Some regional consortia and numerous individual institutions (more than 125) have made clear commitments to Open Science by committing on an individual level where no consortia deals exist. We look forward to increasing funding participation in the coming years from consortia and individual institutions in a newly evolving area. For a list of funders, see [www.scoss.org](http://www.scoss.org).

Lessons have shown that for the SCOSS programme to be effective in attracting funds, both SCOSS and the service being supported need to work actively and consistently to promote the funding drive. DOAJ demonstrated this well. It reached over 75% of its funding target for 3 years in the first year by carrying out many active funding outreach activities. It reached out and followed up with potential funders and built on its existing membership base. Additional contributions from existing DOAJ members amounted to € 129k as compared to 2018. DOAJ saw an additional € 108k from new

members to DOAJ. This has resulted in an increase of 70% institutional funding through SCOSS. This funding helped DOAJ make progress in 2018. For more on this, [see their progress report](#).

Sherpa/RoMEO on the other hand has reached almost € 100,000 in pledged funds, which is positive insofar that this is a new revenue stream to support its service, and these funds are independent of its supporting organisation; this has to do with the way it raises funds. More fund-raising efforts are in the pipeline.

As regards the SCOSS suggested fee which ranges from € 4000 to 500, some challenges were encountered when existing DOAJ members, who were already paying a fee to DOAJ, were asked to contribute significantly more than their previous dues, based on the new suggested fee levels. These initial concerns were ultimately resolved and many of DOAJ's existing members agreed to the higher fee. This resulted in their rapidly reaching their target funding goals. Furthermore, consortia took advantage of the 25% discount, which proved to be an effective incentive for motivating more organisations to contribute funding. We acknowledge the need in future to consider adjusting the fee structure downward if more consortia engage.

## **2.2 Organisation and process**

Operations functioned well to move the concept to an executed, concrete solution that is resulting in investment in open infrastructure, particularly considering the limited resources available for overhead. SPARC Europe was credited for much of this.

As regards the [SCOSS governance structure](#) and how that supported SCOSS, roles and responsibilities of the SCOSS Board, Advisory and Executive Group members were generally clear and met in this small and manageable group. However, these may need to be reviewed in future if the structure does not work well in practise as the group grows.

One intent of SCOSS is that endorsed services strengthen their governance structures by considering international funders in the future design of their services. DOAJ has already embraced this, requesting all SCOSS-funders to nominate members for two of their governing bodies, to then stand for election for several place.

SCOSS-endorsed services reported that the application process worked satisfactorily. They did describe it as time-consuming as they did not, prior to the application process, always have the required information related to finances and a business model already compiled. As the exercise is standard in scenarios where an organisation is seeking funding, the DOAJ recognised it as beneficial, in and of itself, for future purposes.

Evaluators praised the thorough evaluation process although it took longer than expected. SCOSS Board members considered the group to be knowledgeable and a safe environment to productively exchange sometimes conflicting views whilst building consensus. It was also generally felt that the proper criteria had been used to evaluate the services, though additional ones should be introduced based on lessons learnt in the pilot (see below), e.g. on the commitment of the beneficiaries to engage with fund-raising.

The endorsed services reported that they found the communication that ensued with SCOSS following the evaluation phase to be effective.

SCOSS supported both services by creating contact lists of consortia names and emails, helping pursue national consortia, providing template mails and documentation, as well as information for press releases; developing and holding presentations and reaching out to related colleagues, etc., among other activities. This was appreciated.

SCOSS has also gained visibility internationally on various fronts. All SCOSS members distributed information on the initiative to their members although it was felt by many that more can be done in future, e.g. to more actively recommend services to their members.

SPARC Europe did considerable work in the area of dissemination. It created a leaflet on SCOSS and its business case; developed and maintained a SCOSS website; wrote and published blog posts on SCOSS via the website; tweeted announcements when SCOSS hit key milestones; conceptualised and published 2 SCOSS newsletters; held and developed numerous presentations; developed and updated a SCOSS poster; drafted emails for library consortia for SCOSS-promoted services; and followed-up on leads related to membership and/or potential funders. SPARC Europe and some of SCOSS's other members presented at important library and scholarly communications events worldwide, e.g. at ICOLC, LIBER, IATUL, PUBMET, and MUNIN Conferences and at several Focus on Open Science events.

SCOSS's liaising with other Open initiatives such as Plan S, and philanthropic agencies was considered to have been handled well by SPARC Europe, and should continue. SCOSS was also invited to be one of the earliest initiators of the *Invest in Open* global group.

## 2. Areas of improvement

We highlight the positive parts of the evaluation above and now address areas of potential improvement that emerged from talks with various stakeholders and from lessons learnt throughout the Pilot.

### 3.1 Organisation

#### **“Sustainability” defined and the SCOSS mission**

SCOSS is comprised of renowned and trusted organisations deeply engaged and connected with the Open Science community. This particular positioning of our members allows us to help facilitate the funding of essential non-profit OA and OS supporting services that are not financially secure.

The Board discussed the extent to which SCOSS should help sustain any single open infrastructure service. The funding that we help facilitate is intended to serve as a bridge to a more sustainable funding model. We must make the necessary efforts to avoid the risk of devoting money to projects that are perhaps not viable long-term. It is this concern that led the Board to emphasise the importance of every selected service having a sustainable business model in place by the close of the funding period. Every service seeking funding will therefore, in future, be required to provide articulated business model ideas during the evaluation phase to illustrate due diligence into the issue of sustainability.

Services endorsed by SCOSS must be non-profit. To secure this goal, the Board decided that should the service (organisation) be sold at any point during the funding cycle, SCOSS will withdraw its endorsement and end the funding campaign immediately.

**Governance**

Moving forward, the SCOSS Board underlined the importance of global membership representation, which will be a key priority.

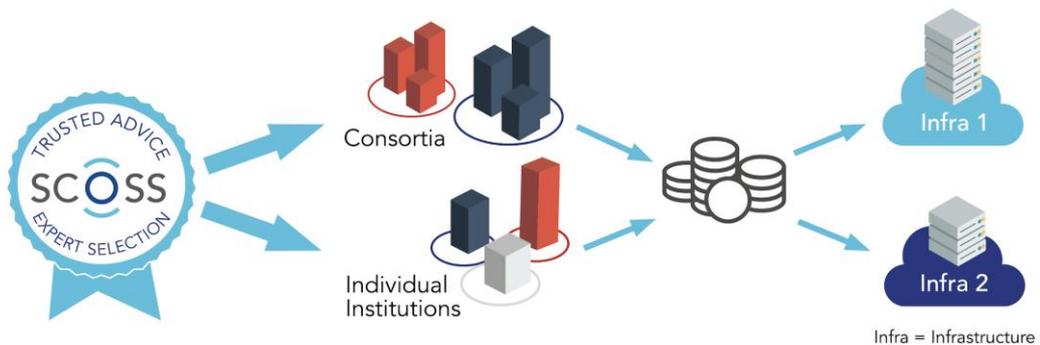
During the Pilot Project, SCOSS-promoted services gained the financial support of multiple consortia - representing numerous libraries. As a result, the Board also agreed that national consortia will be invited to join SCOSS as a member organisation - with a place on the Advisory Group and Executive Group. They will also have the opportunity, over time, to gain a seat on the SCOSS Board, which currently is comprised of larger network organisations representing the continents.

**Spreading Awareness of SCOSS**

To continue to grow awareness for the initiative, SCOSS members have agreed to pursue opportunities to present on SCOSS in their respective countries and regions.

During the pilot, certain funders expressed their concern about the complexity of the SCOSS model. It is understood that the SCOSS message should be simplified in future. The new graphic below will help.

**SCOSS endorses infrastructure for investment**



In future, since information is lacking on funders’ perceptions of SCOSS, we intend to more structurally gather feedback and address any ensuing challenges or questions.

It is important for SCOSS to improve its presence on communications channels such as Twitter, adopting its own Twitter account, alerts and activities. Once more operational funds have been raised, SCOSS may also consider hosting webinars to share progress, to answer questions or discuss certain themes and publish progress reports more frequently than at the current 6-month-interval.

SCOSS also has an immediate need for a new, free-standing professionally-designed website that better lends itself, and its individual content, to promotion.

### **Operational Costs**

When asked how far current resources suffice for SCOSS's operational-related expenses, the Board agreed that the aim should be to employ 1 FTE or equivalent. Furthermore, more resources are needed to cover other costs such as the develop of a professional SCOSS website; to further monitor SCOSS and the OS services environment and to highlight gaps in services; to increase communications related to SCOSS; to intensify SCOSS governance and membership activities; to increase SCOSS advocacy globally and serve the larger group effectively.

The SCOSS Board agreed on the importance of also considering the sustainability of SCOSS operations. SPARC Europe requested a one-time operations fee from DOAJ and Sherpa/RoMEO in 2018. Going forward, many options were discussed -- from the request for a flat fee from endorsed infrastructure, to reserving 5% of collected funds, SCOSS membership fees, funds from a larger benefactor and in-kind contributions for operational costs. The Board ultimately agreed that promoted services must contribute to SCOSS's operational costs in the form of a modest flat fee that will be used to support operations as soon as income has been received. The specific fee will be adjusted based on the funding goal established by the service.

## **3.2 Process**

### **Service Selection**

In order to more fully deliver on our mission, the SCOSS Board agreed to prioritise diversity in the infrastructure it selects, i.e. endorsing globally diverse services that represent a range of relevant thematic areas important to Open Science. The SCOSS Advisory Group will maintain such a strategic priority list of themes and will review this on an annual basis.

In terms of how many services are endorsed during each funding cycle, this will hinge upon the applications received and the funding targets.

Furthermore, the Board agreed to endorse essential infrastructure that has broad, global reach; regional services will not be endorsed at this point as core infrastructure with a wide user base must be addressed first.

### **Application Evaluation**

The consensus among the Group was that although certain criteria were deemed more important than others and discussed as such in evaluations, moving forward, it is important to formally weight certain criteria and inform applicants of these priority areas. As a result, the SCOSS Advisory Group will slightly review evaluation criteria for the assessment of Expressions of Interest, and the Board would do the same for those of the Application Form. For the application, this includes prioritising how well the infrastructure describes the particular needs of the service, and the funding need, its benefits to various communities, its plans for the years ahead, how the infrastructure plans to actively acquire funding, sustainability plans for after the funding phase or how they intend to adapt their governance model to consider funders.

### **Specifics of the funding process**

Since some criticism was raised by certain funders on the level of the recommended funding during the pilot, the SCOSS Board revisited the € 4000 recommended fee along with questions about whether or not suggested funding levels should reflect the need of the applicant and be influenced by the fundraising target. The Board agreed that the services themselves should suggest a fee using a

tiered structure that takes into consideration the range of potential funders - from small to large institutions to consortia -, and also consider discounts for consortia. It is important to stress that SCOSS *recommends* a particular fee to help reach a particular funding target; other fees may be set at the discretion of the service and funder.

Determining the suggested fee will be associated with the community and the target provided. Providing information on proposed fees will now be folded into the application process. And the final fee structure will be reviewed and vetted by SCOSS.

The Board also parsed the benefits and potential disadvantages of centralised versus decentralised funding. It was ultimately decided that a central fund that gathers and manages funds on behalf of the service/s is not a path to mid- or long-term sustainability, which is why SCOSS does not centrally collect funds. We believe that it is essential that Open Science services and their organisations make conscious decisions as to how they will meet the needs of their community in the future and how this fits in with sustaining their work. So when it comes to the long-term sustainability of any one service, the ability to obtain and manage consortial transactions will be key. This kind of decentralized funding structure also allows SCOSS to minimize administrative fees and limits legal burdens. SCOSS-endorsed services will be encouraged to make efforts to build on relationships with consortia developed during the SCOSS funding period.

As a result, those invited to submit a SCOSS application will be expected to show an independent commitment to making efforts to acquire funding -- and to explain this process.

Once a service has been endorsed by SCOSS, formal terms, or a Memorandum of Understanding, will be required to ensure that SCOSS's roles and that of the service are clearly specified and agreed upon before promotion of the service begins. For instance, this will incorporate language pertaining to the service's commitment to actively contribute to the effort to obtain funds.

The SCOSS Board is aware that without an existing paying client / membership base, progress in reaching funding targets may be slower. Efforts will be needed by the service to acquire funds and to set up and manage the financial administration to process payments. The question of whether or not fund-raising should be outsourced to a third party was also discussed as certain services, specifically those with no established paying client base, face particular challenges in raising funds. SCOSS suggests that services that fall within this category either establish a system and manage the entire process internally - or, alternatively, use a subscription agent to carry out the initial groundwork.

In future, since active funding acquisition activities are critical to reach targets for the SCOSS-endorsed service, in the event that a service fails to meet its agreement to help acquire funds as specified, SCOSS will withdraw its endorsement of the service. SCOSS will evaluate service acquisition activities year on year.

Moving forward, SCOSS also plans to actively target research funders from both affluent and non-affluent countries with an invitation to contribute to the crowd-funding campaigns. We also hope to reach out to funders in both non-affluent and affluent countries that we have yet to engage, particularly those with national Open Science agendas. We will also reach out to countries or institutions who are cancelling journal subscriptions to inquire if some of these moneys can be redirected to help fund open infrastructure. To support this goal, SCOSS members will also do more of the groundwork to reach out to their members and consortia so that services have an easier time

explaining what SCOSS is. We will continue to encourage ICOLC to advocate for open infrastructure and SCOSS at its meetings.

Furthermore, it is important for SCOSS to assure an inclusive approach across the globe and across institutions. In addition, it is necessary to acquire members from underrepresented regions – e.g. Asia and Latin America, and for them to engage with institutions on their continents more actively. Helping support infrastructure that is distributed across the globe will ease this process. SCOSS will also continue to engage in the Invest in Open Infrastructure (IOI) initiative, actively working to determine how SCOSS fits into the framework.

To improve transparency, the Board agreed that the applications of successful applicants will be made public, including financial data to share that information with the future funding community.

## Conclusion

The SCOSS Board would like to conclude that the SCOSS pilot has undergone a positive review, and SCOSS will continue beyond the pilot, inviting 6 new services to apply for the next funding cycle with an expectation that 2-3 will be endorsed in this round.

Lessons learnt throughout the pilot with DOAJ and Sherpa/RoMEO, and when discussing with funders and other stakeholders, have been most beneficial. We are clear on how far we can contribute to helping open infrastructure sustain themselves in the future; we have a strategy to embrace diversity on various levels and address pre-defined themes of importance to Open Science when making our infrastructure selections; we have optimised the funding process to better guarantee strong results, getting services committed and engaged in sustainable business models and funding acquisition from the very start; we have a solution to help fund SCOSS operations; and we will provide more transparency on several levels.