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How much are open source projects worth? Billions.

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Red Hat Verticals Team

An oft-cited benefit of using open source technology is the community that supports and contributes to its development. Consider that in the Linux Foundation's multiple open source projects there are more than 500 corporate members and thousands of developers collaborating on them. But how does all that add up? A new report just released from the foundation has an answer: \$5 billion.

The study, "A \$5 Billion Value: Estimating the Total Development Cost of Linux Foundation's Collaborative Projects," attempts to determine the monetary cost of rebuilding or developing the software residing in the foundation's collaborative projects if an organization had to create it from scratch, and the value in collaboration (outside of this cost) that is gained via commercial companies shipping this open code in products. To find the answers, the Linux Foundation turned to a study done in 2002 by David A. Wheeler that examined the Software Lines of Code (SLOC) present in a typical Linux distribution (Red Hat Linux 7.1), which estimated that it would cost over \$1.2 billion to develop a Linux distribution by conventional proprietary means in the U.S., and an update conducted by the foundation in 2008 determined that it would take \$10.8 billion to develop the Linux distribution Fedora 9 by traditional software development means in 2008 dollars. To expand on those studies and determine the value of code present in its current projects, the Linux Foundation used the Constructive Cost Model (COCOMO) to estimate the total effort required to create the projects.

Here are the results of the foundation's study, as noted in the report:

"As of last month, 115,013,302 total lines of source code were present in The Linux Foundation's collaborative projects. Using the COCOMO model, we estimated the total amount of effort required to retrace the steps of collaborative development to be 41,192.25 person-years. In other words, it would take a team of 1,356 developers 30 years to recreate the code base present in The Linux Foundation's current collaborative projects listed above. We estimate the total economic value of this work to be over \$5 billion."

It's great to see the value of open source represented in quantifiable, hard numbers. The foundation's report has a lot more detail, and we highly recommend you check it out. Meanwhile, let us know how your organization benefits from open source in the comments section below.

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