

# URSSI Implementation Plan

Karthik Ram      Jeffrey Carver      Sandra Gesing  
Daniel S. Katz      Nic Weber

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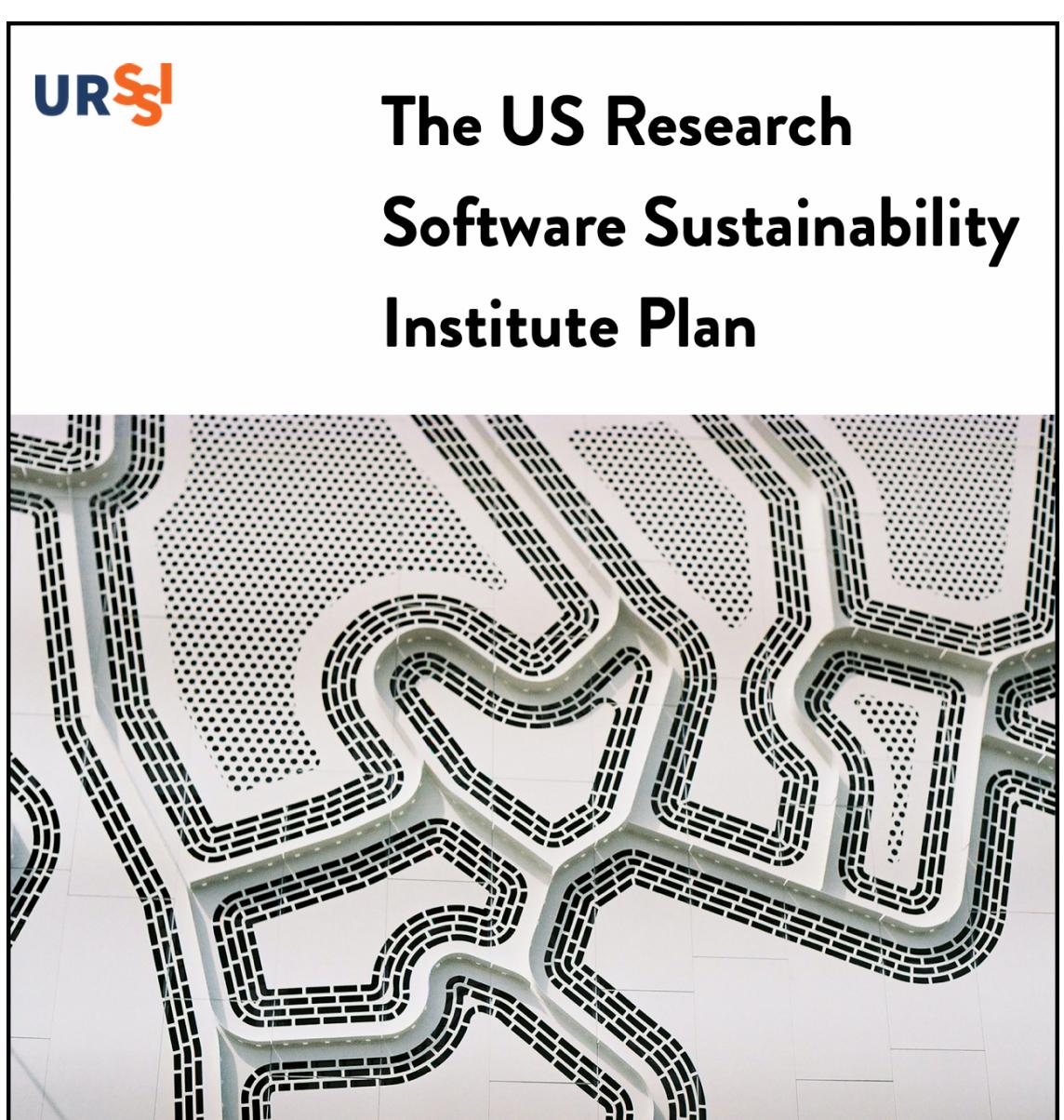
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# Welcome



**Karthik Ram, Jeffrey C. Carver,  
Sandra Gesing, Daniel S. Katz,  
Nic Weber**

This public document is a draft of the final URSSI plan. Empty sections are under internal review before being posted here.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Software pervades all parts of modern scientific research, including data analysis and inference as well as computational science. One would be hard pressed to find an area of research that is not impacted by software. Recent surveys in the US and UK show that 90-95% of researchers rely on research software, and 63-70% of them cannot continue their work if these software were to stop functioning (Hetrick et al., 2014). Much of this software is developed by researchers for researchers, as the contemporary scientific process demands the development of new methods in tandem with the demands of new discoveries and fields. However, despite its importance, a large proportion of research software is developed in an ad hoc manner, with little regard for the high standards that are characteristic of other research activities. As a result, the research software ecosystem is fragile and the source of numerous problems that plague modern computational science (Carver et al., 2018).

Researchers today are under intense pressure to demonstrate expertise in their chosen domains while also trying to maintain a working current knowledge of digital skills such as software engineering. This combination is unsustainable for most researchers. With little bandwidth to keep up with best practices or sufficient recognition of software development as a scholarly activity, much research software is developed in a manner that makes it wholly unsustainable, despite the obvious role that it plays in modern research, for a multitude of reasons. Academic promotion and tenure, even in institutions with liberal policies, consider peer-reviewed publications to be the primary metric of progress in most disciplines. Even when the impact of software is made clear, it is usually not considered a traditional scholarly activity, making it very challenging to get credit (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019). There is no shortage of horror stories of academics who have built demonstrably impactful software, only to be denied tenure. Even outside the tenure track, only a few academic jobs offer meaningful career progression for software work. A second reason, strongly correlated with the

lack of recognition of software, is the lack of training opportunities. Many research software engineers are self taught. Others learn programming from bootcamps and workshops rather than in traditional academic coursework. Over-worked academics are unable to take advantage of such opportunities and therefore develop software using outdated practices. Lastly, even when software is recognized as having impact, funding agencies rarely fund maintenance and ongoing development of such work, leading to reinvention rather than reuse (<https://chanzuckerberg.com/rfa/essential-open-source-software-for-science/>).

We have spent the last two years engaged in a series of activities designed to gain a deeper understanding of why research software is so unsustainable and what can be done about it. Through numerous discussions with diverse groups of researchers, we have brainstormed challenges and solutions that are highly scalable and impact a large swath of researchers. This plan discusses the problem in this chapter, describes our activities (in Chapter 2), outlines high-level plans and methods (in Chapter 3), discusses more detailed plans in the following five chapters (community & outreach activities in Chapter 4, education & training activities in Chapter 5, incubator activities in Chapter 6, policy activities in Chapter 7, and management & coordination in Chapter 8), talks about budget (in Chapter 9), discusses metrics & evaluation (in Chapter 10), and then concludes (in Chapter 11). This complete document is the justification and plan for a new institute that will work in multiple areas to improve research software and the careers of those that produce it, with an end goal of performing better research.

## 1.1 Nature of the problem

One would be hard pressed to name any field of scientific endeavor that has not been substantially transformed by software. From physics to psychology, software has transformed the way we create, acquire, process, model, and draw insights from data. Much of this transformation has come from the increasing availability of open source tools, many of which have helped improve the rigor, quality, and reproducibility of research. The development of research software is often not considered scholarship, making it very difficult for academics to seek funding and find meaningful career paths, especially when research software activities make up a significant part of their contributions. Such people often lead double lives, working tirelessly to meet the traditional responsibilities of academic life, while developing open source tools that enable modern research. We are able to break the problem down into the following four areas:

**Research software itself is not sustainably developed:** In many fields research software is developed by academics for other academics. Because these people have spent much of their careers developing deep domain expertise, but not developing deep software expertise, software does not often get the same level of care as other aspects of the research enterprise (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41592-019-0686-2>). Therefore the quality of the

software is highly variable, making it hard to sustain. Mounting technical debt often makes it easier to develop software from scratch than to use existing tools. Versions of software used in papers are exceedingly hard to track down, making it challenging to reproduce research findings or reuse research software. When Collberg and colleagues (Collberg et al., 2013, 2014) decided to measure the extent of the problem precisely, they investigated the availability of code and data as well as the extent to which this code would actually run with reasonable effort. The results were dramatic: of the 515 (out of 613) potentially reproducible papers, across applied computational research, the authors managed to ultimately run only 102 (less than 20%). These low numbers only count the authors' success in running the code, not in actually validating the results.

**Lack of career opportunities:** Software does not often count for career advancement (e.g., promotion and tenure) in academia, making it an invisible scholarly contribution. Research software is often not cited (31-43%), even in highly ranked journals (Howison and Bullard, 2016). Besides the negative impact on career trajectories, this lack of visibility means that incentives to produce sustainable, widely shared, and collaboratively developed software are lacking. For those outside of traineeships or tenure track positions, the Research Software Engineer (RSE) movement has begun creating a new class of academic positions that explicitly value software work, but such positions are not very common in universities the United States.

**Lack of training opportunities:** When NSF PIs in the BIO directorate were asked about their biggest challenges in leveraging vast amounts of data currently available, lack of training was listed as the single biggest challenge (Barone et al., 2017). Although this training deficit describes the ability to use existing data science software, the skills needed to develop them are harder to come by. While programs like The Carpentries and a handful of university courses offer training in analyzing data, very few train researchers in modern open source software development (Hetrick, 2014; Hetrick et al., 2014; Nangia and Katz, 2017). This gap remains to be filled.

**Lack of diversity in research software:** Open source communities struggle to gain participation from women and more broadly from underrepresented groups. Less than 10% of contributors to open source communities identify as female (Lee and Carver, 2019) compared with approximately 25% of the overall computer science field (National Science Foundation, 2017; Vasilescu et al., 2012). Cultivating a diversity of perspectives, fields, and backgrounds is important for growing a robust research software community. There is a need to understand the sources of diversity problems and work to improve over the current state (Daniel et al., 2013). Contrary to the initial belief in open source communities, the ability to contribute to a project anonymously does not solve the gender diversity issue (Nafus, 2012) at least partially because project members are able to determine the gender of contributors, even those that use pseudonyms (Vasilescu et al., 2015). In addition, a large percentage of female contributors have either been subject to or witnessed gender-based dis-

crimination (Powell et al., 2010) and have been discouraged from participating in these projects because of the aggressive nature of the discourse and the lack of female role models (Reagle, 2012). In our own URSSI survey, described in more detail later, we found evidence of the same lack of diversity. When asking survey respondents to self-identify their gender, only 25% identified as female. The 164 US respondents to the 2018 International RSE Survey (Philippe et al., 2019) reported being 82% male, 14% female, and 4% preferred not to say. They also reported being 77% white, 11% Asian, 6% Hispanic/Latino, 5% other, and 2% Black. Additionally, 3% reported having a disability.

## 1.2 Valuing producers of research software

Despite the numerous barriers that prevent people from receiving recognition and career success for their research software work, some have successfully overcome them. An exemplar is in this regard is Dr. Fernando Perez, currently an associate professor in statistics at the University of California, Berkeley. For much of his career he worked in a traditional untenured position as a research scientist in neuroscience and computational research, while collaboratively developing an open source notebook interface for the Python programming language as a side project. Over time, his software work started having much more of an impact than any of his traditional scientific contributions. The current evolution of his group’s efforts, the Jupyter ecosystem (<https://jupyter.org/>), is considered by many to be “universally accepted by the scientific community” and has won him and his team awards such as the Association for Computer Machinery award for software. More recently, the magnitude of his software contributions and the far reaching impact of this effort (<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/06/gravitational-waves-black-holes/528807/>, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/04/the-scientific-paper-is-obsolete/556676/>) has earned him a fast-tracked tenured position at University of California, Berkeley. This type of unconventional success in a traditional public university is a sign that the recognition of software work as scholarship is changing.

While the result of Dr. Perez’ story is promising, it is very difficult to achieve. Other academics who have produced work of similar or greater magnitude in the past weren’t as fortunate. Travis Oliphant, for example, served as an assistant professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Brigham Young University in the early 2000s. Among his accomplishments during this time, he is credited as the primary creator of NumPy, the Python library for numerical arrays that is the foundation of modern data science tools, and as one of the early contributors to SciPy, the widely used library for scientific Python. These contributions were deemed insufficient for tenure. Kirk McKusick, a professor at EECS in Berkeley was denied tenure in the early 1990s because his primary work was on the BSD Software Project, which then went on to become the foundation of the modern internet. [TODO: Other examples would be welcome and appreciated. Are

there women/people of color who have experienced similar situations that we can highlight here?]

### 1.3 Why we ran this conceptualization

It comes as no surprise to researchers that software is undervalued in academia. However, substantive evidence supporting this claim is scattered and mostly anecdotal, making it hard to build a convincing case that the research community and their stakeholders need to care more. In 2017 we submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation's Software Infrastructure for Sustained Innovation (S2I2) program to gather this evidence, identify unique challenges not already being addressed, and to formulate a plan for an institute to implement solutions. The proposal was funded in December 2018, allowing us to engage in various activities over the following 24 months. Despite the awareness of these issues and the existence of similar conceptualizations (albeit domain-centric ones), the core challenges around sustainability (of people/software/practices), recognition and credit, and training/workforce development remain poorly understood and poorly addressed.

We used a wide range of approaches to understand the core social and technical challenges of developing sustainable research software. These approaches include an extensive survey, in-person unconferences, both general and topic focused, a pilot training event, and a series of ethnographic studies. We mapped out the current state of software related challenges with an extensive survey targeting researchers across the country. We also invited participants to workshops across the country to share critical challenges and brainstorm solutions in small groups. We dug deeper on a couple of core issues that arose repeatedly (credit and incubators) by organizing two focused workshops to tackle them (credit and incubators). This report captures our summary of the survey, workshops, and studies and describes a core set of activities that define the work of a future US Research Software Institute.

### 1.4 What we plan to do and why

The conceptualization phase with its survey, workshops, and ethnographic studies elucidated the need in the community for different components of a potential implementation of URSSI. We identified four areas for supporting the research software community - to accelerate science for diverse research domains as well as software engineering as a research area in its own right. Each of these activities contributes to the desired impacts described in Section 3.4.

1. **Incubator:** Sustainability of research software has many aspects beyond good software engineering practices that overlap with diverse areas of ex-

pertise. Such areas include technology advice, project management, business planning, usability advice, license management, etc. The incubator service area would focus on providing projects with experts who have a consultancy agreement and could support a project in the different stages of their life cycle – from spinning up a project to first results and uptake of software to planning its sustainability after the funding ends.

2. **Education & Training:** Many universities offer curricula in conceptual software engineering but there is a lack of practical training to meet the community needs to go into depth for different technologies. University courses offered in computer science departments are also often impractical for domain researchers. The survey showed that there is a need to choose formats and timeframes that are suitable for people in the role of Research Software Engineers (RSEs) and busy domain scientists who lack formal or informal training. While The Carpentries and the RDA-CoDATA summer school, for example, do an excellent job of teaching basic programming and computational & data analytic methods to researchers in a peer-to-peer model, mostly in 2-day courses, URSSI has a massive opportunity fill the gap in teaching more in-depth software engineering, software project management, and community development practices in longer engagements, such as a 5-day summer- and/or winter-school. URSSI will strive to collaborate on topics with the Carpentries and the existing software sustainability institutes, such as the Science Gateways Community Institute and the Molecular Sciences Software Institute, so that rather than replicate effort, identify training opportunities in the overall research software landscape that is currently missing.
3. **Policy:** Policy is an important area to improve the sustainability of research software. Policies could include campaigns as well as guidelines for citation of software, templates for job positions, good software engineering practices as well as bad software engineering practices as counterexamples. We have already been collaborating with the UK SSI for several years and plan to expand collaborations with initiatives/projects such as US-RSE to find a common ground on international level while considering the specific situation in the US.
4. **Community & Outreach:** Many researchers or developers in the role of an RSE work in silos and the Community & Outreach area of URSSI would connect them to peers and provide access to beneficial material, resources, and contacts to improve this situation. The RSE community has already achieved some successes by simply working together. The number of chapters has gone from 1 UK university in 2013 to 28 chapters in 2020. URSSI has the potential to capture more of this momentum. Community engagement would include scalable communication such as a website, blogs and newsletters, two-way communications for discussions such as webinars and online discussion forums as well as face-to-face meetings in the form of

workshops. In addition, this area will include a fellows program to support work done by community members that benefits URSSI activities.

Building these different areas into URSSI would formalize URSSI's informal position as the focal point for the overall community of software developers as well as for a set of disciplinary communities. URSSI will help accelerate science that needs research software and improve the career paths of those who develop and maintain it, including RSEs.



## Chapter 2

# URSSI Conceptualization

The purpose of this conceptualization project was to create a roadmap for a US Research Software Sustainability Institute (URSSI). The roadmap was to be informed by and responsive to a community of potential stakeholders, including researchers, software developers and users, funders, and program / product managers. To engage this diverse group of people and institutions we completed the research described in this section including a series of workshops, community outreach and communication, a survey, set of ethnographic studies, and a pilot Winter School for early-career researchers. At the conclusion of this section we offer a summary of the challenges identified, collectively, across all of the URSSI conceptualization activities and what role we believe URSSI should play in addressing these challenges.

### URSSI Conceptualization Participation



## 2.1 Workshops

**Community wide workshops:** In 2018 we held two community workshops with URSSI stakeholders in Berkeley (April) and Chicago (October). We invited participants based on their ability to represent diverse roles, institutions, and perspectives on research software. The general goal of the two community workshops was to determine which topics this diverse group of stakeholders consider to be well-understood, which topics still have uncertainty or a need for guidance, and what work remains to be done in supporting sustainable research software. URSSI PIs facilitated broad discussions and participated in small group breakout discussions. Additionally, participants at each workshop gave presentations about their on-going research software activities.

**Thematic Workshops:** Participants at the first community workshop identified two topics worthy of more focused discussion and community input. We organized the following workshops to better understand those topics:

- The **Metrics, Credit and Citation Workshop**, held in Santa Barbara, California in January 2019, focused on research software metrics, citation, and impact evaluation. The 23 participants had strong expertise in the various workshop themes, including the PIs of the CodeMeta project, Zenodo, and software credit initiatives such as SourceCred.
- The **Research Incubators Workshop**, held in College Park, Maryland in February 2019, focused on methods for incubating new and existing research projects. The 20 participants had strong expertise in research software project development, including program officers from various government agencies, open-source research software developers, and organizational scholars that have studied research software processes.

**URSSI Design Workshop:** In April 2019 members of the Senior Personnel and Advisory Committees participated in a workshop in Chicago, IL. PIs presented preliminary results from our research (ethnographies and survey) as well as lessons learned from the four previously held URSSI workshops.

## 2.2 Website / Newsletter/ Blog

One of the major goals of the conceptualization project was to build awareness of the need for an institute, publicize our activities, and increase overall community interest. To achieve this goal, we used a website, nine newsletters, 36 blog posts, and a series of public talks and webinars given by the PIs and others. We sent the newsletters to the URSSI email list, which consists of workshop attendees and other interested members of the community. We also publicized the newsletter and blog posts via the URSSI twitter account, which has over 500 followers.

## 2.3 Survey

We developed and disseminated a survey to compliment workshop participation. The primary goal of the survey was to gather the opinions, preferences, and self-reported activities of the research software community regarding development practices, development tools, training, funding/institutional support, career paths, credit for software work, and diversity/inclusion. For each of these topics, we asked a small number of general questions and then allowed participants to self-select to answer more detailed questions about any area of particular interest. We distributed the survey to PIs of currently funded NSF and NIH projects and to relevant mailing lists. The survey closed in May 2019 after receiving approximately 1200 responses.

The results of the survey highlighted some areas where URSSI could play a key role in advancing the sustainability of research software in the United States.

1. There was a mismatch between how respondents wanted to allocate their time and their actual allocation of time. This result provides an opportunity for URSSI to work with developers and teams to help them focus their efforts on the tasks that are most relevant.
2. The aspects of the software development process respondents viewed as being more difficult than they should be tended to be people-related activities rather than technical activities. This result suggests that URSSI could support teams and developers by providing training and/or resources related to human factors in the software development process.
3. Respondents indicated they use a number of software development practices. However, one key practice that was underutilized is peer code review. URSSI can provide training on peer code review and work with teams to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to appropriately support this activity in the research software space.
4. The respondents indicated that software development practices including *requirements*, *design*, *maintenance*, and *documentation* were not well-supported by tools.
5. In terms of version control, there is still a sizable percentage of people who use methods like *copying files to another location* and *zip file backups* as version control. This result suggests that URSSI could provide additional training and tools to help teams use modern version control systems.
6. Many of the items above relate to training, or the lack thereof. The survey results suggest a large percentage of respondents have not received training in software development. While the respondents indicated there were sufficient opportunities for training, most of them suggested they did not have sufficient time for training. URSSI could help by providing

training in different formats that work better with the demands of the research software developers' environments.

7. Many respondents also found the level of support, in terms of funding, to be inadequate to be successful. URSSI could help by advocating both at the national funding level as well as at the University level for increased funding for important research software development activities.
8. Respondents also indicated their software contributions were not significantly valued in performance reviews. URSSI could help by developing and advocating for policies that help research software developers get adequate recognition for their work.
9. Most projects lack a formal diversity plan. URSSI could help by providing template diversity plans and support for developing appropriate plans for individual projects.

## 2.4 Ethnography

To gain a deeper understanding of the practices and experiences of researchers who are actively engaged in software development, we have undertaken a series of ethnographic studies. These studies focused on software projects of varying size and complexity in the fields of hydrology, astronomy, and biochemistry. Using observations, semi-structured interviews, and a series of archival documents, we produced case studies of how, over time, these projects overcame challenges of recruiting contributors, building a governance model, seeking funding, and sharing credit in sustaining a software project that has demonstrable impact on a community of researchers.

We developed two of these studies, Astropy and Rosetta Commons, as full case studies. Both projects face unique sustainability challenges that they solved somewhat differently. While the main findings of this work are not novel in the sense that they will surprise anyone familiar with challenges to sustaining research software, the value of this work is in comparing the two cases. By better understanding common approaches to overcoming sustainability challenges, we believe there is a valuable opportunity to abstract these approaches into models of success that research software projects in other domains can modify or tailor. The following is a brief summary of the findings from these two case studies.

Points of comparison:

- *Distributed work coordination:* Key to the success of both Astropy and Rosetta Commons is coordination of remote collaborative work. Astropy mirrors Python's core development team in structuring contributor guidelines and supporting designated maintainers. Rosetta Commons differs

substantially in that the project employs four full-time infrastructure maintainers. This offloading of maintenance responsibilities frees up contributors (distributed labs throughout the USA) to focus on conducting research and driving innovations that extend Rosetta’s key functionality.

- *Funding:* Astropy is fiscally sponsored by NumFocus, but depends upon grant funding from a variety of sources to sustain its collective work. A recent grant from Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, “Sustaining and Growing the Astropy Project,” is focused exclusively on maintenance and governance for the project’s long-term viability to practicing astronomers. Rosetta Commons combines licensing and grant funding to sustain its work. Licenses for commercial use and an NIH infrastructure maintenance grant have continuously supported the project since 2005.
- *Credit:* Both projects have had a number of papers published about their development. Astropy suggests two publications to cite when acknowledging use of the software (Robitaille et al., 2013; Price-Whelan et al., 2018). These two publications, combined, have over 3000 citations. Rosetta Commons, because it has many versions, methods, and language specific implementations, has no canonical citation. Interviews with contributors to Rosetta noted that this lack of canonical citation causes confusion for authors when rushing towards publication. Many researchers have sought a centralized source they could acknowledge. Despite the lack of a canonical citation, two papers describing Rosetta and its use in predicting protein structures have, combined, over 4300 citations (Rohl et al., 2004; Salmena et al., 2011).

We observe differences in the two projects that seem marginal at first glance, but upon further analysis have important practical consequences for software development activities. For example, two substantial differences in the projects have consequences for the long-term sustainability of each project:

- Astropy, in following an open model of contribution, focuses time and attention on clearly documenting and making contributor guidelines accessible to research software engineers. The maintenance team therefore focuses their effort on ensuring contributors are supported while simultaneously keeping various packages up to date and available to the community that depends upon this code for their research. This approach is partially a result of the software ecosystem being broadly useful to a discipline (Astronomy), as compared to Rosetta Commons, which focused on specific analytic tasks within a subfield of biological engineering (Macromolecular modelling).
- Continuous annual grant funding and licensing fees allow Rosetta to centralize infrastructure tasks to a core team whose sole job is maintenance. This approach in turn encourages innovation and expansion of feature sets

for labs that focus solely on producing new research insights. Astropy has, over time, centralized maintenance of the project’s software development and maintenance. But until very recently, this maintenance has been a volunteer activity. Shifting time, attention, and energy towards organizing an open-source model of development impacts career trajectories for practicing astronomers and contributes to a more fragile ecosystem for astronomy.

We recognize that software sustainability is more than just financial support, but what these case studies make clear is that the economic realities of maintaining and contributing to software development have important downstream impacts that shape innovation and engagement. The URSSI conceptualization has studied how these challenges can be practically overcome.

## 2.5 Winter School

In late December 2019 we ran our first ever URSSI school on research software engineering. We began accepting applications in July and received an overwhelming response to our call for applications. For the 30 participant slots available, we received 169 applications, meaning we had a challenging time selecting the participants and had to turn away a large number of interested researchers. While the selection committee used multiple criteria to evaluate and select participants, successful applicants already had some experience with Python programming, Git, and Unix skills, which was necessary to benefit from the workshop. Our goal was not to repeat the same material covered in bootcamps and Software Carpentry style workshops, but to focus on the research software engineering skills that not formally taught in any setting. These skills include best practices for packaging code as software, testing, collaborative software development, code review, and related topics such as licensing and archiving. The school lasted 2.5 days.

Based on the demand described above, this experience made evident the strong need for the skills covered in the school. The overall feedback from the school was also positive (more on that below). Some key lessons from this pilot that impact our design of a Summer School as part of URSSI are: 1) the school needs to be longer to allow for both discussion time and focused time for students to work on their own code, applying the lessons from the lectures; and 2) the presence of additional helpers outside of the primary instructors was quite beneficial to help answer specific questions from the students.

A few example quotes from the Winter School feedback form include:

- “I really can’t say enough good things about this super empowering workshop! You did an amazing job identifying the things I didn’t know that I

didn't know, and teaching them at a level that was immediately actionable in my work."

- "Thank you so much to everyone for taking this amazing initiative to teach young scientists on software sustainability."
- "Thank you for putting together this winter-school, it was super useful to me and I'm looking forward to applying everything I learned to my future projects and to go deeper into the topics that were covered."

## 2.6 Joint Activities

During the URSSI conceptualization process, we helped start two new activities that overlapped our goals, both so that we could promote these goals and also so that we could build up these future partners of a later full URSSI institute.

### 2.6.1 Research Software Alliance (ReSA)

ReSA was founded in 2018 to support recognition and valuing of research software as a fundamental and vital component of research worldwide, instigated by URSSI, the UK Software Sustainability Institute, and the Australian Research Data Commons. ReSA's mission is to bring research software communities together to collaborate on the advancement of research software. Recent achievements include:

- Development of research software guidelines for policy makers, funder, publishers and the research community for inclusion in the RDA COVID-19 Guidelines and Recommendations (Research Data Alliance, 2020)
- Inclusion of software in the draft revision of the OECD Committee for Science and Technology Policy's Enhanced Access to Publicly Funded Data for Science, Technology and Innovation (which will become soft law) (**TODO** add link to final document after release)
- Co-leadership of the FAIR 4 Research Software taskforce with FORCE11 and RDA to develop community-agreed principles and implementation guidelines
- Support from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to achieve ReSA's goals

The Director of ReSA is Michelle Barker and the Steering Committee is comprised of:

- Neil Chue Hong, Director, Software Sustainability Institute, UK

- Catherine Jones, Software Engineering Group Leader, STFC, UK
- Daniel S. Katz, Assistant Director for Scientific Software and Applications, National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), University of Illinois, USA
- Chris Mentzel, Executive Director, Stanford University, USA
- Karthik Ram, URSSI PI, University of California, Berkeley, USA
- Andrew Treloar, Director, Platforms and Engagements, Australian Research Data Commons, Australia

### 2.6.2 Research Software Engineering (RSE)

In a 2012 workshop run by the UK SSI, a number of UK researchers who develop software realized that while they internally recognized a number of common elements to the work they did, along with others at their universities, there was no commonality to how others saw this work and these roles, and they needed to come together to build and develop a community. As stated by James Hetherington, they decided they needed to “develop the profession of a scientific software engineer and the career track of software developers in academia.” The SSI studied academic job descriptions in the UK, and found about 10000, of which about 400 were related to software development, with 194 different job titles. To build recognition of the common software elements of these positions, the SSI chose the name “research software engineer”. The SSI then began publicizing this idea, building a community of people who identified with the role, leading to the formation of the UK RSE Association, which is now the Society of Research Software Engineering. The SSI and RSE Association/Society encouraged people who were performing RSE-like work to also identify with this title, built RSE groups in UK universities, encouraged universities to change their job titles, held workshops and then conferences for RSEs, encouraged a funding agency to provide fellowships to RSEs, and built up the association/society, which now has about 2000 members (Hetrick, 2016).

As a number of non-UK people (including some URSSI PIs) started attending UK RSE conferences, the SSI also supported activities to grow the international community. These self-developed and SSI-supported activities have led to RSE groups in Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, the US, Canada, Australia/New Zealand, South Africa, and Belgium, some of which have now held national workshops and conferences. The US Research Software Engineer Association (US-RSE) formed in 2018, with the support and participation of three of the five URSSI PIs, and has 420 members as of May 2020. The US-RSE Association is centered around three main goals:

- *Community*: to provide a coherent association of those who identify with the role (not necessarily title) of Research Software Engineer, and to provide the members of the community the ability to share knowledge, professional connections, and resources.

- *Advocacy:* to promote RSEs' impact on research, highlighting the increasingly critical and valuable role RSEs serve.
- *Resources:* to provide useful resources to multiple demographics, including technical and career development resources, and information and material to support the establishment and expansion of RSE positions and groups within the research ecosystem.

There are thus some overlaps between US-RSE's goals and URSSI's and a clear reason for us to work together going forward.

## 2.7 Synthesis of URSSI Activities

In the following section we describe common challenges and dilemmas we identified across URSSI's conceptualization activities. Where possible, we identify the role URSSI could play in helping overcome these challenges as a funded institute.

### Challenge 1: Decentralized expertise

Throughout the planning activities, the community of stakeholders recognized that there already exist a number of individual efforts to help improve the development, maintenance, and overall sustainability of research software in the US. While these efforts, collectively, are comprehensive in their scope, the decentralized structure of this expertise is inefficient for both resource discovery and delivery of services. For example there are many points of expertise in research software development (e.g., SWEBOK, RSEs), education and training (e.g., academic initiatives, Carpentries), credit and metrics (e.g., CiteAs), incubation (e.g., ESIP, the UW eScience Institute) that are available to individuals at specific institutions. However, there is currently no comprehensive organization that can serve to coordinate these activities, promote centers of expertise, and ensure that effort is not duplicated— a role that is played admirably in the UK by the Software Sustainability Institute.

As a coordinating center, URSSI could help solve this challenge in the following ways:

- Broker connections between points of expertise and serve to coordinate efforts and funding such that different experts could better collaborate on sustainable development, education, and policy initiatives.
- Identify and convene experts to help fill gaps that exist between service delivery, for example, where the Carpentries see gaps in knowledge skill or acquisition in sustaining software education.

- Disseminate best practices from specific disciplines to the broader research community. By acting as a center of research software excellence URSSI could be a space where solutions from one domain could be learned and efficiently transferred to another.
- Coordinate and help to curate relevant research software packages through discovery portals, such as <https://libraries.io/>

**Challenge 2: Pathways to sustainability for non-commercial research software**

Throughout the URSSI conceptualization activities, participants voiced concern for the viability of valuable software projects that do not seek commercialization. Technology transfer programs at universities and through research funding agencies (e.g. I-Corps, SBIR/STTR) are well established and have been successful at helping entrepreneurially-focused software projects recognize and execute viable business models. This transition pathway is promoted for software that has a potential to sustain itself through fees or licensing agreements. However, there is no equivalent university guidance for software projects that would like to pursue non-commercial open source models for sustainability.

There is a need for a US-based institute, divorced from any single university, to help valuable research software projects realize a non-commercial open-source route to sustainability. This support could include a program, such as an incubator, that would guide research software projects towards developing open-source governance, budgeting, licensing, and fiscal sponsorship in service of non-commercial sustainability. We view this route, and its guidance from an institute, as critical to promoting an ecosystem of diverse research software projects that may not be readily amenable to commercialization, or have the potential to build healthy and viable volunteer developer communities as an alternative to licensing.

**Challenge 3: Coordinated advocacy and analysis for policy change**

Related to the first challenge of decentralized expertise, there is a need for coordination and targeted leadership around policy for sustainable research software. Participants in URSSI workshops described a need for coordinating communities around emerging national, institutional, and even disciplinary specific policies that have a downstream impact on sustainability, such as software citation principles, tenure and promotion guidelines that recognize research software contributions, sustained funding or financial support for research software maintenance, and software management plans that explicitly document expectations around software development and archiving.

Currently, community members take on many of these policy activities as additional professional service, or as volunteer work. This secondary focus on any one policy issue, in turn, leads to slow progress, high turnover of volunteers, and does not allow any one person or institution to develop the deep expertise needed for effective sustained analysis or advocacy.

An institute that could dedicate time and attention to policy design, invest personnel time in developing needed expertise, and coordinate a sustainable lobbying network would allow advocacy work to become more manageable, effective, and result in better outcomes for research software stakeholders. Further, there is often a need to conduct advocacy work driven by empirical research that can substantiate how or why one policy decision is better than another. An institute dedicated to these activities would facilitate data-driven policy research that could lead to stronger advocacy positions, and benefit funding agencies, universities, and research institutions that seek to adopt new policy aimed at improving research software sustainability.

#### **Challenge 4: Signals of viability**

A valuable contribution of the URSSI workshop and engagement activities has been convening stakeholders with expertise in the evaluation and funding of research software. These stakeholders include current and former program officers from NSF, NIH, DoE, DoD, and IMLS, as well as philanthropic organizations like the Gordon and Betty Moore and Alfred P. Sloan foundations. These participants have a collective desire for an institute to develop stronger signals of a research software project's viability; to help evaluate a project's potential for long-term sustainability; and help communities of research software stakeholders coalesce around strategic funding initiatives that could benefit research through software investments.

A dedicated US institute focused on software sustainability could help meet this challenge in a number of ways, but we recognize that there is no overarching or simple solution. The plan we describe below explains, in numerous places, how URSSI can and should convene different communities to address complex problems like strategic financial investment, evaluation for viability, etc.

#### **Challenge 5: Career Advancement and Credit**

Closely related to Challenges 1, 3 and 4 is a desire of URSSI stakeholders to see an institute dedicate time and resources towards promoting recognition for research software activities and helping to shape reliable career pathways for research software engineers (RSEs). At URSSI workshops, there was near-unanimous agreement that the acknowledgement of research software contributions remains difficult for career advancement and there is a lack of clear guidance for both universities and funding agencies on how to make progress on these issues.

A dedicated US-based institute for research software sustainability could play a leading role in advocating for best practices in the measurement, reward, and credit for research software activities. This activity would include dedicated research into measuring and evaluating software development activities, advancing techniques for use and user impact evaluation, and promoting formative metrics that are conducive to long-term viability. Relatedly, a dedicated US-based institute could better evaluate and promote the impact of research software engineering positions that currently exist and advocate for their creation where

they do not.

In the next chapter, we describe URSSI's plan to meet each of these challenges. In particular, we focus on how a strategic investment in a US-based software sustainability institute would practically organize itself, allocate budgets, and measure progress on each of the challenges identified in the conceptualization phase.

# **Chapter 3**

## **URSSI Plan**

Throughout the URSSI conceptualization process, the team worked on overall planning iteratively, using slides at workshops and the URSSI website to disseminate current thoughts, using the survey and the ethnographic studies as inputs, using workshops (including slides and shared note documents) and the discussion forum (using Discourse on <https://discuss.urssi.us>) to gather and record feedback. Together, these activities plus internal discussions of the team and a focused mission and vision working group have led to most of the content of this document.

### **3.1 Mission and Vision**

URSSI PIs began to develop mission and vision statements in late 2018. The intent of these statements was to succinctly state the purpose for URSSI's existence (mission) and based on that purpose what URSSI strives to achieve (vision). The process for developing these statements was:

- At the first two workshops, we asked participants about the goals and vision that a US research software sustainability institute should pursue.
- The URSSI PIs then identified institutions with similar goals and collected their mission and vision statements for comparison.
- Eight members of the Senior Personnel and Advisory Committee participated in a working group focused on developing URSSI's mission and vision statement.
- Each working group participant provided a written set of three mission and three vision statements based on the conceptualization proposal, workshop participant's feedback, and guidance from the URSSI PIs.

- Neil Chue Hong, director of the Software Sustainability Institute in the UK, facilitated a synthesis of the working group's feedback. This synthesis process included a teleconference with participants to discuss and refine versions of each mission and vision statement.
- The URSSI PIs then presented drafts of each statement to workshop participants at the final URSSI meeting in Chicago and refined a final version of each statement.

The mission and vision of URSSI are as follows:

**Mission:** Our mission is to improve the recognition, development, and use of software for a more sustainable research enterprise. We achieve this mission through collaboratively developing education, outreach, and software services that emphasize open, transparent reproducible, and cooperative practices. URSSI is an institute for software expertise as well as a social infrastructure that promotes an inclusive and diverse community of research software engineers, maintainers, contributors, and users.

**Vision:** Empowered people, building better software, enabling exceptional research

## 3.2 Planning assumptions, methods, and principles

The following assumptions are inputs to our planning process:

- Our plan is based on the idea of proposing to NSF, and therefore, focuses on the US community. We will, however, work with like-minded organization both inside and outside the US, including the Research Software Alliance (ReSA). (Also see the potential partners listed the next subsection.)
- We will propose an institute with a 5-year duration and a potential 5-year extension, based on NSF's current institutes and published documents.
- The budget of URSSI will be \$3m-\$5m per year. We take \$3m as the baseline minimum funding level needed to operate an institute, below which an institute is not the right method to achieve the mission and vision, and then build higher cost and higher return activities on that baseline.
- There is demonstrated interest in supporting some URSSI goals from private foundations and potential interest from other federal agencies, so URSSI activities should be planned as a set of reinforcing (but separable) activities, potentially on different timelines.

- There is a strong need for improved software sustainability across all fields, and URSSI cannot solve this need in all fields by itself.
- There are many partners who can help URSSI achieve some of its goals, as there is overlap between these goals and the goals of those partners (see the next subsection)
- It is not practical for URSSI to directly work with the US research software development community (all of those who develop research software in the US, including in academia, national laboratories, and industry) due to the small size of URSSI and the very large size of this community, so URSSI needs to work indirectly by leveraging other groups.

Given the mission and vision, and our assumptions, we plan to use a set of methods to ensure that URSSI is successful:

- URSSI must choose a set of initial targeted communities and efforts, focus on them for some period (until some predefined metrics of success are met or some predefined time period has passed without success), then move on to the next set of targets
- URSSI must work closely with partners to amplify its efforts (see the next subsection)
- URSSI must be clever about using resources, attempting to achieve multiple outputs for activities whenever possible.

Guiding principles:

- Leverage existing organizations for authority, credibility, resources
- Focus on people, not projects
- Embed diversity and inclusion within all aspects of URSSI
- Leverage available resources (software, services, credit systems, training materials, etc.) where possible rather than reinvent
- Share resources we create to allow others to reuse and build on elsewhere
- Respect and learn from volunteers
- Activities should have an end or a sustainability plan beyond URSSI
- Distinguish between software quality measures (badging, intrinsic) and software impact measures (reuse, citation)
- Sustain software by sustaining its communities (stewards, developers, maintainers, leaders, active users)

- Coordinate activities rather than start new ones when possible
- Advocate and promote a variety of solutions to challenges, recognizing that no one solution is likely to work for all stakeholders or in all situations

Some topics are partially or completely out-of-scope for URSSI:

- **Software Commercialization.** As an institute, URSSI will position itself as a broker to existing bodies of knowledge or expertise, and seek to fill needed gaps where no expertise already exists. Relevant to this positioning is a route to research software sustainability through software commercialization. We view this path to sustainability as already well supported by existing programs and initiatives, some of which are already funded by NSF. As a principle, URSSI is not opposed to or discouraging of research software commercialization. We will actively seek to learn from and collaborate with the commercial software ecosystem, including technology transfer offices that provide structured pathways to commercialization for research software in academic institutions. In this role, URSSI might guide people in deciding if commercialization is a realistic or good choice for their software project, and connect those who decide that it is to existing support programs like I-Corps. What we believe URSSI can uniquely provide, and what we find to be lacking, is support for alternative routes to sustainability through open-source or non-commercial fiscal sponsorship. While these alternative routes are obviously less straightforward, and more challenging they remain the most viable option for improving the long-term accessibility and impact of most research investments in software. A majority of even the best research software projects won't be commercially viable given the size and scope of their audience. It is this critical gap, between commercialization and open-source, that URSSI seeks to close.
- **Software Development and Maintenance.** URSSI staff will not develop or maintain research software, nor will URSSI provide funds to projects to do this, other than as part of focused incubation or training activity. Given the small size of URSSI and the large size of the software development and maintenance community, such hands-on software work is not a useful way for URSSI to have an impact.
- **Infrastructure.** URSSI will not run infrastructure for the research software community. If new infrastructure is needed, URSSI will work with other organizations to instigate projects to create and maintain that infrastructure, run by those other organizations.

to create and maintain that infrastructure, run [TODO: what else should be out-of-scope for URSSI?]

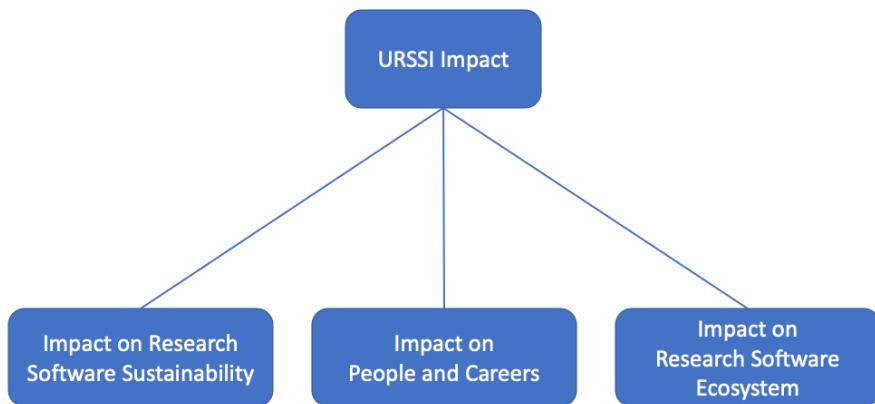
### 3.3 Partners

URSSI will work with a variety of partners with whom we have overlapping goals. For the purpose of this plan, we list partners with whom we will seek to work, recognizing that these potential partner organizations have not made a commitment, and such commitments will depend on specific activities, and specific funding opportunities. In the following table, we list these potential partners and the areas in which we see an opportunity for collaboration. See the appropriate chapters (e.g. Community & outreach (Chapter 4), Education & training (Chapter 5), etc.) for the specific partnering opportunities in each area of URSSI's work.

Potential partner	Partnering area(s)
Other NSF SI2/CSSI Institutes & Centers of Excellence (e.g., SGCI, MolSSI, IRIS-HEP)	policy, education & training, incubator, community & outreach
Research Software Alliance (ReSA)	policy, community & outreach
Software Sustainability Institute (SSI)	policy, education & training, incubator, community & outreach
Better Scientific Software (BSSw)	policy, education & training, community & outreach
Fiscal sponsors (e.g., NumFOCUS, Code for Science & Society)	policy, incubator, community & outreach
US-RSE Association	policy, education & training, community & outreach
(UK) RSE Society	policy, education & training, community & outreach
Academic Data Science Alliance (ASDA)	policy, community & outreach
Research Data Alliance (RDA)	policy, education & training
American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)	policy, community & outreach
Science & Technology Policy Fellows	
Campus Research Computing Consortium (CaRCC)	policy
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	policy
The Carpentries	education & training
Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement	community and engagement

### 3.4 Desired impact

URSSI's ultimate desired impact, as stated in the vision, is on scholarly research in all fields. URSSI aims to achieve this impact by enabling and encouraging the contribution of the resources and training to the research software ecosystem that will improve research software and to empower the people who create and maintain that software. In the remainder of this chapter, for each of these three elements of impact, we describe our activities that we believe will contribute to them. Additionally, in Chapter 10 (Metrics and Evaluation), we show the full set of activities and their intended impacts.



For software, URSSI aims to improve the sustainability of research software by

- Developing and curating best practices for software projects, including examining practices in industry, for testing, governance, codes of conduct, continuous integration.
- Sharing information and practices through communities calls, training opportunities, an incubator, and a community-developed book

The activities that have a primary impact on the sustainability of research software are described in Community & outreach (Chapter 4), Education & training (Chapter 5), and Incubator (Chapter 6). Additionally, some activities in Policy (Chapter 7) have a secondary impact on the sustainability of research software.

For people, URSSI aims to improve the careers of those who develop and maintain research software by:

- Fellowships
- In-person events and community calls

- A summer school, and the incubator program
- Promoting new career paths for those who develop and maintain research software
- Developing and advocating for research software usage and impact metrics to be a factor in the hiring and promotion of software developers and maintainers, including promoting the publication of research software
- Encouraging a diverse set of participants to enter the research software development and maintenance field and decreasing structural and systemic barriers to productive careers for members of underrepresented groups

The activities that have a primary impact on people and careers are described in the four following chapters, on Community & outreach (Chapter 4), Education & training (Chapter 5), Incubator (Chapter 6), and Policy (Chapter 7).

For the research software ecosystem, URSSI aims to improve the understanding and functioning of the ecosystem by

- In-person events and community calls
- A newsletter and an active social media presence
- Incentivizing contributions to public software
- Disentangling software quality and software impact, including promoting software credit and citation mechanisms
- Documenting the use of research software in research and providing systematic and regular analysis of the impact this software has on research
- Promoting an increased understanding of the importance of research software in research
- Advocating for increased funding opportunities for software maintenance
- Creating an award program to recognize software contributions
- Growing and participating in communities around the field of research software

The activities that have a primary impact on the research software ecosystem are described in Community & outreach (Chapter 4) and Policy (Chapter 7). Additionally, some activities in Education & training (Chapter 5) have a secondary impact on the research software ecosystem.



## Chapter 4

# Community & Outreach

Researchers in academia and national labs are incentivized to become experts in one or more specialized domains. While research software plays a critical role in achieving such mastery, skills to develop such software are rarely taught in formal settings. These skills are often picked up from secondary special interest communities and online resources. We plan to formalize such community resources and associated activities in our institute plans.

The institute's Community area will build a thriving community of like-minded peers for researchers to seek advice, learn about training opportunities, and funding announcements. A community manager will curate state of the art information on best practices for research software development. We will work closely with The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) to train a research engineer who seeks to pursue a career in community management. CSCCE specializes in professionalizing scientific community building and their training program can be completed while the community manager is getting started with their position. The Community area will also administer a competitive fellowship program for early career researchers. These fellowships will provide funding, training, and prestige/recognition to pursue a career that promotes the development and use of research software. The thriving community will also provide venues and annual conference focused on software across disciplines where researchers can share their work, learn about new software, and software development techniques.

Many of the current challenges around sustainability of software, and those who produce it, are mostly social and cultural and not limited by any unassailable technical challenges. While other areas of the institute such as Policy and Education & Training lay down the guidelines and training necessary to grow the research software enterprise, a strong community strategy will be key to maintaining it. URSSI will act as the hub for all types of researchers interested in using and developing research software. The institute will provide necessary resources to address shared challenges and help catalyze collaborations to tackle

emerging problems. URSSI's Community & Outreach area will achieve this mission through the set of activities described below.

## 4.1 Community & Outreach Resources

Managing the URSSI community will require the following staff and resources:

- Managing communications (website with regular posts, moderating a mailing list), producing high quality newsletters, and acting as a community liaison will require 2-3 FTEs.
- This could involve a Director of Community (could be part of a PI's time), with the remaining part of the area's workforce split over two positions: a community manager and fellowship coordinator (to be split with the Incubator Area), reporting to the Director of Community. We will work closely with The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement to recruit one of their scientific community manager trainees as a fellow. We may also recruit someone who will undergo their training upon joining URSSI.

Besides the budget for the 2-3 positions, the Community & Outreach area of the institute will also require budget for:

- Technical infrastructure (including: website, mailing list, archiving of resources). Maintaining a high quality newsletter will require access to high quality data feeds, all of which require paid subscriptions. The team will also require technical help to maintain a static site on GitHub.
- One URSSI fellow (as part of a cohort of 4-5 fellows/year) can be asked to focus on community. Much like the BSSW fellowship, an URSSI fellow can propose a community related topic to pursue for the year of their fellowship.
- Participant support for fellows and speakers to attend annual meetings
- Base costs for an annual URSSI conference (with the rest to be supported by registration and sponsorships)

## 4.2 Community & Outreach Methods

### 4.2.1 Fellowship Program

URSSI will run an annual fellowship program modeled heavily on the successful program run by the UK Software Sustainability Institute (Sufi and Jay, 2018).

We will recruit 3-5 fellows from a pool of US graduate students, postdocs, and research software engineers. Since research software suffers from a lack of diversity, the fellowship selection process committee will focus on providing opportunities for candidates from underrepresented groups. The community team will rely on existing research and tools on candidate selection to make decision making transparent and free from human biases as much as possible (Huppenkothen et al., 2020). One of the criteria used to select fellows will be a diversity statement that fellows will be required to submit, and ~50% of the selected fellows will be members of underrepresented groups, with a lower bound of 25%. Each fellow will affiliate with one or more areas of URSSI (Policy, Education, Community, Incubator) and propose an activity that would take no more than 1 day a week of their time. Fellowship stipend will provide an appropriate time buyout and also cover travel to biannual collaborations workshops, and the annual URSSI conference. Fellows will be given an additional travel budget to present their research software activities at society and discipline conferences. Each fellow will be paired with an URSSI mentor and success will be based on entry and exit interviews.

The fellowship program is aimed at the people and careers portion of URSSI's impact goals.

#### 4.2.2 In-person events

Create new community events: Building upon the work of small workshops such as Workshop on Sustainable Software for Science: Practice and Experiences (WSSSPE), there is an opportunity for URSSI to host an annual in-person conference for scientists, developers, and students to connect and discuss research software development and their applications. One of the criteria used to select funded attendees will be a diversity statement that applicants will be required to submit, and at least 25% of the selected applicants to be funded will be members of underrepresented groups. The conference will initially be medium sized (with a limit of 300 participants) and grow depending on the interest. Talks and workshops will span the entire continuum from applied computational research to software development. The event will also feature a “demo day” for URSSI incubated projects, which would be a cross cutting activity with the Incubator program. The costs for such an event will be supplemented by a mix of registration fees and sponsorships.

In-person events are aimed at the people and careers and research software ecosystem portions of URSSI's impact goals.

#### 4.2.3 Online community events

Promote existing activities: One of URSSI's strengths will lie in amplifying the work of existing initiatives. We will achieve this by showcasing projects

in our weekly newsletter, by inviting projects to present their work on monthly community calls (aka webinars), and by highlighting/crossposting news via partner organizations such as the Carpentries, rOpenSci, Workshop on Sustainable Software for Science (WSSSPE), Mozilla, and others. The community manager will work with various partners and data feeds to curate and disseminate a high quality newsletter similar to the the data science newsletter operated by the Academic Data Science Allaince (ADSA). The institute will budget for costs associated with newsfeed subscriptions.

Community calls: Modeled after the successful series organized by Mozilla and rOpenSci, a monthly webinar series will expose researchers to the latest best practices and new trends in research software, and will provide them an opportunity to interact with prominent research software engineers. This free and open series will provide additional opportunity for the community to participate, especially for those that are constrained by travel. Past calls, including videos, code, and Q&A will be archived and made searchable by a dedicated community coordinator. We will consider diversity when chosing participants who will present in these calls, and seek to have at least 25% of the presenters being members of underrepresented groups.

Online community events are aimed at all three portions of URSSI's impact goals: research software sustainability, people and careers, and the research software ecosystem.

#### 4.2.4 Curating and disseminating best practices

URSSI fellows will convene ad hoc panels of experts to curate information on state of the art practices for scientific computing. The topics will cover many foundations of research software engineering including but not limited to collaborative software developing with modern version control, software testing, code review, packaging and distribution, and overall software design. The materials will also provide strong guidance on open science practices to increase impact of such work. These include guidance on licensing, properly archiving research software, and citation.

Curating and disseminating best practices is primarily aimed at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goals, and secondarily at the people and careers and research software ecosystem portions.

#### 4.2.5 Newsletter and social media

There is a huge opportunity for URSSI to produce and disseminate a high quality newsletter to keep the community informed about research software news, notable research papers, critical software, events and job openings. The data science community already benefits from such a newsletter that is maintained by Laura Noren and Brad Stegner and financially supported by the Academic

Data Science Alliance. The community manager will curate news, jobs, software releases, conferences, and activities of other organizations (by crossposting). For community calls, we will invite speakers from related communities such as SSI, BSSw, US-RSE, and also solicit presentations from the larger community. All material will be stored in public GitHub repositories under a permissive license to allow people to use and remix the content while contributing back to the original source.

The four major channels of communication will be a website, a newsletter, mailing list, and accounts on social media such as Twitter and Slack.

The newsletter and social media are primarily aimed at all the research software ecosystem portion of URSSI's impact goals, and secondarily at the research software sustainability and people and careers portions.

#### 4.2.6 Other activities

Besides the activities described above, the institute will feature these ongoing activities:

- URSSI will serve as a broker for software expertise and connect developers to scientific projects seeking contractors, expert advice or collaborators on grants. The community team will coordinate some combination of a job/skills board to better leverage expertise among US institutions. [TODO: Flesh out details of this program]
- Promote training events from URSSI and other communities
- Develop an ambassador program for early career researchers to promote sustainable software and current issues to their local communities. Examples of similar programs include the Campus Champions program at XSEDE, and the SSI fellows program (Sufi and Jay, 2018).

An URSSI ambassador program will be a light touch activity (less engaged than the fellows program) and provide students at US colleges and universities with resources to support campus colleagues effectively use research software to advance their research. The program will provide a venue to build community among early stage students (advanced undergraduates, beginning graduate students). One of the criteria used to select ambassadors will be a diversity statement that potential ambassadors will be required to submit, and at least 25% of the ambassadors will be members of underrepresented groups.

- Hosting a blog, with a series of staff and guest blog posts, including cross-posting relevant blog posts from others

Table 4.1: Impact table

Activity	Impact on Research Software	Impact on people and careers	Impact on
Fellowships		X	
In-person events		X	
Community calls	X	X	
Curate best practices	X	y	
Newsletter & social media		y	

### 4.3 Community & Outreach Assessment and Metrics

#### Goals:

- Steadily grow the number of subscribers and participants each year
- Grow the diversity of participants, instructors, and speakers each year. Self reported data on affiliations and domains of expertise will also provide a measurable metric of impact across domains.
- Grow the number of applications we receive for the fellowship program every year
- Grow the rate of paper and poster submissions every year
- Improve the careers of those who participate in URSSI

#### Metrics:

- Number of subscribers to the newsletter, visitors to the website, and social media followers over time
- Quantify instructors, presenters, lesson developers, and participants by demographic and geographic breakdown
- Count citations of software that have participated in URSSI
- Tracking career paths of fellows will also act as a measure of success for the program

#### Impacts:

This table maps URSSI activities from this chapter to the three portions of URSSI's intended impact. (A complete table of impacts from all URSSI activities can be found in Chapter 10 (Metrics and Evaluation).) In the impact cells, X indicates a designed primary impact on an activity, and y indicates a designed secondary impact.

## Chapter 5

# Education & Training

Researchers often view software development skills as separate from, but complementary to their disciplinary training. This perspective introduces a dilemma for researchers, particularly for early-career researchers, who need to master their discipline and simultaneously acquire sufficiently-good software engineering skills. When forced to choose, they typically make sacrifices or take shortcuts in software engineering, as they view their disciplinary skills and knowledge as more important to their careers, and more rewarded by current incentive systems. Further, many researchers do not aspire to become software engineering experts, but approach the acquisition of software skills as a means to a research end. This approach is implicitly encouraged by the fact that the educational content of most disciplines that require software skills does not actually include sufficient discussion of software development or engineering. As a result, there are valuable skills such as packaging, testing, releasing, archiving, and even designing research software that are dramatically underdeveloped in the overall research ecosystem.

Indeed, previous studies demonstrate that researchers are rarely purposely trained to develop software. A 2017 survey of US National Postdoctoral Association members regarding postdocs' use of software in research and their training regarding software development found that 95% of respondents use research software. However, 54% ( $n = 104$ ) of the respondents to this survey reported that they have not received any training in software development (Nangia and Katz, 2017). A similar survey of software use and training from the UK repeats this finding: in 2014, Hettrick et al. asked researchers at randomly selected researchers at 15 Russell Group universities about their software use and training. Of the 417 responses, 45% reported having no training in software development. Of the 55% of respondents that reported having received training in software development, 73% had received some form of formal training in a software development course, the remaining 27% were self-taught. In further analyzing these results, Hettrick et al. report that 21% of respondents who

develop their own software had no training in software development (Hetrick, 2018, 2014). A 2016 survey of 704 PIs from the Biological Sciences Directorate of the US NSF found the most pressing unmet needs are training in data integration, data management, and scaling analyses for HPC (Barone et al., 2017). And a 2018 survey of almost 1600 scientist-developers found that 82% of respondents felt that they were spending “more time” or “much more time” developing software than they did 10 years ago (Pinto et al., 2018).

Not only is there a gap in software development training in general, there’s also an additional gap across gender. When analyzed by gender (self reported binary of men and women) the first two surveys show that only 39% of female respondents in the UK and 32% in the USA report have received some form of software development training, compared to 63% of male respondents in the UK and 64% in the USA.

This lack of training is not new, nor is it newly discovered. Greg Wilson has written (Wilson, 2016; Software Carpentry, n.d.) about the history of Software Carpentry:

In 1995–96, [Wilson] organized a series of articles in IEEE Computational Science & Engineering titled, “What Should Computer Scientists Teach to Physical Scientists and Engineers?”. These grew out of the frustration he had working with scientists who wanted to run before they could walk, i.e., to parallelize complex programs that were not broken down into self-contained functions, that did not have any automated tests, and that were not under version control.

In response, John Reynders (then director of the Advanced Computing Laboratory at Los Alamos National Laboratory) invited [Wilson] and Brent Gorda (now at Intel) to teach a week-long course to LANL staff. This course ran for the first time in July 1998, and was repeated nine times over the next four years. It eventually wound down as Gorda and [Wilson] moved on to other projects, but two valuable lessons were learned:

1. There is tremendous pent-up demand for training in basic skills.
2. Textbook software engineering is not the right thing to teach most scientists.

This need led to the Software Carpentry organization, which built a successful train-the-trainer model for collaborative lesson development and delivery, and which was used as a model to build Data Carpentry, which then merged with Software Carpentry into The Carpentries, and now also includes Library Carpentry. The Carpentries has developed highly impactful training content and events that meet an intermediate need for training researchers to better develop software. Many computing centers, including those funded by NSF and DOE,

have also long had user training in some types of development (similar to that of Los Alamos), for example, joint activities run by TeraGrid and now XSEDE, and Argonne's ATPESC. Given the success of the Carpentries, these computing center training events often either include or contribute to Carpentries lessons, or complement them. In addition, other NSF-funded software institutes (e.g., MolSSI, SGCI, and IRIS-HEP) are also developing training resources for their target communities, similarly making use of, contributing to, and complementing the Carpentries.

While many researchers may learn how to program on their own, the opportunities for them to learn software engineering and software design are less available. Therefore, we believe that there is an important role that a US-based research software institute can play to expand the breadth and depth of the training available, and to further coordinate and facilitate the acquisition of software engineering expertise by researchers engaged in various development activities. Rather than reinventing content, we anticipate collaborating with and pointing to relevant resources developed through other related efforts.

The Education & Training thrust of URSSI complements and builds upon existing efforts through the following planned activities (more detail appears below):

1. Develop and annually run a summer school on practices for sustainable software development for research software.
2. Develop a Research Project Carpentry lesson program that teaches people how to turn code into a formal project.
3. Plan a review service for software project plans (and note that the implementation of this plan is likely out of scope of URSSI by itself).
4. Evaluate and document successes and failures of industrial software development practices in research software.
5. Compile and maintain a body of knowledge of best practices for research software development. (This URSSI activity will seek to aggregate both existing practices, and serve as an outlet for emerging practices from other domain-specific software institute, e.g., MolSSI, SGCI, IRIS-HEP)

## 5.1 Education & Training resources



This area requires the following staff:

- Training Lead: coordinates all training activities and assessment of those activities (1 FTE).
- Training Officer: assists Training Lead in coordination of training activities, develops and delivers training activities (1 FTE).
- Assessment Coordinator: leads the assessment efforts, in conjunction with the Training Lead (this position could be shared with other parts of the project) (0.5 FTE).
- Research Coordinator: leads the effort to gather experiences from research software projects (0.25-0.5 FTE).

## 5.2 Education & Training methods

This section provides more details on how we plan to design and execute each of these activities within URSSI.

### 5.2.1 Develop and annually run a summer school on practices for sustainable software development for research software

*Overview:* During the conceptualization phase, we identified a need for additional, focused training opportunities on sustainable software development prac-

tices for researchers who were not in a domain covered by an existing institute. One of the primary reasons for this need is that it is generally difficult for degree programs to make room for this type of content. We plan to meet this need with a summer school, which is a proven method for providing hands-on training to transfer these skills to students, in this case on sustainable software development practices for research software development. We conducted a Pilot Winter School as part of the conceptualization process. The details of that activity appear in Chapter 2. The plan described here builds on the key lessons learned, including: (1) the school needs to be longer to allow for both discussion time and focused time for students to work on their own code, applying the lessons from the lectures, and (2) the presence of additional helpers outside of the primary instructors was quite beneficial to help answer specific questions from the students.

*Content:* Based on the needs identified during our survey, workshops, and other discussions, we identified the following topics as candidates for inclusion in such a school: (1) software design (including modularity), (2) software testing, (3) packaging and distributing code, (4) collaborative software development with modern version control (i.e., git/GitHub), (5) peer code review, (6) open science principles, and (7) software citation.

*Format:* The summer school will be a 1-week in-person event. We plan to follow the successful PNAS hackweek model (Huppenkothen et al., 2018) where we allocate 50% of the time to lectures and 50% of the time to putting the concepts into practice. We will invite instructors with expertise in the different topic areas (see above) to participate and deliver the lectures, and will take diversity into consideration when selecting instructors. One of the criteria used to select participants will be a diversity statement that potential participants will be required to submit, and at least 25% of the selected participants will be members of underrepresented groups. To facilitate the “hacking” time, we will ask participants to bring a code project they wish to work on during the school. The “hacking sessions” will provide ample opportunities for the participants to have hands-on time applying the concepts from the lectures to their own code projects. These sessions also provide time for code reviews and other ad hoc topics that arise during the school. The instructors will be available during the hands-on time to help participants as needed. By the end of the school, participants should have substantial intellectual knowledge and experiential knowledge. Because researchers often do not have sufficient time for training or to attend events like this one, as an alternative to the face-to-face summer school events, we also plan to package the content into Carpentries-style lessons that can be used either in shorter training sessions, webinars, or asynchronously.

The URSSI summer school is primarily aimed at the people and careers portion of URSSI’s impact goals, and secondarily at the research software sustainability and research software ecosystem portions.

### 5.2.2 Develop a Research Project Carpentry lesson program that teaches people how to turn code into a formal project

*Overview:* One challenge faced by many research software developers is how to convert a small (individual) coding effort into a more formal project. This situation occurs frequently as researchers develop small units of code to accomplish tasks important in their own work. When other researchers are exposed to these code units, they often want either to use the code, add to the code, or both. This is the point when the researcher needs to convert that code into a more formal project, both to ensure quality as others use it and to allow the community to contribute to it. Therefore, we propose to develop a Research Project Carpentry lesson plan, along similar lines as Software Carpentry, that will help researchers make this transition from an individual coding effort to a community-focused project.

*Content:* The goal of this effort will be to help projects develop a good project plan. As such, the Research Project Carpentries lesson program will focus on helping researchers understand what content a good plan needs to contain. It will also provide information researchers need for making choices about which of the various practices are most relevant to their particular project. The topics to be covered in Research Project Carpentry include: (1) requirements elicitation, (2) issue tracking, (3) source and version control, (4) testing, (5) documentation, (6) packaging and distribution, (7) pair programming, (8) code review, and (9) metrics. Note that there is some overlap between the focus of Research Project Carpentry and the Summer School described above. We anticipate reusing relevant content between these efforts.

*Format:* We will develop modules on the topics above as carpentries-style modules. This approach will allow the Research Projects Carpentries materials to be used either in a face-to-face training course, like the Summer School, or as stand-alone units. This flexibility will allow researchers to access the content in a mechanism that is most relevant to them. When this material is tested, we will use a diversity statement submitted by potential participants as an input to the decision process, and at least 25% of the selected participants will be members of underrepresented groups.

*Note:* While this activity is relevant to the URSSI effort, we believe that it will have appeal beyond URSSI. Therefore, even though we include it here in the plan, we will also seek funding to support it from organizations outside of NSF. We also plan to solicit other organizations and individuals to contribute to this activity. URSSI will lead this work, organizing a community that will include external participants.

The Research Project Carpentry lesson program is primarily aimed at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goals, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion.

### 5.2.3 Plan a review service for software project plans

Building on the work done for Research Project Carpentries, URSSI has identified the need for a service where experts review and comment on proposed project plans. Researchers who are interested in this service would submit a project plan in a specified format. Then, experts would review the plan to ensure both that it is (1) complete with respect to the content necessary for the type of project and its current stage, as well as (2) the choices made for each aspect of the project plan are consistent with best practices. Once the review is completed, the reviewer would work with the project team to help resolve any deficiencies identified in the original project plan. This model is akin to that used by many “incubators” for start-up companies.

This activity is likely beyond the scope of URSSI, so we will create an initial plan for it, then seek to partner with other organizations who are pursuing similar efforts and explore external funding sources. In addition to the operating the service, URSSI and partners will need to develop and make available the following resources: (1) templates for project plans, (2) checklists for researchers to follow when developing the plan, and (3) guidance on how to choose from various alternatives for each section of the plan.

The software project plan review service is aimed at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goals.

### 5.2.4 Evaluate and document successes and failures of the use of industrial software development practices in research software

Industrial software engineering has developed and refined a number of best practices for software engineering and software development, resulting in a large body of related literature. Conversely, it is not always clear which of these practices are relevant for use in developing research software, most notably because of the different incentive structures for developers in the research arena. It is also not always clear which aspects of the research software domain motivate the need to develop new software engineering or software development practices to handle the unique contexts within which research software exists. To accomplish this activity, URSSI will need to perform the following steps.

First, URSSI will gather experience reports describing the successful and unsuccessful use of industrial software engineering and software development practices in research software projects. Gathering these experiences will involve conducting surveys and interviews of developers of research software to document important information. In addition to the successes and failures with specific practices, these experience reports will also document cases where developers of research software encountered a situation or a problem for which they were unable to find software engineering or software development practices that were

relevant. Cases where there is a lack of relevant practices suggest opportunities for creation of new practices.

Second, URSSI will analyze the experience reports to systematize the successes and failures and develop a series of evidence-based lessons learned. Because this information will be based upon real experiences from research projects, they will have great value to other research software projects.

The results of these efforts will feed into the next activity by providing concrete experiences that we can document into best practices. These experiences will be beneficial because we will draw them from experiences on real projects, with knowledge about the context within which the practice works. This context will help provide a description of the limitations on the practice, which is equally important to document.

This activity is primarily aimed at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goals, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion.

### **5.2.5 Compile and maintain a body of knowledge of best practices for research software development**

Based on the outcomes of the above activities, URSSI will develop a portal to provide living information about best practices for research software development. In addition to including content developed from our own activities, URSSI will also actively find, through various means that include workshops and surveys, and curate information from other sites related to the development of research or scientific software. We will specifically ensure that information produced by the Carpentries is included, as relevant.

We will curate the following types of information:

1. Checklists for sustainable software - much of the content here will overlap with ideas discussed in earlier activities.
2. Templates for use in developing software, including templates for project plans, templates for documenting requirements, templates for test planning, and templates for community guidelines and policies.
3. Badging efforts that provide recognition for various qualities of research software and research software projects.

In addition to best practices, the URSSI clearinghouse will also curate information about training resources. In addition to providing links to the URSSI-developed training (described above), we will also link to other relevant training resources developed through other efforts like MoLSSI, SGCI, and IRIS-HEP. To help individual researchers and teams better understand how to make use of

the various training options, we will develop roadmaps that guide people to the most relevant training for their current situation.

This activity is also primarily aimed at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goals, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion.

### 5.3 Cross-cutting activities

To support the five activities described above, URSSI will also need to perform a number of cross-cutting activities as follows:

1. *Curriculum Development and Coordination* To achieve the goals stated above, URSSI will need to support the development of new training materials. We anticipate providing support to experts in the research software community who can take their existing knowledge and package it in a Carpentries-style format that is most amenable to be used in the various types of training activities URSSI will support. Importantly, the training proposed above is meant to build upon, and provide a complement to existing educational outreach efforts. This training will provide follow on, more advanced content than the Carpentries, and will be longer in duration. We can provide this advanced content because our target audience is a subset of the audience focused on by the Carpentries.
2. *Instructor Training* To help deliver all of the developed content to a wide range of audiences in various locations, URSSI will need to provide support for training instructors. These instructors will be integral to the success of the Summer School and the Research Projects Carpentry.
3. *Piloting Workshops* As we develop content, we will conduct smaller workshops to pilot the content to ensure its sufficiency before deploying it to a larger audience. Because we will be asking people to participate in content development by providing feedback, we will need to have resources to support the travel for instructors and participants.
4. *Gathering Experiences on Successes and Failures of Software Practices* URSSI will support a team of researchers, who are experienced in survey and interview methods, to gather experiences, summarize the results, and document the findings. In addition, URSSI will need to provide support for travel for URSSI personnel to meet with members of research projects.
5. *Conducting Workshops* URSSI will provide support for the Summer School and Research Project Carpentries instructors to travel to the workshops. URSSI will also provide small fellowships for the instructors to compensate for the time required to participate. In addition, to increase participation from a diverse community, URSSI will provide travel support for a small

number of workshop participants, determined based on need in individual cases.

6. *Packaging and Sharing* As URSSI develops content related to the educational activities described in this chapter, we will package that content in a shareable format. We will make the content freely available on GitHub. We will also archive each release of content on Zenodo using a proper license that allows anyone to use and/or modify the content as needed. In addition, we will strive to work with the Carpentries to enable the content to reach more people.

## 5.4 Education & Training metrics/milestones

To ensure that the training activities are providing sufficient content, URSSI will conduct numerous assessment activities. These activities will occur both concurrently with the training activities, i.e., as entry and exit surveys, as well as longitudinally after training. The benefit of conducting assessment longitudinally is that it provides insight into whether the content learned during training is viewed as useful over time as real projects evolve.

Some of the specific measures that we will gather include:

- Post-event evaluations: For workshops and training courses, we will conduct follow-up surveys to evaluate the value of the content. We will conduct evaluations immediately at the end of each event while the information is fresh in the attendees' minds. We will then conduct a follow-up survey 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years later to evaluate the applicability of the content to the attendees' work. In conducting these evaluations, we will build on lessons learned and guidance from The Carpentries Assessment Network.
- Demand: We will measure demand for the content by the number of people who apply to attend various training events and workshops.
- Use of material: We will measure downloads and use of the information that we produce.

### Impacts:

This table maps URSSI activities from this chapter to the three portions of URSSI's intended impact. (A complete table of impacts from all URSSI activities can be found in Chapter 10 (Metrics and Evaluation).) In the impact cells, X indicates a designed primary impact on an activity, and y indicates a designed secondary impact.

Table 5.1: Impact table

Activity	Impact on Research Software	Impact on Industry
Summer school	y	
Projects Carpentry	X	
Review service for software project plans	X	
Examine use of industrial software development practices in research software	X	
Book of knowledge of software dev best practices	X	



# Chapter 6

# Incubator

The intent of an URSSI Incubator is to support software projects seeking to grow, transition to an open-source model of development, or improve software engineering practices. The incubator plans to do this by providing mentorship, a small amount of funding, and guided support for improving governance, documentation, financial planning, and evaluating development practices. The following sections describe the motivation for an Incubator program focused on research software.

## 6.1 Background

Common tasks solved by research software often include the generation, analysis, visualization, and processing of data. These software solutions are, just as often, generalizable beyond the immediate needs of an individual researcher, research group, or a particular research effort. However, there are few institutional and personal incentives to develop generalizable research software, package this software for reuse, create meaningful documentation, and share software in open repositories. Each of these activities requires substantial investments of time, money, and effort.

For researchers the return on this investment may be minimal - software is rarely cited in scholarly literature (Howison and Bullard, 2016; Hwang et al., 2017; Hsu et al., 2019; Park and Wolfram, 2019), tenure and promotion committees rarely consider software contributions (Moher et al., 2018), and grant funding often acknowledges software development as a byproduct of rather than a substantive contribution to a research project (Broman et al., 2017; Siepel, 2019).

These challenges are despite increasing evidence of the value of software sharing and reuse in addressing research challenges that require fast and efficient community response. For example, the Medical Research Center in the UK is

currently using a 13 year old pandemic simulation codebase to model control measures for COVID-19. In doing so, they've attracted collaborators from Microsoft, the Abdul Latif Jameel Institute for Disease and Emergency Analytics, and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Infectious Disease Modelling to document, refactor, and extend this code. While the original author of the simulation code acknowledged its numerous imperfections <sup>1</sup>, the ability to start from an existing working model saved time, money, and effort in combating a global pandemic.

Contemporary research is littered with similar examples - imperfect software that is valuable for one purpose can be made more broadly useful by being shared, properly documented, and made available for sustainable reuse. Finding ways to encourage and support research software so that it remains accessible for future improvements and uses is a primary goal of URSSI. But, there currently exists little guidance for how a single research software project can transition from the individual efforts of a small set of researchers to a distributed open model of development that attracts and retains valuable communities of contributors (Howison, 2015).

Open source models are a helpful, but not the only, reference for the forms of cooperative community organizing that we believe will be valuable to developing a more sustainable research software ecosystem. An open-source model has some basic features for community development that are necessary for sustainable research software: code is openly licensed for reuse, members are distributed across time and space, and the organization of development efforts depend, in part, upon loosely connected individuals making small contributions (or peer-production) <sup>2</sup>. These types of models for collaboratively organizing a software project are substantially different from how most researchers are trained and learn to develop software. Most research software development is currently focused on solving immediate short-term individual needs rather than collaboratively building generalizable solutions or performing necessary maintenance of this software <sup>3</sup>. These are obviously beneficial and valuable modes of collaborative software development that can and should play a more prominent role in the research software ecosystem. In the following section we further justify some of our working assumptions about why open models of software development can lead to more sustainable research software, and then propose the design and implementation of a research software incubator program that would help foster a transition to open-source, or similar, forms of research software development.

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<sup>1</sup>See Neil Ferguson's tweet for an extended commentary

<sup>2</sup>See the Open Source guide on building community

<sup>3</sup>Rene Gassmoeller has made this argument succinctly in a recent blog post

## 6.2 Evidence base

There currently exist several detailed taxonomies of successful open source community models, including the Apache Project Maturity Model and Mozilla's Open Source Archetypes. The features that differentiate one open source model from another are often subtle, but important, in project organization, credit distribution, and methods for reaching consensus on strategic decisions. Decades of empirical research into open-source provides the following key findings relevant for the likely success of distributed research software development:

- **Governance** in open source often includes a framework for organizing distributed work, establishing formal and informal roles for participants, managing access to resources, and distributing credit for work performed (O'Mahony, 2007, ). Many previous studies of open-source success (measured as the long-term usefulness or accessibility of a codebase) have shown that vertical authority structures (such as how decisions are made and responsibilities are delegated) and horizontal coordination (open contributions) are key governance features that frameworks can help to make explicit and transparent (Stewart, 2016). As contributors and maintenance responsibilities grow in scope, software governance research has also emphasized the importance of designing coordination processes so that contributors can be empowered to self-select tasks that lead to positive outcomes for a software project over time (Shaikh and Henfridsson, 2017).
- **Documentation** plays a key role in open-source projects - it eases the onboarding of new contributors and plays an important role in the effective reuse or repurposing of a software package (Aversano et al., 2017). Documentation is also an important, but often underdeveloped, aspect of software development in research settings (Geiger et al., 2018). Underdeveloped documentation is true of all software development <sup>4</sup>, but the tedious and time consuming tasks related to creating useful documentation are arguably more difficult in research settings where the development activities focus on solving practical problems in analyzing or interpreting data (Ram et al., 2018).
- **Maintenance** is also a key element of open-source development activities. Maintenance includes solving problems introduced by operating system changes, code defects, and evolving software to meet emerging user requirements (Bourque and Fairley, 2004). Open-source projects often face practical challenges in attracting and retaining maintainers. Previous empirical studies show that many projects on GitHub, for example, have only 1 maintainer (Eghbal, 2016). Recent surveys of developers report that up to 86% of projects have no maintainer (Coelho and Valente, 2017).

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<sup>4</sup>In GitHub's annual developers survey documentation was noted as the biggest barrier to engaging with open-source software <https://opensourcesurvey.org/2017/>

- **Licensing** is a key feature defining an open-source model of software development. But, developers often have a difficult time making licensing decisions without consultation of legal experts. A recent survey makes this point clear - up to 38% (n=375) of experienced developers were not able to select an appropriate license given a scenario in which they were asked to identify an appropriate license for a given software library (Almeida et al., 2017). Developers' understanding of how to interpret licensing restrictions also significantly decreased in scenarios where multiple licenses were required.

For software projects that have the potential to broadly impact research communities, we believe that, at minimum, there should be greater support for making decisions about governance and licensing, and assistance in creating useful documentation that can attract new contributors or ease maintenance tasks. Rather than simply creating a guidebook or articulating best practices for adopting open-source models of software development, a meaningful intervention for URSSI could include close interaction with and service to research software development projects that seek a route towards sustainability through community engagement and collaboration.

### 6.3 Incubators background

Incubators or business accelerators are a common way for venture capitalists to support entrepreneurs and “start-up” companies attempting to break into a new market. These types of incubator programs often provide mentorship as well as fiscal support for a founder or product owner to identify market fit, build out or expand software features, and develop a network of interested stakeholders. Successful graduation or exit from a start-up incubator is viewed as securing funding or launching a new product (often with a culminating event where the founder / product owner “pitches” the product to potential investors). Successful start-up incubators like Tech stars or Y Combinator have designed processes for attracting, evaluating, and helping promising software-based projects achieve financial success. Y combinator for example has successfully graduated over 2000 companies that collectively have a market valuation over \$155 billion.

Open source incubators are less common. Perhaps the most successful and long running open-source incubator is by the Apache Software Foundation, which provides a well documented process for software projects wishing to become part of the Apache Foundation (Schweik and English, 2012). Similar to a start-up incubator, the Apache model of incubation includes a project mentor and dedicated resources (infrastructure) for projects to develop releases of their software that comply with the Apache Foundation’s standards. Success, or graduation, in the Apache incubator is thus dependent upon making two consecutive software releases that are evaluated, and ultimately accepted by Apache developers.

Through conceptualization activities, notably community workshops, we began to formulate a plan for *incubating* research software projects that would focus specifically on providing project developers time and support to improve the sustainability of their software projects. A research software incubator would help projects identify and make strategic decisions about governance, assist research projects in creating valuable documentation, and strategically plan for transitions from individual or small teams to fostering a community of contributors and maintainers.

We believe that a research software incubator should have features similar to start-up and existing open-source incubators, but also should differ in appreciable ways.

First, we do not intend successful graduation or exit to be based solely on funding or code acceptance into a particular foundation structure. Start-up incubators in particular focus on software development as a means to a company being acquired or receiving a large investment for future development. Instead of focusing solely on growth for funding, we see a research software incubator model as providing the necessary time, mentorship, and financial support that will help a promising software project make decisions about how to improve the sustainability of their software and their project organization. Second, and importantly, start-up incubators often provide financial support for founders to dedicate all of their time and attention to a project's successful graduation. This level of financial support is likely infeasible for URSSI.

Additionally, most researchers would have a very difficult time in dropping all other responsibilities at their institution to focus solely on a single software project that doesn't have the potential for a significant financial return on their investment of time and effort. Therefore, we believe it is important to design a research software sustainability incubator in which a researcher can complete it with a small amount of effort and mentorship from the URSSI community. We do not expect that URSSI Incubator activities can or should be a project team's only focus.

## 6.4 URSSI Incubator

Our plan addresses problems related to credit, reward, and acknowledgement of research software development activities in its Policy area. The URSSI Incubator proposal aims to provide multiple alternative pathways to sustainability through mentorship, project development advice or guidance, and strategic planning for governance. We seek to help projects that show promise in solving general research problems mature, both the code and the project itself, in ways that are valuable to a broad community of potential users. In doing so, we believe there is an opportunity to increase the sustainability of research software.

The broad goals of the URSSI Incubator program are:

1. Provide the social and technical infrastructure to help research software projects become more sustainable. For projects that are growing, support will focus on how to achieve this growth in manageable ways. For projects that are already at a community level of contribution and development, support will help to identify and eliminate technical debt.
2. Provide research software projects, at various points in the development lifecycle, the opportunity to improve their development and organizational practices so as to mature, or develop, in ways that are broadly valuable to scholarship.
3. Provide an alternative to academic technology transfer offices. We believe there is an emerging need for guidance to scholarly research software projects that is focused not on commercialization but on a transition to open-source community models. Technology transfer programs at universities and through research funding agencies (e.g. I-Corps, SBIR/STTR) are well established and have been successful at helping entrepreneurially-focused software projects recognize and execute viable business models. More recent examples of this model have focused on transition pathways towards openness, with a particular focus on open-source (e.g. the Open@RIT program at Rochester Institute of Technology). The commercial transition pathway is promoted for software that has the potential to sustain itself through fees or licensing agreements. However, there are currently few equivalent university guidance for software projects that would like to pursue non-commercial open source models for sustainability.
4. Provide guidance and mentorship in best practices for development, licensing, project coordination, and advice for funding to projects wishing to grow into community software projects. This component of the Incubator will draw upon expertise and guidance that is developed in URSSI's Education and Policy areas.

## 6.5 Incubator resources

### Personnel

- 0.5 FTE Program Director shared with Education + Teaching, Policy, or Communications
- 1 FTE Program Lead. This individual would be in charge of coordinating the application and selection process, administering incubated projects, tracking success, coordinating an Incubator Advisory Board (described in detail below), and acting as the URSSI Incubator project manager.
- Advisory Board (Volunteers). A group of senior researchers and software engineers who can offer strategic guidance to the Incubator program for meeting targeted goals.

- Project Mentors (Volunteers + Graduated projects). Provide intensive, one on one mentoring to research software projects based on existing expertise in a discipline, software language, stage of development, or other criteria of compatibility.

Additional Resources that may be valuable for an incubator program to succeed:

- Annual Incubator showcase, or a “demo day”, for projects that have successfully graduated or exited the URSSI’s program. This activity could be part of a larger URSSI annual event that coordinates the community dedicated to software sustainability. Invitations to this event would be extended to public and private funders who may see an overlap with their own programs during pitches. This can result in matchmaking between projects and funders.
- Incubated project funding: Monetary (or in-kind service) award for projects that will be given a budget to advance goals during a period of “incubation”. Each project should receive a similar allocation of money. This money would be similar to how the SSI currently funds research fellows at a standard rate across their period of engagement. The money could be discretionary to the project so that it could be used for travel, advocacy, website development, assistance in writing documentation, etc.

## 6.6 Incubator methods

URSSI’s Incubator program will include a process for soliciting applications (or call for participation), selecting participants, a cycle of activities, and a standard for successfully exiting or graduating from the Incubator. The incubator will run on a semi-annual schedule so that new project cohorts can enter the Incubator in either January or July of each year. In the following subsections we describe the intended processes for running each stage of the Incubator.

We view the Incubator as a single activity from the point-of-view of impact, and it is aimed at both the research software sustainability and people and careers portions of URSSI’s impact goals.

### 6.6.1 Project solicitation and selection:

The URSSI Incubator will solicit proposals for projects three months in advance of the formation of a new incubator cohort. A cohort will consist of a minimum of five projects that will go through the incubator activities (described below) at the same time. The cohort model enables a network effect and should allow URSSI to scale incubator activities appropriate to the personnel and resources available.

The incubator application will ask a project to identify its goals for developing, growing, improving development practices, and/or maturing a software product in some targeted way, as well as a description of the limitations preventing the project from making the software useful beyond a small community. The application will ask project leaders to clearly articulate the problem the software is trying to solve and provide evidence of the need for a generalizable solution that will serve a broad community of users and the potential to attract new contributors, and how the project is contributing to diversity. The project lead (defined below) should also clearly state how or if the project is seeking to transition to a new model of development. Acceptance into the URSSI Incubator will not require the project to be seeking a transition or an attempt at growth per se. We are designing the incubator to be accomodating to software projects that seek either a shift or change in development models or to solidify and establish best practices within an existing model of development.

In short, the Incubator will select projects based on their potential to:

- Address a demonstrated or emerging need in scholarship
- Organize development in an open-source or equivalent model
- Attract and sustain a developer community
- Contribute to diversity
- Benefit from a network of URSSI mentors

The URSSI Incubator Selection Committee will select projects on a semi-annual basis. In the Apache incubator model this committee is the Incubator Project Management Committee. This committee will include a mix of URSSI staff including the Program Lead (described above), URSSI steering committee / senior personnel members, and selected external URSSI community members such as recognized leaders in open-source research software as well as previous incubator participants. Selection committee members will serve a two year term, with some initial members serving either a 1 or 3 year term to guarantee continuity. In this way, no more than 50% of the committee will change in a given year. The advisory board will also conduct incubator project evaluations (described below).

Over time, there may be an opportunity to build cohorts around a particular theme, a point in development, a particular software language, or even sponsorship by a particular funding agency. For example, URSSI might be contracted by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to run a cohort of projects that have been funded and are potentially in need of guidance. For the initial cohorts we plan to simply run an open call for applications and select, as stated above, at least five projects per year.

### **6.6.2 Project entry**

Selection as a participant in an URSSI incubator cohort will require at minimum:

1. A project lead who is responsible for completing incubator activities in a timely manner and managing any funding allocated to the project. The project lead would be the equivalent of the PI on a funded grant. The project lead is further responsible for coordinating activities and communicating with the URSSI incubator program administrator.
  - Importantly, URSSI will not be prescriptive as to who can play the role of a project lead. A project lead could be anyone - a senior student who worked on the code and wants to make the project more sustainable, a PI or co-PI of grant (but not assuming the PI will stop being a researcher to be a software developer), or a dedicated contributor to a project that seeks a more permanent leadership role. This model could resemble the NSF's I-Corps program, which focuses on transitioning promising technologies to commercialization, but instead be focused on a transition to sustainable open-source. We see the project lead as beneficial to the individual: recognition of making it into the URSSI Incubator program can then be their badge of merit to helping to secure promotion or preparing the lead for future positions of leadership.
2. An identified and dedicated mentor (from the URSSI community) who will strategically offer advice and guidance through the set of activities described below. A mentor should not be seen as administrative support, but instead a trusted person for whom the project team can consult when making decisions. In the Apache incubation model, this mentor role is often described as critical to a project's ultimate success in graduating from incubation.
3. A code repository that is openly accessible. The repository should be a central hub where documentation (e.g., contributor guidance, governance, licensing, etc.), code, reviews, and issue tracking can take place.

### 6.6.3 Incubator activities

After projects join an Incubator cohort, URSSI will match them with a project mentor. The mentor will help guide the project through the Incubator activities described in this subsection. The mentor will further evaluate and offer feedback on the successful completion of each activity.

URSSI Incubator activities will likely be consistent across each cohort. In preparation for a new cohort entering the incubator, the Program Lead will publish an URSSI Incubator Cookbook (similar to the Apache Model) that describes the activities, expectations for project leaders, and evaluation metrics.

Below are activities that we imagine to be consistent across each cohort. These activities are not chronologically organized - a project can work on any of these activities at any time in their period of incubation.

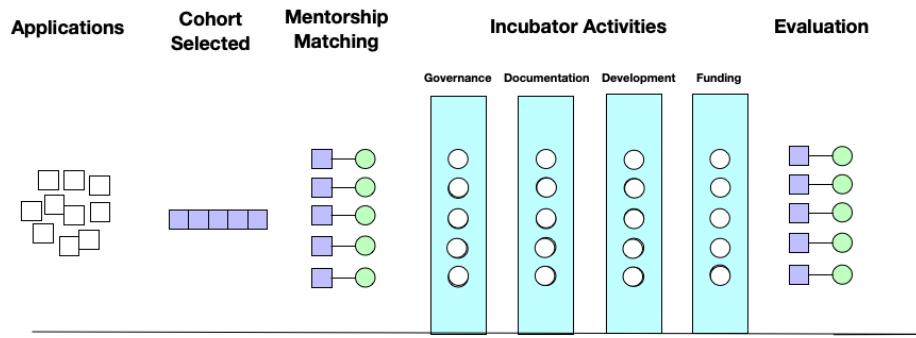


Figure 6.1: A general depiction of how the URSSI Incubator may be organized

### Project roles

The project lead will, under the guidance of the mentor and program lead, establish a formal definition of roles that a project member is to play. If a project already has a set of predefined roles then those roles will be reviewed for improvement, and formally documented.

- Roles will likely be similar across projects, but can and should leave some room for interpretation depending on the maturity of the project and the project's stated goals.
- Formally defining roles within the project is meant to ensure transparency, encourage participation, and efficacy in onboarding new or explaining the expectations for contributing to a project. As an example, Node.JS defines three roles for a project's governance:
  - A *Contributor* is any individual creating or commenting on an issue or pull request
  - A *Committer* is a subset of contributors who have been given write access to the repository
  - A *TC (Technical Committee)* is a group of committers representing the required technical expertise to resolve rare disputes

### Project governance

In addition to defining roles, the project lead will, under the guidance of the mentor and Program Lead, establish a model of governing the project that is clear about expectations in how decisions are made, establishing a roadmap or release schedule, and adjudicating disputes that may arise. (Note: URSSI does not have to develop this guidance from scratch, but can modify and adapt existing guides for research software.)

In addition, a governance model should also include:

- Code of conduct - which can follow existing best practice recommendations

- Process and expectation for citing software, acknowledging use, and authoring papers related to the project, including how credit should be given to different project contributors. (Jupyter has a very good model for this governance documentation)

A key component of the governance model will be selecting a license which dictates the proper uses of the intellectual property of the project.

#### **Establishing best (or good enough) software engineering practices**

This components of the incubator will be provided by the URSSI Education & Training area, and include, but not limited to activities such as:

- Version control management
- Test coverage and code integration
- Code reviews
- Issue templates and tracking
- Software design
- Release management

#### **Documentation**

Incubator activities around creating or improving documentation related to a software project will include guidance for creating helpful ReadMe files (e.g. WriteTheDocs' recommendations) on readable readme documentation], project descriptions, creating style guides for documentation, and review of documentation with a technical writer.

#### **Project funding & financial planning**

The project team should develop a policy for accepting donations, managing funds, seeking grants, etc. After a project lead formalizes this policy, it should be added to the governance documentation.

#### **Project evaluation**

Projects would, under the guidance of the program lead and mentors, establish appropriate metrics to track (e.g. following guidance from the open source handbook on metrics). Guidance on this work will be informed by the metrics work URSSI is engaged in through its Policy area. These metrics could include a number of potential evaluations:

- Discovery - CodeMeta or appropriate metadata is created for the repository to be discovered and reused
- Usage - formal citations, stars or forks on GitHub, etc.
- Contribution / Maintenance
- Retention of contributors or maintainers

#### **6.6.4 Project graduation or exit**

Upon completion of the activities described above, a project will go through an Exit Evaluation. This evaluation will include four components:

1. The project will publish a software paper in JOSS or similar domain journal.
2. The project mentor will then provide structured feedback to the project lead, and allow the project lead to reply or address any concerns raised in the feedback
3. The Project Lead will provide a very short recorded presentation to review the progress made on goals stated in the project proposal, activities completed, and demonstrate working software products for evaluation.
4. The URSSI Incubator Selection Committee (described above in the Selection subsection) will convene annually to review each cohort's materials - including the JOSS publication, the mentor review, and the project lead's presentation. The committee will vote on whether or not the project should graduate from the Incubator.

Graduation from the Incubator should send a positive signal about the sustainability of the project, but should not be a formal credentialing mechanism or certification of guaranteed sustainability. Similar to other incubator programs (e.g. YC, or Apache) graduation should be viewed as a significant achievement in itself.

#### **6.6.5 Relationship to funding and external awards**

An incubated project could have a relationship to external funding or funders in a variety of ways. Most significantly, we view the incubator as a potential matchmaker between promising research software projects and potential funders. Thus, funders will be invited and are an important participant in the Incubator showcase or graduate events.

Successfully graduating from the incubator program should act as an informal signal to funders that the project has the potential for further investment. In this scenario, completing the URSSI Incubator would act as an informal quality check. Funders would have greater assurance about the potential for a project to succeed, for funding new directions of the project, or potentially funding an institution or group around the project so as to better support sustainability.

### **6.7 Incubator metrics/milestones**

For Incubated projects there will be two periods of evaluation.

Short-term evaluation (1-2 years):

- Increase in the number of mentions in research projects on GitHub, publications, and software dependencies compared to other research software of similar age.
- Increase in the number of GitHub stars, forks, downloads (from package managers) relative to other projects of similar age that have not gone through the incubation process.
- Improvement in codebase, documentation, governance, licensing, or strategic planning. This improvement can be defined with project mentors that set specific targets or goals for individual projects.

Long-term evaluation (3-5 years):

- Number of projects that attract follow-on funding
- Persistence - This could be measured by the number of projects that continue to exist 5 years from incubator graduation, software that has regular contributions or updates to the repository, and active maintainers that have been identified as part of the project for different stages of development.
- Attracted contributors - This could be measured over a portion of time that looks at commit history of different individuals contributing to a repository.
- Returning Mentors - This could be measured by mentors who had graduated the incubator and return to provide guidance and help to new incubator projects.

For the Incubator program evaluation may include any of the following:

- In years 1-3 URSSI will select at least 15 projects (~ 5 per year) for incubation. The program should be evaluated based on the success of projects' graduating from the Incubator, and whether or not those projects meet both short and long term milestones (as described above).
- Funders participation (i.e., that the program attracts funded projects to enter and exit URSSI Incubator)

### **Impacts:**

While in other chapters, we have mapped the activities from that chapter to the three portions of URSSI's intended impact, here we treat the incubator as a single activity. (A complete table of impacts from all URSSI activities can be found in Chapter 10 (Metrics and Evaluation).)

Table 6.1: Impact table

Activity	Impact on Research Software	Impact on people and careers	Impact on research software
Incubator	X		X

# Chapter 7

## Policy

The Policy area's intent is to create an enabling environment to support the people who develop and maintain research software, and to support research about research software, to ultimately increase the science & research impact of software.

**The Policy area's activities are divided into two parts, research and advocacy.** Research is the collecting and analyzing of data, while advocacy is the dissemination of the research results in such a way that it changes practices. The Policy area focuses on understanding and then advocating for potential initiatives (actions, mandates, incentives, directives) that decision makers can take, sometimes thought of as leverage points, including strategies and decisions to invest. Policy happens at multiple levels, including national, funding agency, institution, and research group.

The Changes that the Policy area seeks to make include:

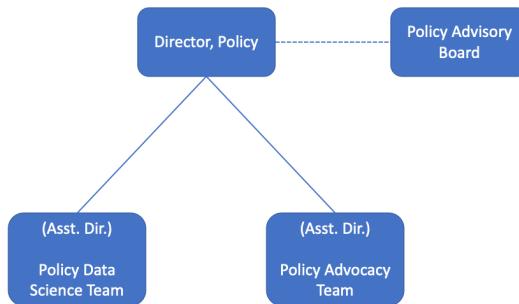
1. In funding agencies, direct funding of software maintenance and other software sustainability activities is a core part of the mission, e.g., at NSF, this includes all program officers across all directorates.
2. In universities and academic fields, positions for people developing and maintaining research software are available, recognized, and rewarded.
3. In publishing, support and recognition for software as a core part of scholarly research is the norm. (This includes the recognition that software is as valuable to the research community as the results themselves, that processes exist to evaluate software in papers, expectations for authorship for software developers are clear.)
4. In industry, sharing best practices, coordinating efforts, and contributing to open source software projects is the norm.

5. Open source software is recognized as a key element of open science and reproducibility.
6. Research software is built and maintained by a diverse and inclusive group.

## 7.1 Policy resources

The policy area will require resources that include funding for people and for events and travel.

### 7.1.1 People



The policy area comprises:

- Director for Policy, an URSSI co-PI, leads the overall Policy area, working with the Policy Advisory Board and Policy staff to define and execute policy research and advocacy activities.
- Policy Data Science Team: performs research such as finding, collecting, and analyzing data, aimed at informing policy, but not about policy itself. For example, with regard to software usage metrics, empirical studies would be most effective, but this team would not recommend policy language based on those studies. Includes a possible assistant director, funded staff, URSSI fellows, and community volunteers.
- Policy Advocacy Team, focused on policy development (such as use cases and examples of practices that are effective for sustainability), which ultimately would be used for presenting actionable ways to support research

software to institutions, possibly integrating and building upon the data science teams findings. This team focuses more on planning advocacy that in doing it, by understanding different stakeholders, and building a roadmap for how to effectively advocate (within universities, foundations, industry, national labs, etc.) Includes a possible assistant director, funded staff, URSSI fellows, and community volunteers.

- Policy advisory board (appointed volunteers) who provide advice on potential policy area research questions and advocacy activities.

#### Funding for personnel:

- 3 FTEs, divided across possibly part-time Assistant Directors for Policy Data Science and Policy Advocacy, the Policy Data Science Team (potentially a postdoc), and the Policy Advocacy Team. The Director for Policy might also act as one of the Assistant Directors, depending on that person's background.

Additional team members, not funded by the policy area:

- Director for Policy, an URSSI co-PI, funded by URSSI at top level
- Policy Advisory Group (appointed volunteers)
- URSSI fellows, working in Policy Data Science Team and Policy Advocacy Team
  - (Fellows program to be run by URSSI Community area; these policy fellows might be funded by policy area if needed)
- Other community volunteers, in Policy Data Science Team and Policy Advocacy Team

#### 7.1.2 Additional resources

Additional resources may be needed by the research group for data collection, management, analysis, etc., and by the advocacy team for dissemination of materials and community organization and support. Both teams may need additional resources for producing materials, including graphic design, copy editing, etc.). Amount are **TODO TBD**

#### 7.1.3 Events & travel

Funding for workshops: **TODO: TBD**

- Potentially including a policy conference / workshop(s) akin to Aspen Institute or CODATA - \$370k. This could also be part of an annual URSSI event. Some events might also be low/no cost, held fully virtually.

**Funding for travel/speaking:** TODO: TBD

- As part of advocacy activities, URSSI personnel will discuss findings and recommendations.

#### **7.1.4 Flexibility**

If there is less budget available, we would cut back on workshop funding

If there is more budget available, we would:

- Expand policy program to have a summer program for undergraduate and graduate students focused on software / science policy (e.g., an NSF REU site or something like a Google Summer of Code for policy / law students)
- Hire communication staff to do outreach and engagement around policy topics (dedicated expertise in policy as opposed to general outreach)

## **7.2 Policy methods**

Initial activities are planned around an initial set of aims articulated below, where additional aims also will be suggested. The URSSI leadership group will regularly review suggestions of new aims, and will determine a rough desired level of activity across the aims.

The policy team will then develop and scope activities to match these desired levels, with review from the Policy Advisory Board, which will also be able to suggest adding or removing aims back to the leadership group.

The policy team will also maintain this listing of active, planned, and potential activities and its mapping to the aim. Activities will be split into those that, if successful, are likely to lead to significant changes in 1-2 years, 3-5 years, and longer-term, with an initial goal of applying 50% of resources to the 1-2 year activities, 40% to the 3-5 year activities, and 10% to the longer-term activities.

### **7.2.1 Aims**

Initially, the policy area will work to address the following set of aims:

1. Establish career paths (including titles and evaluation criteria for hiring and promotion).
  - addresses Changes 2, 5 (from list of changes at the start of this chapter)
  - aims primarily at the people and careers portion of URSSI's impact goal, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion
2. Improve the measurement of impact of individuals, especially in activities that are inherently collaborative like software development.
  - addresses Changes 1, 2, 3
  - aims primarily at the people and careers portion of URSSI's impact goal, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion
3. Incentivizes contributions to public goods / infrastructure within the academic credit model
  - addresses Changes 1, 3, 5
  - aims primarily at the research software sustainability portion of URSSI's impact goal, and secondarily at the people and careers and research software ecosystem portions
4. Disentangle software quality and software impact.
  - addresses Changes 1, 4, 5
  - aims at the research software ecosystem portion of URSSI's impact goal
5. Better recognize the value and importance of software.
  - addresses Changes 1, 2, 3, 5
  - aims at the research software ecosystem portion of URSSI's impact goal
6. Improve/increase funding opportunities and stable funding for maintenance of software that is important but doesn't have a generic market and/or isn't considered novel in the eyes of the average funder/reviewer. Today "lumpy" project funding (projects that are competitively funded for fixed periods, often with gaps between funded project periods) means that maintenance/sustainability can't be reliably folded into project costs.
  - addresses Changes 1, 4, 5
  - aims primarily at the research software ecosystem portion of URSSI's impact goal, and secondarily at the research software sustainability portion

7. Increase the diversity of the development and maintenance community to achieve the diversity of the overall US population.
  - addresses Change 6
  - aims primarily at the people and careers portion of URSSI's impact goal, and secondarily at the research software ecosystem portion

### **7.2.2 Partners**

The Policy area will seek to work with partners listed in the “Partners” section of Chapter 3, specifically including:

other NSF SI2/CSSI Institutes & Centers of Excellence (e.g. SGCI, MolSSI, IRIS-HEP), the Research Software Alliance, the Software Sustainability Institute, the US-RSE Association, the (UK) RSE Society, the Academic Data Science Alliance, the Research Data Alliance, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellows, CaRCC, OECD, and any other projects and organizations that also seek to define and address overlapping aims.

The Policy area needs to build relationships with the following groups and organizations, and to work closely with them, particularly in policy activities.

- Institutional and research leaders in the academic and national laboratory community, such as VCRs, CTOs/CIOs, who can help URSSI penetrate various institutions and disciplines
- Representatives from professional academic associations
- Representatives from industry (including those already invested and sold on OSS, as well as those skeptically interested)
- Representatives from Open Source communities, particularly those that are already effective and working at scale
- People working in science policy, such as in AAAS and the National Academies (in particular, AAAS policy fellows might be interested in helping on time-constrained activities that match the purpose and period of their fellowship)
- Representatives from organizations and companies serving OSS and RSE communities (e.g. NumFOCUS, Code for Science & Society, GitHub, Code Ocean)
- Representatives from organizations that represent other research support roles (e.g., librarians, data stewards, RSEs), to work together to promote all such roles

- Representatives from organizations that focus on diversity and inclusion in academia, to encourage them to include software-focused roles where possible
- People from the European Commission regarding European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), etc.
- Representatives from organizations like the Research Data Alliance and FORCE11

### 7.2.3 Planned Activity Pool

This is the initial list of activities that URSSI will maintain, and choose from. The specific activities that will be chosen to start depend on the funding level for URSSI. Most activities include an amount of effort (generally in person-months) that is needed to accomplish them. Note that some activities (the items below) include raising additional funds for those activities - that fund raising is part of the activity. Other activities (in the “Unplanned Activity Pool” subsection) are tracked but are beyond the scope of URSSI, and are more likely activities that others might perform, potentially in coordination with URSSI.

Activities are divided into two types:

1. **Policy Research Activities.** These activities involve research, such as gathering and analyzing evidence and data.
2. **Policy Advocacy Activities.** These activities focus on advocacy. They generally depend on policy research or previously gathered evidence and data.

High-level activities include:

- Maintaining the list of potential activities and prioritizing them, including getting inputs from the overall community. These inputs will be collected and recorded by all members of the project in their interactions with the community, as well as by community members, via tagged GitHub issues. Community members will be able to see this list and react with a +1 to issues they think are important, and URSSI will use these reactions as an element of prioritization. (ongoing)
- Tracking completed activities and their consequences (ongoing)
- Collecting examples of good and bad policy, structures, and interventions from industry and from other disciplines (potential fellow project)
- Developing an advocacy roadmap for how to effectively advocate (to universities, foundations, industry, national labs) (policy person & advisory committee, spread over 3 months)

Additionally, while this is a plan and not a proposal (it doesn't have a budget envelope it is working to fit in, it is not responding to a specific solicitation, and the potential funder's goals are unclear) we have considered priorities for these activities. Initial activities will mostly focus on research, as most advocacy activities would follow and be based on the results and lessons of the research activities. In addition, as mentioned above, final prioritization will also need inputs from the Policy Advisory Board and the URSSI leadership team. Activities with a preceding “(+)” are considered higher priority than other activities.

#### **7.2.3.1 Career Path Activities (Aim 1)**

##### **Faculty career path policy research activities:**

- Study tenure guidance and policies, and find/document ways that software work is measured and recognized. Publish examples of successes. (ADSA is interested in partnering on this; the ADSA Career Development Network is mostly faculty facing exactly these challenges. Additionally, RDA is in the process of developing an Open Science Registry<sup>1</sup> as a collaborative platform to share both the intention and outcomes of pilots and other initiatives that specifically address the academic reward system, as an outcome of the European Union Open Source Policy Platform (OSPP) final report (Mendez et al., 2020).) (2 months)

##### **Faculty career path policy advocacy activities:**

- Promote best practices in recognizing and measuring software work in hiring practices and tenure letters via sample guidance documents for committees, for faculty, and for letter-of-reference authors. (needs focused workshop and follow-through, ~3 months over a year)
- Commission a NAS report (similar to the one on Open Source Software Policy Options for NASA Earth and Space Sciences) on career pathways/progression in academia. Would need to define, then raise funds from outside URSSI (~\$1m), then work with NAS to define a charge and to contract for the study. (4 months over 2.5 years, overlapping with related item in staff career path policy advocacy activities)

##### **Staff career path policy research activities:**

(All the activities below will be coordinated with US-RSE and other national RSE organizations. Additionally, some information already exists that can be mined, such as international and national RSE surveys (Philippe et al., 2019), ...)

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<sup>1</sup>This link may not yet work.

- (+) Document existing (known successful/viable, known failures) career paths for individuals creating research software (2 months)
- (+) Examine and document industry career paths vs. national laboratory career paths vs. academic career paths (1 month)
- (+) Create and maintain a mailing list for those interested in career paths (mailing list to be supported by Community area) (ongoing, low level of effort)
- Create a clearinghouse of job descriptions with criteria for performance assessment; distill out design patterns or different categories for different roles. This could also include documenting salary levels for different job descriptions, and connecting the job descriptions with then learning modules necessary for these jobs (3-4 months, plus ongoing maintenance)
- Examine how salaries for RSEs compare with those of other researchers? (needs to follow clearinghouse, 1 month)

**Staff career path policy advocacy activities:**

- (+) Help start organizational “chapters” of research software developers (perhaps called URSSI chapters?) at existing universities / societies / organizations; create handbook, tools, best practices to support local organizers; assign an URSSI “coordinator” / community manager. These chapters could: talk about training, do consulting for problems, host hacky hours, study groups, software days, and come together in a larger event, perhaps a regional workshop or an URSSI-wide conference. Overall, this helps / grows / establishes the community (and make connections that could help chapter members meet the right person for their next career moves).
  - Done with URSSI Community area; Policy part (1 month) is creating some materials, e.g., guidance on how to set up a chapter, how to align it to local activities, and how to run it.
  - Also to be coordinated with US-RSE, as regional US-RSE groups might overlap regional URSSI chapters.
- Work to promote and support the establishment of RSE capabilities at universities around the US. Provide advice on how to talk to university administrators (and which ones) about this, etc. (1 month, jointly with US-RSE)
- Provide examples of language to universities they can use in HR/job ads for RSE positions (1 month, jointly with US-RSE)

- Commission a NAS report (similar to the one on Open Source Software Policy Options for NASA Earth and Space Sciences) on {career pathways/progression in academia, recognition of software, evaluation of software developers, inclusion of software in hiring and promotion} Would need to define, then raise funds from outside URSSI (~\$1m), then work with NAS to define a charge and to contract for the study. (4 months over 2.5 years, overlapping with related item in faculty career path policy advocacy activities)

#### 7.2.3.2 The impact of individuals (Aim 2)

**The impact of individuals policy research activities:**

- Identify factors (manual, such as evaluations, and automated, such as crawling repos) that are part of impact and publicize them. Some known factors to investigate include quantifying code contributions, code review, mentoring. Determine good practices (for formatting or housing the information on these factors) so those factors are discoverable and/or queryable. (An initial effort of 6 months will make progress and better scope additional work that could be performed.)

**Measuring the impact of individuals policy advocacy activities:**

- Create champions (e.g. librarians) to promote and educate individuals and projects of these good practices, working with the best practices activity in Community area.
- Help individuals understand how they can best promote themselves (e.g., claim software works on ORCID), working with the best practices activity in Community area.

#### 7.2.3.3 Incentivize contributions to public software (Aim 3)

**Incentivize contributions to public software policy research activities:**

- Gather data/examples that show when contributions to public projects increase your citation count or regular metrics (1 month)
- (+) Gather examples of successful use of individual contributions to public goods/infrastructure to gain academic promotion (1 month over 3-6 months)
- (+) Use regular surveys to better understand why people do and don't contribute; get data to understand the value of public goods to community (1 month over 3-6 months each year)

- Determine a way to make it easy for scientific communities to peer-review public-good software (or contributions to such software), with the idea that peer-review is considered a mark of quality. This could be done by starting a new journal or working with existing journals or conferences, or via existing community organizations or software-focused organizations (ongoing, not well-scoped)
- Research to counter the idea that publishing in the small set of “highest impact” journals is key, and expose actual impact of work instead (work with scholcom community, use what they have done, maybe adapt their work for software - maybe 2 months to start)

**Incentivize contributions to public software policy advocacy activities:**

- Work to persuade high-profile individuals to make public contributions to public projects
- (+) Share examples of successful use of individual contributions to public goods/infrastructure to gain academic promotion, produce templates, advocacy toolkits and examples to help others to make their case. Similarly, work to persuade people that contributing to projects will increase their products within their normally accepted reward system (e.g., get more collaborators and papers; increase opportunities to meet/work with new/old collaborators; will build social connections/network) (ongoing, not well-scoped)
- (+) Show how you can participate in public goods / infrastructure projects (e.g., how to structure an issue, how to write your first PR), collaboratively with best practices activity in URSSI Community area (low initial effort, low ongoing effort to maintain)
- Produce templates based on successful use of individual contributions to public goods/infrastructure to gain academic promotion, advocacy toolkits, and examples to help others to make their case (1 month)
- Reframe contributions as first class research products / objects (i.e., explain how building the best software is itself science, as it's both discovery and creation). In order to do this, amplify existing efforts to build a taxonomy of such contributions to make it clear what those contributions are, and encourage people to claim/talk about/take pride in these contributions; work with publishers to highlight these contributions and the people who make them. Also advocate (materials, webinars, ambassadors, etc.) within academic communities (deans, faculty, science societies, review panels, funders) that public software contributions are research (also could be done by cross-disciplinary respected groups, such as the national academies)

- (+) Work to revise funder policies to ensure reviewers prioritize grant proposals that reuse, build-upon and contribute back to maintenance of public infrastructure
- Create high-profile equivalent of “highest impact” journal for software and data work - where publication is seen as an accomplishment indicating the significance of the software

#### **7.2.3.4 Disentangle software quality and software impact (Aim 4)**

**Disentangle software quality and software impact policy research activities:**

- Create checklists/review guidelines for different levels of peer-review for software; can be tiered, could issue stars or use another rating system; leverage information already available from journals and other resources.  
(1 week)

**Disentangle software quality and software impact policy advocacy activities:**

- Disseminate peer-review for software checklists/review guidelines to publishers and other organizations that review software, via a working group.  
(2 months over 2 years)

#### **7.2.3.5 Better recognize the value and importance of software (Aim 5)**

**Recognize the value and importance of software policy research activities:**

- (+) Find science/discovery cases where software was particularly fundamental, particularly digging into software that is not so generally well-known (2 months over 6 months)
- (+) Research and deliver case studies in sustainable software value, e.g., NetCDF, HDF5, DS9 image viewer, GCM model(s). How much money was invested in these projects and how did these projects return value to the community? Examples of value could include: number of research projects taking advantage of these solutions, amount saved by not having to reinvent these technologies. (6-to-12-month fellow project)

- Quantify the money that has implicitly funded maintenance and sustainability, and has been saved or lost in the shift to open source (e.g., where funds have been spent on one-off software rather than maintaining existing open source software, and where an investment in software maintenance saved funds from being spent on one-off software) (6-month fellow project)
- Calculate bus factor for a bunch of key software in disciplines (partner with CHAOSS, or perhaps 6-month fellow project)
- Document maintenance and funding for critical packages for several disciplines, e.g. IRAF in astronomy (6-month fellow project)

**Recognize the value and importance of software policy advocacy activities:**

- (+) Publicize science/discovery cases where software was particularly fundamental, focusing on demonstrating impact of software (1 week/year, ongoing)
- (+) Raise awareness that software needs to be maintained (low level, ongoing)

#### 7.2.3.6 Funding opportunities for software maintenance (Aim 6)

**Funding opportunities for software maintenance policy research activities:**

- (+) Review the landscape of funding opportunities for software maintenance (and gather data about them) and provide a public summary, then keep the summary up-to-date. (jointly done with ReSA? Or CZI EOSS?) (1 month and some ongoing work)
- Gather case studies of successful commercialization of open source projects and encourage the research community to understand and make use of them (2 months)
- Review the scope of maintenance needs by various research disciplines. Determine the order of magnitude of the maintenance backlog for research software (with CHAOSS and others, unscoped)

**Funding opportunities for software maintenance policy advocacy activities:**

- Encourage funding agencies to require software management/maintenance plans (SMPs). Use them to couple the idea of maintenance to the idea of development, to make it clear that just doing development without maintenance doesn't work. Note that this leads to questions about when maintenance should be stopped, and it's also unclear how long-term maintenance would be supported (since grants are by definition time-limited). (1-2 months/year ongoing, work with ReSA)
- Advocate for funding agencies to provide a funding pool for short-term maintenance grants for existing projects (e.g. CZI's EOSS program). (1-2 months/year)
- (+) Advocate for universities to support maintenance of software developed by their university as part of research impact (or possibly technology transfer), in part by including how software we highlight in the success stories campaign was paid for, including university and RSE contributions, then using this collectively to demonstrate the impact of specific university-funded activities, to encourage other universities to step up. (2 months/year over multiple years)
- Encourage companies to provide funds and channel these funds into maintaining research software projects, perhaps via a review process with reviewers from both academic software projects and the companies. This could be done jointly with NumFOCUS or a similar organization, similar to Tidelift (1-2 months/year)

#### **7.2.3.7 Increase diversity of software community (Aim 7)**

##### **Diversity and inclusion policy research activities:**

- (+) Survey US research software projects to examine diversity of leadership and contributors (3 months)
- Study/survey contributors who make a single contribution and those who make ongoing contributions vs membership in underrepresented groups (3 months)
- (+) Contribute to DISCOVER event cookbook, working with NumFOCUS's DISC
- Other items with CS&S and NumFOCUS's DISC, for example, creating a cookbook aimed at projects

##### **Diversity and inclusion advocacy activities:**

- (+) Advertise DISCOVER event cookbook, working with NumFOCUS's DISC

- (+) Other items with CS&S and NumFOCUS's DISC, such as advertising the cookbook aimed at projects
- Reach out to projects to encourage them to mentor Outreachy interns and those from other programs (e.g., Linux Foundation diversity programs, <https://opensourcediversity.org/#programs>), and to work with Google Summer of Code, maybe include some matchmaking. Consider URSSI as an organization that applies to a set of these programs on behalf of a set of software projects.
- Build community mentoring program focused on diversity
- Work with RLadies, Women in Data Science, etc.

#### 7.2.3.8 General advocacy activities (not mapped to specific Aims)

- Work with REU<sup>2</sup> programs? – set up a network of software-focused REUs? Or focus on software aspects of more REUs? (provide training, guidance, language for proposals, ...) (2 month to start + ongoing)
- Foster competition between universities (and their administrations), as has been done by the SSI in the UK to create RSE groups, by:
  - Highlighting software work (including internal investments to sustain projects that the university sees as important and prestigious) and successes (including funded projects that focus on software) in some universities.
  - Ranking the contributions of universities to software or their structure for software developers, and publicizing the ranking (maybe with US-RSE) – via newsletter, blogs, press releases (potentially run by or at least coordinated with the URSSI community area). This could be based in part on information submitted by the software community, e.g. Laura Noren's and Brad Stenger's Data Science Community Newsletter. These rankings and information would also be bi-directionally shared with ReSA.
- Work in citation and credit (get publishers to recognize and highlight software in research) (with FORCE11 and others) (minor support of other activities)
- Promote software management plans and software sustainability plans as part of proposals (3 months over a year, bringing together community and volunteers, work with ReSA and RDA)

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<sup>2</sup>REU is refers to both NSF's Research Experience for Undergraduates program, as well as being a generic term for summer and other programs that provide undergraduates with research experience.

- (+) Develop a set of options for how institutions can support research software (e.g., RSE groups, RSE careers, tenure and promotion guidelines) and disseminate it (with US-RSE, starting after year 1)
- (+) Create and operate a professional award program (working with other established organizations) e.g., ESA URSSI software award. The URSSI software contribution to research awards: URSSI/ESA (e.g. John Chambers software award from stats association). \$10k funding available from URSSI (eventually domain societies would be asked to partially fund the awards). URSSI would need to define the categories, criteria/heuristics, etc. for awards beforehand. And find people (either staff or community volunteers) to run awards processes (accept nominations, make decisions) (2 weeks/year starting in year 2)
- (+) Work with NumFOCUS to provide guidance to projects on how to work with (including obtaining funding from) industry (sharing material with incubator area)
- (+) Offer training for software development proposals (or point to others who do)
  - Develop and disseminate best practices for software development proposals (with NumFOCUS or the Capentries)
  - Training/materials could be asynchronous, or in-person with NSF program officers as well, if they were willing to do so
- Licensing (in partnership with OSI, Creative Commons, others)
  - Provide (pointers to) guidance on licenses and copyright for research software (little work, partner with OSI and point to existing best practices)

#### 7.2.3.9 Unplanned Activity Pool

The activities listed here are those that would support URSSI but are beyond the scope of URSSI. They are listed here to provide ideas to others, and URSSI would potentially be willing to encourage and support them, but likely without resources.

##### 7.2.3.9.1 Staff career path policy research activities (Aim 1)

- Comparative study of research success at universities with core RSE groups vs those without. (potential research topic, not to be started by URSSI)

**7.2.3.9.2 Incentivize contributions to public software policy advocacy activities (Aim 3)**

- Run a help desk once a week on-line for people who are running into difficulties in making contributions and need help

**7.2.3.9.3 Disentangle software quality and software impact policy research activities (Aim 4)**

- Define what software quality means.
- Define what software impact means and how to measure it. Impact can be looked at in many ways: scientific, economic, societal, etc.
- Define how you know what software will be impactful (signals of high impact)
- Capture the difference between software quality and software impact in written resources (blog post, paper, etc.)
- Conduct a Delphi study or multiple Delphi studies across or between disciplines to determine a consensus on key indicators of software impact and related questions, such as: Does improving the quality of software improve its impact?
- Perform randomized experiments of software impact where the treatment is improved software practices
- Perform a retrospective study of software quality as related to “impact” of that software.

**7.2.3.9.4 Recognize the value and importance of software policy research activities (Aim 5)**

- Study whether higher-quality software produces higher-impact science or more reliable science results

**7.2.3.9.5 Funding opportunities for software maintenance policy advocacy activities (Aim 6)**

- Provide a system to match open source maintenance needs and open source programmers (e.g., classified ads), to be funded by URSSI, or URSSI could support proposals for such maintenance work (both morally and by providing guidance to the proposer)

- Provide fellowships for programmers to “do good stuff” related to maintenance
- Attach money for maintenance to some of the to-be-created awards for good software development, jointly named and funded with other communities

#### **7.2.3.9.6 General advocacy activities (not mapped to specific Aims)**

- Talk about problems with current software licenses/models and suggest alternatives
- Create peer-review and publishing systems that are software appropriate, and not just a version of article appropriate system. For instance, find a software ecosystem-native way to peer-review software inside a code management system, or “publish” software by giving a specific version of code a DOI

### **7.3 Work between Policy and other URSSI Areas**

- Education & Training – use to learn about problems, use training events to disseminate products and advocacy
- Community – provide topics for fellows, work with on newsletter and dissemination, host champions, contribute to and disseminate best practices
- Incubator – develop both general and specific guidance for projects

### **7.4 Policy metrics/milestones**

- Amount of funding provided by US public and private funding agencies for research software development and maintenance
- Number and fraction of US universities with RSE-like positions, and number of such positions at each university
- Number and fraction of US university faculty who successfully use software work as an important part of their tenure packages
- Number of participants in policy events, and their satisfaction based on exit surveys
- Collect “thank yous” and anecdotes where URSSI is recognized for helping do something

Table 7.1: Impact table

Activity	Impact on Research Software	Impact on people and car
Career path		X
Impact of individuals		X
Incentivize contributions to public software	y	y
Disentangle software quality and software impact		
Better recognize the value and importance of software		
Funding opportunities for software maintenance	y	
Increase diversity of software community		X
Award program		y

- Number of requests from universities for talks from URSSI staff
- Number of talks by others where URSSI is discussed
- Number of views and citations of URSSI policy documents and web sites
- **TODO:** more needed

#### Impacts:

This table maps URSSI activities from this chapter to the three portions of URSSI's intended impact. (A complete table of impacts from all URSSI activities can be found in Chapter 10 (Metrics and Evaluation).) In the impact cells, X indicates a designed primary impact on an activity, and y indicates a designed secondary impact.



# **Chapter 8**

## **Management & Coordination Area**

The Management & Coordination Area of URSSI is designed to manage the project (assign and monitor work, usually in work packages; monitor, mitigate, and respond to risks; provide reports; adapt work to community feedback; and ensure project sustainability) and foster collaboration between the four other areas of URSSI: Policy, Education & Training, Incubator, and Outreach & Community.

### **8.1 Management resources**

The PI and Co-PIs are funded at 0.25 FTE and are supported by staff at their home institutions for writing reports and budgeting, etc. The Work Package Leader roles are filled by PIs and/or senior personnel and are funded at around 0.1 FTE for leading a work package. The Sustainability Officer, Diversity Officer and Evaluator are each planned at 0.1 - 0.25 FTE depending on the phase of the institute. The initial phases of ramping up the institute, defining work packages (see definition below) and services, as well as detailed project plans with 1-year to 5-year goals will require more effort at the beginning, and we will revisit the level of effort after about 18 months and 48 months. In addition to continuous monitoring of progress and risks and potential refactoring of work and addressing risks, work on sustainability, evaluation and diversity, will be major topics.

## 8.2 Work packages

All work to be done in URSSI (including management and coordination) is structured into work packages (WPs), which are organized around the project's goals and areas, with an additional WP that is concerned with quality and risk management, project coordination, sustainability, and reporting activities. A WP defines a discrete unit of work over some period, and can be part of one or more areas. The duration of a WP can be a fixed period (e.g., six months to organize and run a single training event) or can span the full lifetime of the project, such would be the case for the maintenance of the website or regular distribution of newsletters. For example, a WP to support a new open-source project might last a year and span three areas: education & training, incubator, and outreach & community.



Fig. Areas and WPs: A WP can exist in one or more areas. The WP "Project coordination, risk management and reporting" spans all four areas and lasts for the duration of the project. WPx, for example, is part of Education & Training, Incubator, and Outreach & Community. WPy, WPz, and WPw each exist in a single area.

## 8.3 Management structure and procedures

Management of URSSI includes activities that occur at different levels, appropriate to the size and structure of the institute. This section presents the project's organizational and decision-making mechanisms, as well as its process for ensuring effective information interchange between the individual work packages. Central to the project's management is a key set of roles and committees, which

are described in detail below: the PI, the Co-PIs, the Work Package Leaders, a sustainability officer, an evaluator, and the Steering Committee. Work Package leaders may be Co-PIs or other URSSI staff.

The **PI and Co-PIs** have overall responsibility for project activities and will work with the evaluator to make periodic revisions to ensure the project's continuing success. The PI will manage the administrative and financial aspects of the project, with the assistance of one or two staff members. The PI will also oversee the day-to-day management of the project, with the support of the Co-PIs. The PI and Co-PIs are responsible for reviewing the overall progress of the project. They will work closely with the Work Package Leaders to manage the technical work of the project. **Work Package Leaders** will be responsible for the progress of their individual work packages, the timely production and quality of deliverables, and the achievement of milestones. The **Sustainability Officer** will work towards ensuring the sustainability of the overall institute. The **Diversity Officer** will ensure that URSSI meets its internal and external diversity goals, and will suggest additional activities as needed. The **Evaluator** will ensure that URSSI activities progress towards the overall goals of URSSI are measured and, and will suggest corrective actions when needed. The **Steering Committee** will advise and support the PI and Co-PIs. **Senior Personnel** are responsible for tasks assigned to them by Work Package leaders. Tasks include administrative tasks for the project.

This structure has been developed to:

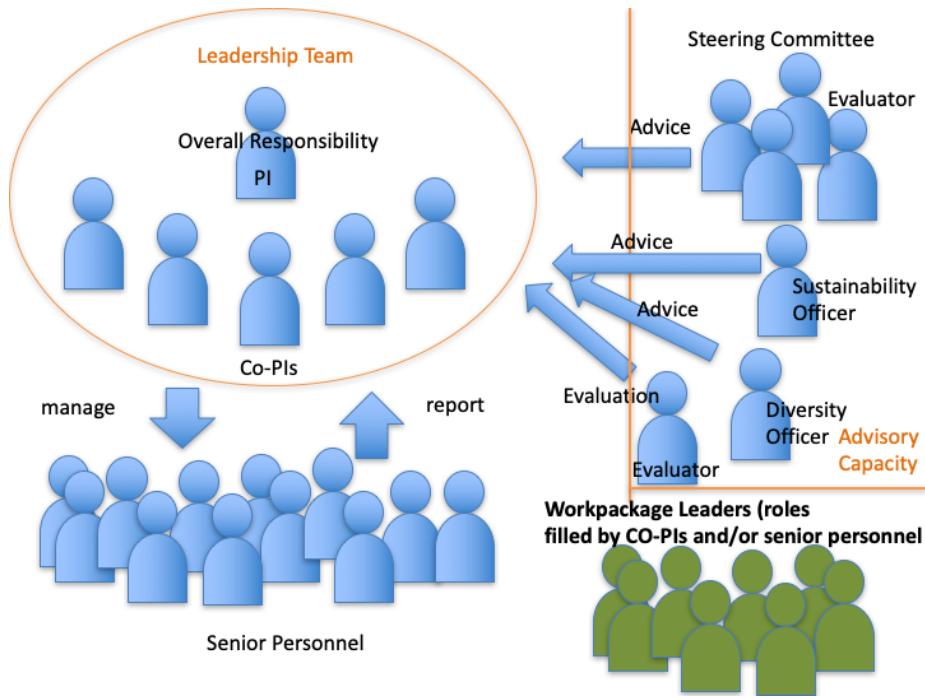
- Ensure effective management of the project;
- Ensure clearly defined communication channels both internal and external to the project;
- Establish clear procedures for making decisions and resolving conflicts;
- Ensure the project proceeds within the framework of the budget, including efficient reallocation of budget if necessary and according to administrative, financial, and legal principles defined by NSF; and
- Ensure that the participants meet their obligations in the project.

## 8.4 Project Management Team

The project management team comprises

- Leadership Team (the PI and Co-PIs)
- Work Package Leaders
- Sustainability Officer
- Diversity Officer
- Evaluator
- Senior Personnel

In addition to this team, the project will rely on a Steering Committee.



The Project Management Team will meet on an annual basis, starting with an initial meeting in the first month of the project to promote effective and efficient work among all participants. This meeting will include the whole project management team along with invited experts. The PI can call additional meetings at any time. The annual meetings will be face-to-face when possible. Additional meetings may be via telephone conference, video conference, or both. In addition to the core project team, the PI can invite any person knowledgeable about an area of concern within the URSSI scope to attend Project Management Team meetings in an advisory capacity.

The Project Management Team will contribute to the strategic orientation of the project and represents the interests of all participants. Its main tasks are to:

- Collect feedback from potential user researcher communities and developer communities;
- Disseminate the project's latest results via publications and presentations at conferences and workshops; and
- Accomplish the work packages.

### 8.4.1 Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will be formed at the start of the project. It will consist of 6-8 experts invited by the Leadership Team, drawn from diverse areas including sustainability, software engineering, and domain researchers. Steering Committee members will be asked to serve for two-year terms, though initial terms may be longer or shorter to set up staggered terms for the committee. Members can continue for additional terms if both the member and the project (PI and Co-PIs) agree.

The Steering Committee will be the ultimate advisory group in the running of the project. Its role is to

- Give guidance to the PI, Co-PIs and Work Package Leaders;
- Exchange experiences and formulate ideas for interoperation with other SI2/CSSI projects (e.g. MolSSI, IRIS-HEP) and on sustainability;
- Advise in scientific decisions.

The Steering Committee will be invited to every Project Management Team meeting.

### 8.4.2 PI

The PI will coordinate the project and will:

- Address all recommendations submitted by the Steering Committee and the Project Management Team, taking appropriate actions;
- Address ethical, legal and diversity issues relevant to the project;
- Approve project budgets;
- Ensure the project proceeds according to administrative, financial, and legal principles defined by NSF;
- Participate in annual NSF PI meetings; and
- Report to NSF.

### 8.4.3 Leadership Team (PI and Co-PIs)

The PI and Co-PIs form the Leadership Team: the decision-making body of the project. They will:

- Set the strategic direction of the project;
- Ensure effective operation of the project and ensure that all efforts are focused towards achieving its objectives;
- Define work packages and assign work package leaders;

- Invite Steering Committee members;
- Address risks that may impair progress towards the project's objectives and propose strategies to address those risks;
- Direct the project according to the work plan taking corrective actions as needed;
- Ensure the free flow of information between Work Package Leaders and ensure cooperation and liaison between the individual work packages takes place;
- Ensure that the work packages interact effectively;
- Ensure deliverables are of good quality and on time;
- Assemble progress reports and deliverables;
- Monitor the progress of work packages towards their milestones and deliverables.

#### **8.4.4 Work Package Leaders**

A work package leader is responsible for the effective planning, execution, and reporting for an individual work package. They will be responsible for:

- Coordinating the communication and work between partners within their work package;
- Understanding work package constraints and coordination issues, especially if a work package falls into several areas;
- Ensuring progress towards work package milestones and deliverables;
- Ensuring all work package reports and deliverables are produced in a timely fashion;
- Ensuring all results and outputs are disseminated effectively to other work packages;
- Ensuring good communication with other work packages;
- Reporting the progress of their work package to the PI and Co-PIs;
- Providing support for the PI;
- Setting up regular meetings (about weekly or bi-weekly) between participants within their work package via telephone conference, video conference or both.

#### **8.4.5 Sustainability Officer**

The sustainability officer ensures that all actions and work packages are analyzed regarding their contribution to the sustainability of the institute. Work packages might be effective at the beginning of the institute but might phase out over time or need to be redefined with different metrics, for example. The sustainability officer can suggest and lead work packages such as building additional collaborations and analyzing and/or applying for additional funding streams. They would collaborate closely with the incubator area to use its methods for

spinning out work packages to be self-sustainable beyond the duration and funding of the project. The sustainability officer is planned as part of the advisory board, not as a Co-PI, so they are not involved in day-to-day management of an area or work packages. The goal is that this role maintains and provides a high-level external perspective on impact and measures for sustainability.

#### 8.4.6 Diversity Officer

The diversity officer ensures that all actions and work packages are analyzed regarding their contribution to the diversity of the institute and the overall community. The diversity officer will also be an ombudsperson for any diversity-related issues that arise, where individuals inside or outside the project want to privately point out problems or make suggestions. The diversity officer will also help in building partnerships with communities that enable the project to increase diversity.

#### 8.4.7 Evaluator

The evaluator is responsible for assessing the performance of the project, including by defining appropriate metrics, and suggesting appropriate measures if performance is found to be lacking or goals of the project are not met.

### 8.5 Risk management

The leadership team as well as the steering committee are well experienced in project and risk management. The leadership team will maintain a risk register that is refreshed at least annually, and will address risks that may impair progress towards the project's objectives by proposing strategies to address those risks and directing the project according to the work plan, taking corrective actions as needed. The project plan will be designed to accommodate appropriate and proven risk management practices.

Some risks common to any type of project of this size and complexity, including coordination risks, problems in tasks delivering, loss of a project team member and a low impact on community building and community growth. Other risks are specific to this institute plan, such as little interaction between existing institutes for complementing each other's activities.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Coordination risks			

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	
The coordination of many project team members can be difficult and problems in communication and organization can upset the project. Problems in task delivering	2	2	4	Prevention: Clear communication channels; regular meetings. Measures in the case of occurrence: Improve communications among team members with scheduling more meetings and adding communication channels
A task will be not or late delivered due to several problems: financial, organizational or technical.	1	2	2	Prevention: The implementation and execution risk is minimised by the detailed work package descriptions and resources allocation, by the complementary expertise and roles in the work packages; the project plant will continuously assess project risks based on input from the project team. Measures in the case of occurrence: Appropriate corrective actions will be decided as necessary, and tracked to completion to avoid or reduce the effect of any risk detected.
Loss of project team member Parts of the intended results cannot be delivered and the expertise of the team member is missing. That could delay or - dependent on the team member and on the point of time - endanger the whole project. Low impact on community building and community growth	2	3	6	Prevention: Have overlapping expertise between team members; code of conduct to avoid conflicts between team members. Measures in the case of occurrence: Providing clear communication channels if conflicts occur; redefining goals and responsibilities and acquiring staffing if a team member leaves.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Activities may have less impact as expected	1	3	Prevention: Evaluation of work packages and tasks and collecting feedback from the community on different activities. Measures in the case of occurrence: Adapting of the work plan and further outreach activities.
Choice of communities to engage with are not at the right point in their lifecycle / do not have sufficient effort to engage	2	3	Prevention: Interviews with community leaders and selected community members before engaging on a large scale. Measures in the case of occurrence: Planning the engagement with the community beyond low effort such as newsletters for a later point of time.
Impact is affected by community politics for a specific community	2	3	Prevention: Interviews with community leaders and selected community members. Measures in the case of occurrence: Analyzing whether a change of community politics is expected and if yes, invest larger community building effort; regular check of impact of actions on the community for recognizing slow or minor uptake.

## 8.6 Management metrics/milestones

The Management & Coordination Area provides the structure to efficiently manage URSSI. There are three main phases for building and evaluating the structure and defining tools for supporting the management process.

First phase (1-3 months):

- Announcing and filling open job positions of the institute, and strongly considering diversity while doing so
- Defining the project management framework and tools supporting this framework, e.g., following the concept of Traction and working with Trello Boards
- Defining the mission, vision and culture of URSSI
- Defining 1-year, 3-year and 5-year goals
- Defining work packages, starting with the first 18 months

Second phase (4-18 months)

- Evaluating the efficiency of the management structure, e.g., are additional roles/positions needed, are fewer positions needed
- Evaluating the project management framework
- Evaluating and revisiting active work packages
- Defining work packages for 18 - 60 months
- Define sustainability metrics for work packages

Third phase (18-60 months)

- Evaluating and revisiting work packages
- Distinguishing and preparing to ramp down services that can be managed sustainably by the community and services that should be sustainably delivered by URSSI

## **8.7 SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)**

A SWOT analysis helps find the best match between environmental trends (opportunities and threats) and internal capabilities.

- A strength is a resource or capacity the organization can use effectively to achieve its objectives.
- A weakness is a limitation, fault, or defect in the organization that will keep it from achieving its objectives.
- An opportunity is any favorable situation in the organization's environment. It is usually a trend or change of some kind or an overlooked need that increases demand for a product or service and permits the firm to enhance its position by supplying it.
- A threat is any unfavorable situation in the organization's environment that is potentially damaging to its strategy. The threat may be a barrier, a constraint, or anything external that might cause problems, damage or injury.

The SWOT analysis is based on experiences in the conceptualization phase of URSSI.

Strengths

## 8.7. SWOT (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS)101

- Conceptualization of URSSI created already awareness and some community involvement
- Experience with winter school
- Results of survey and ethnographic studies

### Weaknesses

- Awareness of URSSI in a large set of communities

### Opportunities

- Close collaboration with existing NSF sustainability institutes, carpentries, UK SSI, US-RSE, ReSA, BSSw, ...
- Yearly surveys on research software engineering

### Threats

- Overlapping effort from projects hindering uptake of URSSI activities
- A plethora of target communities



## **Chapter 9**

# **Budget**

At this point, without a specific opportunity to propose to, we do not have a budget documented. Different sections can be supported at different levels depending on opportunities.



## Chapter 10

# Metrics and Evaluation

This chapter is being developed.

This table maps URSSI activities to the three portions of URSSI's intended impact. Activities are preceded by a letter to indicate what area of URSSI they are from (C = community and outreach, E = education and training, I = incubator, P = policy), and in the impact cells, X indicates a designed primary impact on an activity, and y indicates a designed secondary impact.

Table 10.1: Impact table

Activity	Impact on Research
C:Fellowships	X
C:In-person events	X
C:Community calls	
C:Curate best practices	X
C:Newsletter & social media	
E:Summer school	y
E:Projects Carpentry	X
E:Review service for software project plans	X
E:Examine use of industrial software development practices in research software	X
E:Book of knowledge of software dev best practices	X
I:Incubator	X
P:Career path	
P:Impact of individuals	
P:Incentivize contributions to public software	
P:Disentangle software quality and software impact	
P:Better recognize the value and importance of software	
P:Funding opportunities for software maintenance	
P:Increase diversity of software community	
P:Award program	y

# Chapter 11

## Final Words

Research software continues to play an important role in enabling much of modern research. Without access to high quality research software, it would be impossible to address many pressing challenges we face, such as emerging infectious diseases, food security, wildfires, climate change, among others. Through numerous interactions with the US research community, we have identified several key challenges and solutions to improve the sustainability of research software and of those who develop and maintain it. This plan describes a cohesive set of interrelated activities to be coordinated and run by URSSI.

Our goal is to improve the quality, usefulness, and sustainability of research software by improving practices, and increasing diversity of practitioners. To grow and sustain a thriving community around research software, we propose an institute to coordinate efforts around training and education, community development, software development practices, and advocating for people engaged in research software. Each of these four areas have activities designed to impact people, software, and the broader research software ecosystem. These include impacts on:

**People:** Helping researchers develop their software skills, connecting them with peers, sharing best practices, preparing them for a workforce within and beyond academia, and getting recognition for their research software work as scholarship.

**Software:** Incubating promising research software tools and helping them become more sustainable, identifying challenges and developing resources to address them, disseminating best practices for software development

**Research Software ecosystem:** Incentivizing contribution to public infrastructure, recognizing and valuing software in academia, national labs, and industry, and increasing the diversity of research software practitioners in the United States.

The open science movement (Tennant et al., 2020), which has seen growing support among early career researchers over the past decade, has surfaced many of the challenges facing research software. Among numerous motivations for greater openness, reproducibility, reusability and increased transparency rank high. While the early days of the movement focused on open and free access to research publications, research data has been the more recent focus of the scholarly community. In addition to numerous data repositories, tools, and training resources, the community came together in 2013 to launch the Research Data Alliance, a community consortium whose mission is to improve cultural and technical practices for greater sharing of open data.

Research software needs a coordinated effort of similar scale such as the one being led by the Research Software Alliance (<https://www.researchsoft.org/>). Many of the activities proposed in this plan are not entirely novel. However, they have never been carried out in a coordinated manner with the intention to develop and grow a community of researchers with a shared interest around research software. A thriving community is also critical to address a challenge facing all of academia, national labs and industry, which is the lack of diversity. URSSI will be a platform to provide opportunities for many communities that have had little to no representation in this space.

While a handful of the activities we describe in this plan can be funded and executed independently, anything short of a coordinated effort will not have the impact we desire at the scales we describe. These activities are all interrelated and support each other. Therefore we are likely to have a substantially larger impact doing them in a coordinated fashion than as separate activities. An institute like URSSI can also serve as a focal point to coordinate many existing disparate efforts and help them succeed by reaching a wider audience. Addressing long standing systemic challenges requires a coordinated investment.

# Glossary

in progress



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