

Civilian Code Conservation Corps:

*Free software for governments of all  
sizes*

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# Outline

- Governments should use free software
- Obstacles in their way
- Current state of affairs

# Disclaimers

Focused on USA

Based on my  
experience

Open source



Why should we care?

“The mission of the state is to organize society for the freedom and well-being of the people. [...] The state needs to insist on free software in its own computing for the sake of its computational sovereignty (the state’s control over its own computing). All users deserve control over their computing, but the state has a responsibility to the people to maintain control over the computing it does on their behalf.”

– Richard M. Stallman, “Free Software, Free Society”

Control

Is software public infrastructure or a  
public resource?



# Software as infrastructure



Infrastructure: “The basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (e.g. buildings, roads, power supplies) needed for the operation of a society or enterprise.” (Oxford American Dictionary)

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# Software as public resource



Once a government builds a piece of software, it becomes a national resource

# Forest Service Multiple Use Mandate

“[...] it is the policy of the Congress that the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.”

- Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960

Software is infinitely replicable  
(at zero marginal cost)

Free software is both infrastructure  
and a resource

Because software is **infrastructure**  
that can be used like a **resource**,  
the government has a duty to make  
it available to us

If you're not convinced...

# Open tools are more effective

- Greater control
- Reduced lock-in
- Transparency and trust
- Efficiency



# Improved interoperability yields better public service

- State of Georgia's OpenHMIS (Homeless Management Information Systems) API
- Reduces data entry burden on service providers

Free software helps other  
governments

# Federal assistance administered by states

- CBO: “17 percent of federal outlays and a quarter of spending by states and localities” is in grants from the federal government to states (as of 2011)
- Half of this is Medicaid

# City to City sharing



Ok, you're convinced

Why aren't all government software  
projects free software?

# Fear

“Government agencies tend to be unusually risk-averse. Somewhere at the top there's an elected official who, reasonably, sees an open source project as just one more surface area for opponents to attack.”

- Karl Fogel, “Producing Open Source Software”

Security





But who will help me  
support the system?

# Vendors

- Inexperienced with free software
- Wary of increased competition



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Where are we now?

# Current events

- Checkbook has been re-deployed in Texas
- Medicaid “90/10” rule from early 2016
  - Defines “open source”
  - “(20) Systems and MMIS modules developed, installed or improved with 90 percent match must include documentation of components and procedures such that the systems could be operated by a variety of contractors or other users.”

# Open Gov Foundation and Chicago City Clerk's Office

- Digitizing City Council procedures
- Building an open legislative operating system that can be adapted to the needs of other cities

**Governments have a responsibility  
to free their software resources**

# More resources

- Government and free software:
  - [www.dwheeler.com/](http://www.dwheeler.com/)
  - [ben.balter.com/2015/11/23/why-open-source/](http://ben.balter.com/2015/11/23/why-open-source/)
  - [code.gov/](http://code.gov/)
  - [18f.gsa.gov/](http://18f.gsa.gov/)
- Projects and regulations mentioned in this talk:
  - [checkbooknyc.com](http://checkbooknyc.com)
  - [www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/12/04/2015-30591/medicaid-program-mechanized-claims-processing-and-information-retrieval-systems-9010](http://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/12/04/2015-30591/medicaid-program-mechanized-claims-processing-and-information-retrieval-systems-9010)
  - [opengovfoundation.org/](http://opengovfoundation.org/)

Thank you! Questions?