

Corporate Social Responsibility

The principles and practices of open source software are very similar to the principles and practices of modern librarianship. Both value free and equal access to data, information, and knowledge. Both value the peer review process. Both advocate open standards. Both strive to promote human understanding and to make our lives better. Both make efforts to improve society as a whole assuming the sum is greater than the parts.

Eric Lease Morgan, Librarian, University of Notre Dame

From our embracing of open source software to our commitment to providing social value, from our sustainability and environmental credentials to our focus on staff well-being, Open Fifth's ethical approach to doing business is clear.

Open source software and Koha

Open Fifth is firmly committed to open source software - software developed by online communities for free use by all. The company actively supports eight open source products - Aspen Discovery, Wordpress, Request Tracker, FOLIO, Metabase, VuFind, DSpace and, most significantly, **Koha**.

From its foundation in 2007 Open Fifth has been based on providing services in an ethical way to our customers. With many years of cumulative experience of our staff in this sector we recognise the value that libraries provide. We do much to promote the benefits of using open source software both for its technical excellence and for its focus on the user experience for staff and public alike and for the user driven direction of development.

Koha is the Maori word for "gift". Koha's founding tenets are based on providing social value in an ethical and sustainable way. It is the most widely used open source library management system in the world being used by over 15,000 libraries and with over 40 support companies like Open Fifth dedicated to providing support and development services.

As **Koha** is entirely open it lends itself to user participation at all levels. However, people can be unsure of how best to engage. We offer a mentoring service for library staff who wish to broaden their IT skills and also to embrace the broader Koha community. This offer is extended to students at the many academic libraries that use Koha in the UK. In addition the Koha community runs a 'Koha Academy' for school age children. Bugs in Koha are tagged with an "Academy" tag and Koha community members assist children, one by one or in groups, in fixing these problems. Although the problems are basic in nature it gives young people an introduction into basic coding, a sense of achievement in fixing the bug, and their name in the Koha list of developers!

Our staff are actively involved in the Koha and Aspen Discovery communities, whether contributing to the user documentation or fixing bugs reported by community users. Significantly, our Head of Development and Community Engagement completed two cycles as the Koha Community Release

Manager which is one of the most important voluntary roles in an open source community. He continues to take a lead role in the community Quality Assurance processes.

Social value

We are also involved in social value initiatives overseas. At the behest of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and in conjunction with the British Council we participated in a project advising the government of Bangladesh on their implementation of Koha for the automation of all of the public libraries in the country. The aim of the project was to boost literacy, social justice and economic development. As part of a study tour Government ministers and other senior staff from the Bangladeshi library community visited Koha libraries in Cheshire to gain insights into implementation issues and get feedback on experiences from using Koha in a public library setting.

We also completed an implementation project for NewSPAL - the New Surrey Performing Arts Library. This is a charitable trust given responsibility for one of the three largest collections of Performing Arts loan material in the UK. Open Fifth provides ongoing support and hosting services free of charge. This is part of our commitment to supporting the Arts and Voluntary sectors.

As well as large scale projects in the UK such as for numerous local authorities, government departments, universities and colleges we also provide high quality library systems at a much lower price point for third sector libraries such as Dyslexia Action and the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Libraries are an undoubted force for good in a changing world whilst at the same time they are facing massive financial pressures. By offering significant value for money combined with high quality technical and customer support services from a modern platform we feel we are helping libraries best cope with the pressures they face. By their nature, libraries share many of the same values as open source software and we encourage and support librarians to actively contribute to the Koha community.

In 2016 after the Open Fifth implementation of Koha, the library service at Sefton Council was named Sefton Council Team of the Year at an awards ceremony. They won it for the successful implementation of Koha, the way the system helped them take a technical leap forward and the way staff engaged with the changes.

In 2022, a year of significant cost pressures for communities and families as a result of global issues, Open Fifth was able to give £10,000 to a charitable organisation supporting those most affected by the cost of living squeeze. We have also committed to give at least 5% of our future profits to charity.

Sustainable procurement

Open Fifth's commitment to sustainable procurement is demonstrated in our engagement with sustainable procurement tender and framework processes. The vast majority of our Public Sector contracts have been won through these processes.

With respect to our own procurement, we have carefully and deliberately chosen a Net Zero greenhouse gas hosting company as our largest supplier. They have a very clear and active commitment to environmental sustainability with demonstrable actions to reduce energy consumption in their data centres.

AWS recently became the top global purchaser of renewable energy. In addition to the environmental benefits inherently associated with running applications in the cloud, AWS is committed to powering 100% of its activities with renewable energy by 2025. Their renewable energy projects also support hundreds of jobs while providing hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in local communities.

Environmental commitment

Open Fifth is a virtual company. With all staff working from home offices, there is no daily commute, a company-wide ease and familiarity with virtual meetings reducing overall staff and customer travel commitments and a policy to support the use of predominantly electronic admin systems and documentation to reduce printer ink and use of paper. With one member of staff in a small rented Head Office suite, the company has minimal physical office environmental impacts.

Staff well-being

Open Fifth's decision to operate virtually from the outset was on the one hand a commitment to good environmental practice but on the other was a way of supporting the well-being of our staff. By actively embracing and enabling a home-working ethos, employees are encouraged to be in control of their work/life balance.

This is further demonstrated in our support of part time working, continuing professional development and in enabling staff to develop their own professional interests outside of their core work commitments.



Jonathan Field
Managing Director. March 2025