

Is open source right for you?

Read each question carefully.

+1	-1	<i>Needs & goals</i>
		<p>What technology do you actually need to support learning goals? General technology: +1, Specific programs: -1 Many specific programs aren't open source and aren't compatible. Students may need to use such programs for academic and career learning goals, especially in high school.</p>
		<p>Do your needs or goals demand a specific, proprietary solution? No: +1, Yes: -1 Open source can meet many general needs and goals, but it's incompatible with many specific programs for school.</p>
		<p>Are you trying to support advanced curricula in technology? Yes: +1, No: -1 Open source is excellent for advanced curricula, especially programming and Web development.</p>
		<p>Are you trying to foster most awareness of the larger issues in technology? Yes: +1, No: -1 The debate about open source includes many of the larger issues, including intellectual property, free markets, and privacy.</p>

+1	-1	<i>Capacity</i>
		<p>Are you willing and able to search for solutions rather than buy them? Yes: +1, No: -1 It may not even be possible to buy certain open source solutions.</p>
		<p>Would you rather buy certainty or invest in capacity? Capacity: +1, Certainty: -1 Current users report greater empowerment and self-reliance. But certainty may be worth the cost, especially for critical solutions (e.g. finance).</p>
		<p>If you lose an important staff member, will you have a backup? Or does your technology infrastructure stop functioning? Backup: +1, Stop functioning: -1 Avoid too much dependence on any single staff member for any technology. A clever-but-inscrutable solution is risky.</p>

Continue to the next page.

+1	-1	<i>Leadership & planning</i>
		<p>Can you convene a tech planning committee with diverse, open-minded stakeholders? Yes: +1, No: -1 Open source is complex and controversial.</p>
		<p>Are you willing and able to consider and experiment with several solutions? Yes: +1, No: -1 Current users recommend experimenting and migrating incrementally. Open source may not be good for sudden, urgent needs.</p>
		<p>Can you incubate an open source solution long enough to evaluate its actual effectiveness? Yes: +1, No: -1 Long-term results may be worth the cost and stress of migration and adjustment.</p>
		<p>Are you willing to re-plan and use data to make changes? Yes: +1, No: -1 Some solutions may work while others are too problematic. Flexibility may be an unrealistic luxury.</p>
		<p>Can you build or shift capacity over time? Yes: +1, No: -1 Migration may be expensive, but over time staff and other users may develop comfort and capacity for long-term gains.</p>

Continue to the next page.

+1	-1	<i>Support</i>
		<p>Can you maintain or build capacity for support? Yes: +1, No: -1 With open source, users may need a lot of initial support, because they have more mindshare and comfort with proprietary, closed source software.</p>
		<p>Will your technology staff be willing and able to get help from the community? Yes: +1, No: -1 The community is one of the greatest potential advantages of open source.</p>
		<p>Can you risk depending on the open source community for help or do you need more certainty? Risk: +1, Certainty: -1 It may not be easy to find answers. The community is not contractually bound to help.</p>
		<p>Can you afford training? Yes: +1, No: -1 Technology staff may need training, especially on the backend. Some users will benefit from training, including "informal" inservice training.</p>
		<p>Will your advanced users be willing and able to help other users? Yes: +1, No: -1 Schools can emulate the larger open source community of mutual support and enjoy some of the same benefits more locally.</p>
		<p>Are some educators already using open source, at work or at home? Yes: +1, No: -1 These current users can be invaluable, as with any technology. Praise their initiative and invite their expertise.</p>

Continue to the next page.

+1	-1	<i>Change & morale</i>
		<p>Have you recently made major changes in technology? No: +1, Yes: -1 Change is disruptive. Consider open source in the future. There may still be unobtrusive opportunities to experiment or migrate incrementally.</p>
		<p>Will you be making major changes soon? Yes: +1, No: -1 Any new software requires training and adjustment, so it may be easier to try open source during major changes.</p>
		<p>Are you struggling with budget limitations? Yes: +1, No: -1 Open source may save money.</p>
		<p>Are you able and willing to experiment? Yes: +1, No: -1 Open source is risky, but the long-term advantages may be worthwhile.</p>
		<p>Do your stakeholders crave some short-term success in technology integration? Yes: +1, No: -1 Programs like OpenOffice.org and the GIMP may foster improved integration, especially since teachers and students can take the software home.</p>
		<p>Will your needs and goals compel stakeholders to endure hardships and adjust to new solutions? Yes: +1, No: -1 Current users say that stakeholders are more accepting of open source when they understand the potential advantages, especially saving money.</p>
		TOTAL =

Example:

17	7	TOTAL = 10
----	---	-------------------

A large, positive total means open source may be right for you. These numbers only illustrate the relative impact of choosing open source. They are not a definitive measure. The actual impact of some questions will vary from school to school. Answers may be different on the backend (e.g. Web servers) versus the frontend (e.g. desktop computers).

