



D2.2 EXPERT REPORT ON NGI EVALUATION - FIRST PERIOD

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM M1-M18 OF NGI COMMONS

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Abstract	This document provides a detailed analysis of the first 18 months findings and proposes relevant changes in the model of work, with some focus on Work Packages 1 and 2 of the NGI Commons CSA (including Tasks 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, and 2.3). It also reports on community engagements established liaisons/synergies with relevant initiatives (including Task 2.2).
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* R: Document, report (excluding the periodic and final reports)

DEM: Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs

DEC: Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos, etc.

DATA: Data sets, microdata, etc.

DMP: Data management plan

ETHICS: Deliverables related to ethics issues.

SECURITY: Deliverables related to security issues

OTHER: Software, technical diagram, algorithms, models, etc.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first 18 months of NGI Commons have established the project as a bridge between grassroots Digital Commons communities and European policymakers, providing an evidence base to inform the transition from the ongoing delivery of the Next Generation Internet (NGI) programme to the forthcoming delivery of the 'Open Internet Stack' (OIS) programme of work. This transition marks a shift from small-scale, grassroots experimentation to the strategic development of sovereign, open, and interoperable digital infrastructure for Europe. NGI Commons has played a key role in Digital Commons on Europe's digital policy agenda, positioning Digital Commons not only as technical artefacts (such as open source software (OSS), open standards and protocols, and open research/science) but as governance-driven community enablers essential for the development of non-extractive and participatory infrastructures which support digital sovereignty by enabling autonomy and resilience in the provisioning of digital infrastructure.

Key findings from the project's first period highlight the plural and evolving nature of Digital Commons, their increasing embrace by the public sector, and the critical role of public support. Task 1.1, the first structured mapping of Digital Commons ecosystems, profiled 14 diverse case studies, revealing the need for flexible governance models, ecosystem-oriented funding, and caution against over-standardisation. Task 1.2 translated these findings into priorities for incorporating Digital Commons the OIS, resulting in the brief "Building Blocks: A Digital and Internet Commons-Based Approach for Provisioning Europe's Digital Infrastructure", building on a separate mapping surveying Building Blocks for digital infrastructure. The brief identifies technological (including technical and governance) Building Blocks as essential for sovereign infrastructure and warns that Europe's sovereignty ambitions will fail without sustained investment in Digital Commons as part of the efforts to build the OIS. Task 1.3, assessing NGI funding impact, underscored the systemic nature of open source sustainability, identifying gaps in data to assess quantifiable funding outcomes, the reliance on pooled resource bases in funded projects, and the need for long-term, flexible funding instruments. The ongoing development of the Handbook for Commoners under Task 2.3 aims to address these gaps by mapping funding pathways and proposing practical guidance and a future "one-stop-shop" tool for commoners, supporting alignment with OIS and the European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC) for Digital Commons. Community engagement, led through the Digital Commons Task Force (DCTF) (via Task 2.1) – as well as the Digital Commons Community Platform (DCCP), 1-1 conversations, interviews, and events and webinars, and article collaborations (via Task 2.2) – has amplified grassroots voices and opened lasting communication channels with key actors.

Despite these successes, sustaining participation and translating informal insights into actionable recommendations remain challenges. The next phase of NGI Commons will focus on validating and refining these findings through surveys, workshops, and cross-task collaboration, ensuring that community-driven priorities are integrated into EU digital sovereignty policy and funding mechanisms. By strengthening methodological integration, formalising feedback loops, and clarifying its role as a strategic intermediary in the NGI to OIS transition, NGI Commons aims to position its findings for long-term impact. Its success will depend on institutionalising its bridging role and ensuring that Europe's sovereign digital infrastructure is underpinned not only by open technologies but by resilient, participatory, and well-governed Digital Commons communities.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DCTF	Digital Commons Task Force
SAP	Strategic Advisory Panel
DCPC	Digital Commons Community Platform
NGI	Next Generation Internet
OFE	OpenForum Europe
DC/IC	Digital and Internet Commons
EC	European Commission
OIS	Open Internet Stack
WP(s)	Work Package(s)
LFE	Linux Foundation Europe
OSS	Open Source Software
DPGs	Digital Public Goods
DCPC	Digital Commons Policy Council
EDIC	European Digital Infrastructure Consortium
DCCP	Digital Commons Community Platform
CSA	Coordination and Support Action
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
EP	European Parliament

1 EVALUATION OF M18 FINDINGS

The Next Generation Internet (NGI)¹ programme is the European Commission (EC)'s flagship initiative to build a more democratic, resilient, and human-centric internet by funding cutting-edge research and innovation across areas such as privacy, trust, decentralisation, and interoperability. Since its launch, NGI has supported hundreds of open source projects and early-stage innovators working on foundational internet technologies.

NGI Commons is a project which was set up to improve policymaking and investment related to Digital and Internet Commons (DC/IC) in Europe, connected to the NGI programme. As a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) for the NGI programme, the goal for NGI Commons is also to support and review the broader NGI portfolio, seeking to understand how funding from the EC and related instruments can be strengthened to be more effective and support the integration of a range of DC/IC into EU policymaking and programme delivery.

NGI Commons connects directly to the broader mission of the NGI programme by examining how the NGI's projects and approaches contribute to a broader vision of Digital Commons, and by identifying ways in which NGI's funding mechanisms, governance structures, and strategic priorities can better align with long-term public value. Through its work, NGI Commons acts as a critical feedback loop between the NGI Programme and the wider digital commons ecosystem in Europe.

A detailed overview of the Work Packages for the NGI Commons CSA been reproduced below in Table 1.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF NGI COMMONS CSA WORK PACKAGES (WPS)

WP	Name	Lead	Tasks
WP1	Depict and Analyse	OpenForum Europe	- Task 1.1 DC/IC Mapping - Task 1.2 Consultation of experts to identify DC/IC priorities - Task 1.3 Measuring the leverage effect of NGI funding
WP2	Engage and Liaise	OpenForum Europe	- Task 2.1 Engage IC/DC experts to analyse NGI portfolio - Task 2.2 Synergies with relevant initiatives/European technology industry - Task 2.3 Develop a handbook for commoners
WP3	Policy and Roadmap	Open Future	- Task 3.1 Mapping digital sovereignty policy initiatives - Task 3.2 Strategic Agenda and Policy Building Blocks - Task 3.3 Governance models for future digital commons
WP4	Outreach and Impact	Martel Innovate	- Task 4.1 Communication and Dissemination - Task 4.2 Strategic Events - Task 4.3 Exploitation and Sustainability
WP5	Coordination and Guidance	Martel Innovate	- Task 5.1 Project Management - Task 5.2 Strategic Clustering - Task 5.3 Data Management

¹ See: "Next Generation Internet", <https://ngi.eu/>.

Since the inception of this project in January 2024, the future of the NGI has been subsumed by a vision for a new programme of funding, building on the old programme, titled the 'Open Internet Stack' (OIS). Where the NGI programme focused on funding smaller, grassroots innovation, the focus of the OIS will be on developing Building Blocks for the future Internet, leveraging the success of what has come before to work towards something which is more polished, forward-looking, and suitable to the scale of Europe's digital sovereignty challenges.²

This transition from NGI to OIS has, in some cases, required re-contextualising some of the tasks needed to support the delivery and fulfilment of the CSA's intended tasks in light of ongoing changes related to the policy and positioning of Digital Commons in the broader digital policy ecosystem in Europe. This has resulted in several amendments to the Work Packages (WPs) of NGI Commons, as well as a reformulation of some activities to closely align with the needs of a future OIS, a world wherein the NGI branding transitions away in 2027 towards something new and different.

This deliverable outlines some of the key findings from a structured review of the NGI Commons CSA tasks under Work Packages 1 and 2 (WP1 and WP2), reviewing its first 18 months and making recommendations for specific tasks and the overall model of collaboration in the project. Please note that while NGI Commons includes a Work Package 3 (WP3) focused on policy, a Work Package 4 (WP4) focused on outreach and impact, and a Work Package 5 (WP5) focused on coordination and guidance, the focus of this deliverable is in evaluating the first period of findings relevant to the NGI evaluation, which are focused on the knowledge products related to the evaluation of the NGI. Therefore, we have decided to focus on WP1 and WP2, whose activities look back to what has worked and not worked in the NGI and will be relevant in looking forward at what will happen in the NGI as it transitions to the OIS. Policy, communication, and coordination activities are not covered in this review.³

The rest of Section 1 reviews the main activities of WP1 and WP2 of NGI Commons, followed by a review of the more cross-cutting community engagement activities in Section 2. Section 3 summarises overall findings from the periods, summarising findings, making task-specific recommendations, and proposing lightweight changes to the model of collaboration in the NGI Commons CSA consortium. Section 4 provides a summary conclusion for the report.

1.1 REVIEWING THE NGI COMMONS PORTFOLIO

1.1.1 DIGITAL AND INTERNET COMMONS MAPPING (TASK 1.1)

One of the key activities of the NGI Commons project has been a structured mapping of active communities of commoners and related commons, led by the team at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*, or CNRS).

While the concept of Digital Commons has often been seen as fuzzy or redundant by some when compared to more operational licences or standards, Task 1.1 – and the resulting report it produced⁴ – sought to profile the rich diversity of Digital Commons artefacts, communities, and governance models. The findings inform later stages of the NGI Commons project by

² Next Generation Internet, "From NGI to Open Internet Stack: Powering Europe's Digital Sovereignty", European Commission, accessed on 28 July 2025, <https://ngi.eu/download/ngi-forum-2025-from-ngi-to-open-internet-stack-powering-europes-digital-sovereignty-2-pager/?wpdmdl=66927>.

³ A separate Strategic Agenda covering policy activities under WP3 has been submitted to the EC at the same time as this deliverable at the end of July 2025.

⁴ Note: The report has not yet been published publicly but will in the coming months. A summary blog can be found at: Valérien Guiller, "Active Communities of Commoners and Relevant Commons", NGI Commons, 26 June 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2025/06/26/active-communities-of-commoners-and-relevant-commons/>.

providing an evidence base for identifying under-the-radar communities, understanding their governance and sustainability challenges, and contributing to the development of governance frameworks for Digital Commons.

The final report (D1.1) was the result of extensive participation from the Digital Commons Task Force (DCTF), the participants of the Digital Commons Community Platform (DCCP), and other community events. It combined an extensive desk review of literature and policy definitions with 23 semi-structured interviews covering 14 case studies, many of which were drawn directly from the NGI investment portfolio and some of which were separate. These case studies represent a diversity of resources, governance models, funding structures, and maturity levels. The projects those case studies eventually highlighted ranged broadly from grassroots collectives to established foundations and cooperative platforms, encompassing (amongst other things) open artefacts and communities such as open source software (OSS), open data, cultural heritage initiatives, and federated communication tools.

The mapping exercise for Task 1.1 and its report confirmed the complexity of studying Digital Commons, as the field remains highly diverse and resistant to uniform categorisation. Definitions vary significantly across actors, who often draw on overlapping and sometimes competing conceptual frameworks such as OSS licensing, the social and solidarity economy, and digital public goods (DPGs). This diversity, while making standardisation difficult, reflects the richness of the field and suggests caution against premature generalisation or the imposition of rigid typologies, even as a matter of policymaking. Rather than attempting to impose a single model, the findings advocate for recognising the plural and evolving nature of Digital Commons and for situating them within their governance within specific and contextual contexts,⁵ and in support of diverse policy goals and outcomes.

The research highlights the evolution of the Digital Commons concept, which has shifted from its origins in the (F)OSS movement – primarily concerned with copyright and access to digital resources⁶ – towards collective governance models that emphasise shared ownership, community participation, and sustainability. The recent uptake of the concept by public bodies represents a significant political shift, marking a transition from grassroots, activist-driven initiatives to institutional recognition and strategic use of commons as instruments for digital sovereignty. This evolution demonstrates how Digital Commons are no longer defined solely by openness or technical artefacts but increasingly by governance structures and broader societal objectives.

Openness remains a foundational value for many commoners and the projects they run, yet the interviews for this activity revealed that they are increasingly approached in a pragmatic and sometimes contested way. Many actors still view openness as a principle of solidarity and collaboration, but they also confront tensions related to privacy, responsible data sharing, and the risk of value extraction by large commercial platforms. Different communities respond to these tensions in diverse ways, developing tailored licensing models, reciprocity mechanisms, or governance arrangements to align openness with their ethical and political commitments. This finding underscores that openness should not be seen as a simple binary condition, but rather as part of a negotiated and context-dependent practice.

Another finding is that ‘public’ entities emerge as crucial enablers of Digital Commons, both as funders and as clients. The report shows that while structural public support can be transformative, it is often inconsistent, short-term, and administratively burdensome, leaving many projects vulnerable once public funding ends. Some interviewees highlighted the importance of lighter and more flexible funding schemes, such as the NGI Zero⁷ or other

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ E. Gabriella Coleman, "Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking", Princeton University Press (2013): 1-254, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1r2gbj>.

⁷ See: "NGI Zero", <https://ngi-0.eu/>.

subgranting models, which better align with the needs of small and distributed communities. Strengthening public involvement in long-term maintenance, governance support, and capacity-building is identified as a key priority for ensuring sustainability of Digital Commons.

Finally, governance structures were shown to be highly dependent on the individuals and communities who build and maintain the commons. Many projects evolved over time from founder-led or informal collectives to hybrid organisational forms such as cooperatives, associations, or foundations, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation to legal, financial, and community needs. This diversity of governance models suggests that customisation, rather than standardisation, is essential. However, the reliance on charismatic leaders and the lack of formalised processes has remained a challenge for long-term stability and transparency of Digital Commons projects and communities. The report also observed that the discourse of Digital Commons sometimes competes with neighbouring frameworks, particularly the social and solidarity economy or open data movements. Yet, it also argues for better articulation between these ecosystems rather than conceptual exclusion, as their objectives are often complementary.

Moving forward, the results of this activity will continue to feed into the understanding of Digital Commons expressed across all tasks. In particular, it will support the delivery of the DC/IC priorities under Task 1.2, and the articulation of funding impact and funding needs tasks under T1.3 and T2.3. It is being carried forth by an updated additional Deliverable 1.5. It will also inform the policy-related activities overseen by Open Future via Work Package 3, which is focused on policy and a roadmap for Digital Commons, and in particular T3.3, which focused on governance models for future Digital Commons (an effort also led by CNRS).

1.1.2 CONSULTATION OF EXPERTS TO IDENTIFY DIGITAL AND INTERNET COMMONS PRIORITIES (TASK 1.2)

Another key activity of the NGI Commons project has been engaging with communities of commoners and policymakers to identify priorities for the DC/OC agenda, led by the team at the OpenForum Europe (OFE).

The focus of this task is on expert consultation and stakeholder engagement towards a focused prioritisation of activities for the Digital Commons agenda. In this regard, Task 1.2 has aimed to identify and validate Digital Commons priorities that support European digital sovereignty goals through structured community engagement, including expert consultations and workshops. The goal of these activities has been to ensure alignment between community perspectives and EU/global policy initiatives, identifying priorities for the Digital Commons agenda in Europe which are rooted in both community understanding/interests and global policy discourses.

The transition from NGI to OIS meant that it was more important than ever to keep front and center the contribution of Digital Commons to the provisioning of the Building Blocks for the OIS, which identified Building Blocks as a specific priority.⁸ Since the DC/IC priorities had already initiated efforts to identify technological Building Blocks for the Digital Commons agenda, it was a natural next step to define which Building Blocks could be supported by Digital Commons communities, and to outline priorities for strategically embedding the Digital Commons into the Open Internet Stack (OIS) agenda.

These Building Blocks were identified through structured mapping work undertaken in late 2024 and early 2025, which categorised more than a dozen types of potential Building Blocks across different layers of digital infrastructure. The initial results of the mapping were interrogated and refined through interviews, workshops, and feedback sessions with the DCTF and various stakeholders. This has been done most notably through the hosting of two

⁸ Next Generation Internet, "From NGI to Open Internet Stack: Powering Europe's Digital Sovereignty".

workshops, one in June 2025 in Amsterdam at Tolhuistuin⁹ – which sought to gather inputs on the foundational activities of the project’s first half – and a second was done as part of the Digital Commons Policy Council (DCPC) Lab 2025 in Liverpool¹⁰ – which sought to receive inputs on an emerging typology of Building Blocks and generate priorities for the enactment of Digital Commons as part of EC policies and investment related to Digital Commons.¹¹ The findings were also reviewed by the DCTF through an online meeting workshop in May 2025.

The findings were summarised in a forthcoming brief called “Building Blocks: A Digital and Internet Commons-Based Approach for Provisioning Europe’s Digital Infrastructure”, which overviews DC/IC priorities for the EC’s OIS.¹² It argues for a Digital Commons-based approach to provisioning this infrastructure, advancing a structured framework for identifying Building Blocks, which it defines as discrete digital capabilities that are well-positioned to be provisioned as commons. These Building Blocks are conceived not only as technical artefacts (e.g. OSS, open standards and protocols, and open source hardware) but also as governance models, communities, and capacity-building mechanisms, reflecting NGI Commons’ emphasis on social as well as technical enablers of digital sovereignty.

The brief seeks to more concretely position these priorities in light of the ongoing work around digital sovereignty being undertaken by the EC, European Parliament (EP), and various players from civil society and industry. While the brief itself is positioned as a policy tool to inform the OIS, it is relevant for related initiatives – such as the EuroStack and the planned European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC) for Digital Commons – and is also grounded in a broader understanding of how Digital Commons ought to be leveraged as part of European efforts to build sovereign digital infrastructure.

At the halfway point of NGI Commons, this work illustrates the project’s growing influence as a bridge between the Digital Commons ecosystem and EU institutions. It has mobilised community expertise, provided structured evidence to policymakers, and shaped a shared vocabulary for discussing how Digital Commons can underpin Europe’s sovereign digital infrastructure. The next phase of the project will focus on refining and validating the Building Blocks framework with Member States, civil society, and technical communities through surveys and continued community engagement, ensuring that this early influence translates into long-term policy impact.¹³ The findings of this activity will eventually lead to an updated brief and feed into the other activities of the NGI Commons project, including the review of the NGI Commons portfolio by the DCTF.

1.1.3 MEASURING THE LEVERAGE EFFECT OF NGI FUNDING (TASK 1.3)

An additional task of NGI Commons has been to assess NGI funding patterns and their impact on open source projects, an effort led by the team at the Linux Foundation Europe (LFE).

The aim of Task 1.3 has been to complement a strong quantitative baseline for measuring leverage effect with a more nuanced, mixed-methods approach for evaluating impact on projects, communities, and governance. The task looked at the stable of grassroots innovation funded by the NGI and other programmes and identified aspects which could be extrapolated

⁹ Nicholas Gates, "Highlights of the NGI Workshop", NGI Commons, 12 June 2024, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2024/06/12/highlights-of-the-ngi-workshop/>.

¹⁰ See: “DCPC Policy Labs.”, <https://dcpc.info/policy-labs/lab2025/>.

¹¹ Nicholas Gates, "NGI Commons Travelled to Liverpool for the DCPC2025 Workshop", NGI Commons, 4 June 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2025/06/04/ngi-commons-travelled-to-liverpool-for-the-dcpc-2025-workshop/>.

¹² This brief will be published concurrently with this report and thus is not directly linked here.

¹³ Specifically, the findings of the brief will be further elaborated through surveys in the second half of 2025 (by Month 24), which will then result in an updated report and continued ongoing stakeholder engagement, informing research management and recommendations across all work packages in the NGI Commons portfolio.

to understand their health. While the NGI is being transitioned to OIS, the goal of these activities nevertheless remains understanding funding, albeit with a slightly broader context, in order to understand how Digital Commons can be effectively targeted and supported through EC investment.

The setup and delivery of this task has one of the most consistent requests for input for NGI Commons from the DCTF and the broader NGI community. While the initial methodology for the work relied on structured questionnaires, the initial June workshop for the project (originated under Task 1.2) and a subsequent DCTF workshop underscored the limitations of a purely quantitative approach for capturing the diverse and context-specific realities of open source ecosystems. This understanding was built in parallel with some of the preliminary findings and results of Task 1.1, which mapped active communities of commoners and relevant commons.

As a result, the task shifted towards a mixed-methods design integrating qualitative interviews and testimonials to contextualise quantitative findings. This methodological pivot was resource-intensive, leading to the selection of six target projects (later reduced to five due to recruitment challenges): AboutCode,¹⁴ Decidim,¹⁵ F-Droid,¹⁶ Mastodon,¹⁷ and Mobile NixOS¹⁸ – a couple of which had previously received NGI funding. These projects were chosen to reflect different funding models, governance arrangements, and maturity levels, enabling a richer understanding of how NGI funding interacts with broader financial and organisational ecosystems. This shift reflected a substantial level of the DCTF and the NGI community, especially in light of the transition of the NGI, helping to incorporate community input towards a final output which will hopefully be more relevant and its findings more usable.

While the report authored by this task has not been released yet, the preliminary research has generated three key findings with significant implications for future funding policy. First, the study identified gaps in the publicly available NGI funding database,¹⁹ including unreported grants of up to €150,000, raising questions about the accuracy and transparency of existing records. Second, post-project mobility of key individuals poses a challenge for longitudinal analysis, as contributors often move between projects, making follow-up research difficult. Third, most projects conceptualise funding as part of a pooled resource base rather than discrete grant allocations. Especially among mature projects, NGI funding is combined with government grants, foundation support, and micro-donations to sustain maintenance and development activities. This finding highlights the need to understand funding as part of a complex ecosystem rather than as isolated interventions.

While still not final, the task achieved notable successes through extensive collaboration with organisations sharing similar research interests, such as the Sovereign Tech Agency²⁰ and the CHAOSS project.²¹ These partnerships have strengthened knowledge exchange and led to the development of a comprehensive “toolkit” methodology paper synthesising previous efforts to evaluate funding impact.²² Moreover, cooperation from interviewed projects has remained

¹⁴ See: "AboutCode", <https://aboutcode.org>.

¹⁵ See: "Decidim", <https://decidim.org/>.

¹⁶ See: "F-Droid", <https://f-droid.org/en/>.

¹⁷ See: "Mastodon", <https://joinmastodon.org/>.

¹⁸ See: "Mobile NixOS", <https://mobile.nixos.org/>.

¹⁹ Data sourced from: Next Generation Internet, "Discover NGI Innovations", accessed on 28 July 2025, <https://ngi.eu/discover-ngi-innovations/>.

²⁰ See: "Sovereign Tech Agency", <https://www.sovereign.tech/>.

²¹ See: "CHAOSS", <https://chaoss.community/>.

²² Cailean Osborne et. al, "A Toolkit for Measuring the Impacts of Public Funding on Open Source Software Development", arXiv, 2 November 2024, p. 6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2411.06027>.

strong, with many participants engaging enthusiastically in peer review and sharing data to support methodological refinement.

The primary challenge for Task 1.3 has been in balancing methodological rigour with the highly contextual nature of individual projects. Eventually, this will mean developing quantifiable measures that respect project diversity remains a core difficulty. The discontinuation of the NGI programme further complicated the scope, requiring methodological flexibility and ongoing adjustment of research objectives.

Moving forward, the results of this activity will support understanding of the impacts of funding on Digital Commons, in order to improve future resource allocation – particularly in light of the NGI to OIS transition. In particular, it will support the delivery of the Digital Commons priorities under Task 1.2 and the articulation of funding impact and funding needs carried out under Task 2.3. It will result in a first version of the report, Deliverable 1.3, which will be delivered in Month 24 of the project, followed by a final version of the report, Deliverable 1.4, which will be delivered in Month 36 of the project.

1.1.4 AN UPDATE ON THE DIGITAL COMMONS TASKFORCE (TASK 2.1)

The NGI Commons DCTF aims to help analyse the NGI projects portfolio and the effect of NGI funding on Digital Commons initiatives by convening a hand-picked group of prominent researchers, policy and technology experts, mostly with no ties to the NGI-funded projects.

As the main activity of Task 2.1, the DCTF and its representatives have been expected to provide strategic input on several aspects of the NGI Commons work, mainly: (1) the definition of the framework for measuring the leverage effect of NGI funding; (2) fostering collaborations with relevant emerging Digital Commons initiatives at national, European, and international levels; and (3) developing a plan to support further development of Digital Commons. The DCTF have occasionally collaborated with the Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) representatives, the NGI Unit representatives, and other prominent personalities that will be involved during the course of the project.

With reference to the creation of the DCTF, it was agreed that the first wave would consist of a cooperation of around 20 experts, with more waves to follow. The project expects to engage up to 70 people throughout the three-year duration of the project given some natural fluctuations, which may arise from the project's requirements and the general availability of experts. In addition to reviewing the work of the NGI Commons CSA, experts have also been approached to support article collaborations, identify speaking opportunities, and help establish liaisons with relevant initiatives.

Over time, the DCTF has become a central mechanism for integrating expert insights into NGI Commons' strategic outputs. At the moment, the DCTF is currently composed of 46 experts; there were 47, but one person left due to changing jobs. There is a goal to reach 70 people by the end of the project. A summary of the DCTF members can be found below in Figure 2.

TABLE 2: MEMBERS OF THE DIGITAL COMMONS TASK FORCE (DCTF)

	NAME	ORGANISATION
1	Angela Daly	University of Dundee
2	Enric Senabre	University of Barcelona + Goteo founder
3	Stefano Zacchiroli	Télécom Paris
4	Dirk-Willem van Gulik	Apache Software Foundation

5	Johan Linaker	RISE (Research Institute of Sweden)
6	Simon Phipps	Open Source Initiative
7	Matti Schneider	Open Terms Archive, OpenFisca
8	Emrys Schoemaker	Caribou Digital
9	Katja Mayer	University of Vienna
10	Claudia Garad	Wikimedia AT
11	Renata Avila	Open Knowledge Foundation
12	Katharina Meyer	Digital Infrastructure Insights Fund
13	Sophie Bloemen	Commons Network
14	Natalia Ćwik	CHANGED JOBS
16	Fiona Krankenburg	Sovereign Tech Fund
17	Clare Dillon	Open Ireland Network
18	Wouter Tebbens	PublicSpaces
19	Daniel Goldscheider	OpenWallet Foundation
20	Christopher Wilson	My Data Global
21	Liv Marte Nordhaug	Digital Public Goods Alliance
22	Frederike Kaltheuner	New Policy
23	Olivier Delteil	DINUM, French Government
24	Karin Lammers	Perspective 2 - FOSS Community Consultancy
25	Serkan Holat	Freelance OS Developer and Researcher
26	Pierre-Louis Rolle	Code for France
27	Fabien Gainier	Campus Cyber
28	Ricardo Nanni	Digital Commons Lab
29	Célya Gruson-Daniel	Inno3
30	Marco Berlinguer	Autonomous University of Barcelona
31	Vera Vidal	coopdescommuns.org
32	Ben Cerveny	Foundation for Public Code
33	Desirée Castillo-Gosker	Bureau Forum Standaardisatie

34	Bastien Guerry	Direction interministérielle du numérique (DINUM),
35	Sebastian Raible	APELL
36	Jens Finkehauser	Interpeer
37	Malvika Sharan	Open Life Science, Alan Turing Institute
38	Raphael Pouye	Freelance (Currently with ECDPM)
39	Diego Naranjo	Future institute
40	Francesco Siddi	Blender
41	Jacco Brouwer	Dutch Association of Municipalities
42	Maria Dalhange	Arbetsförmedlingen
43	Alicia Asin	Libelium CEO
44	Rasmus Frey	OS2
45	Laura Sophie Dornheim	Landeshauptstadt München
46	Stéfane Fermigier	CNLL
47	Denis 'Jaromil' Roio	Dyne.org/Forkbomb BV

The DCTF is designed as a voluntary expert body rather than a decision-making board. Regularly convening every second month, with seven meetings held so far (four in 2024 and three in 2025), it has maintained a stable level of participation in almost every meeting. To date, each DCTF meeting has been thematically focused, addressing topics such as funding mechanisms, digital sovereignty, public policies, and technological building blocks. The ability to directly influence emerging policy debates and engage with EC representatives seems to have been a key motivator for participation, highlighting the DCTF's unique role as a strategic advisory hub for connecting grassroots Digital Commons expertise with high-level EU processes.

The experience of running the DCTF has provided valuable lessons on managing voluntary expert engagement. Structured and inclusive meeting design and tool selection – featuring clear agendas, guiding questions, and focused moderation – has proven essential to ensure that discussions remain productive and that a diverse range of voices is heard, given the diverse expertise and background on hand in each meeting. While experts bring deep knowledge in their specific domains, synthesising this input into cohesive, actionable recommendations requires careful coordination and strategic moderation.

Moving forward, more surveys and complementary consultation tools are planned for the next phase to capture insights from participants who are less active in live discussions. Challenges will likely remain in sustaining consistent participation for open-ended, exploratory debates, as fluctuating availability and competing priorities can limit ongoing engagement. However, the DCTF's contribution to shaping NGI Commons deliverables has been significant, providing direct feedback on content, surfacing urgent themes such as the growing importance of digital sovereignty, and highlighting emerging initiatives like EuroStack as critical reference points for future policy recommendations.

1.1.5 HANDBOOK FOR COMMONERS (TASK 2.3)

A final major task of the NGI Commons project has been the development of a landscape of funding, which will result in a Handbook for Commoners, led by the team at OFE.

The aim of this Task 2.3 is to more broadly contextualise needs around access to funding and the ongoing understanding built under Task 1.3 into a more forward-looking series of recommendations to commoners looking to access funding. In this regard, the task aims to develop a Handbook for Commoners that helps Digital Commons actors navigate the European funding and support landscape by identifying their key needs, challenges, and available mechanisms. Based on extensive interviews, desk research, and cross-task inputs from commoners and funding vehicles, the handbook will provide practical guidance and a structured framework for accessing funding, governance, and technical support, while outlining provisions for a future European one-stop shop to serve the DC ecosystem.

The development of the Handbook for Commoners has been beset by changes in the funding landscape, particularly those related to the NGI to OIS transition, as well as the ongoing constitution of the European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC) for Digital Commons, whose founding documents were finally signed in July 2025 after over a year and half of setup activities.²³ This requires a re-contextualisation of the methodology for the task, which was agreed upon in Q1 of 2025 but put on hold in Q2 to prioritise delivery of other tasks.

In spite of these challenges, the handbook is being developed to provide practical guidance for commoners seeking funding and support to develop and scale Digital Commons initiatives in Europe. It will synthesise data from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys with commoners, funders, and potential one-stop-shop beneficiaries to map common needs, identify available funding and support mechanisms, and provide recommendations for navigating them. Beyond offering a concise PDF guide, the deliverable will also include technical specifications for an interactive 'one-stop shop' tool to help commoners access up-to-date information on funding opportunities, governance resources, and legal or technical support. This work is being carried out in close collaboration with Work Package 3 to ensure alignment with broader NGI Commons policy activities.

Once completed, the handbook will provide a structured typology of commoner personas, map funding and support modalities from EU and Member State sources to grassroots initiatives, and recommend best practices for applying for and sustaining funding. The final deliverable, due by Month 36,²⁴ will be designed for long-term relevance, serving both as a static reference document and as a foundation for an extensible online hub that could be hosted by beneficiaries such as OSOR, the Digital Commons EDIC, or the Interoperable Europe Portal.

While incomplete, the handbook's development has already generated valuable preliminary insights into the diversity of commoners' needs and the fragmented nature of existing funding pathways. Early discussions indicate that commoners face similar barriers to those identified in earlier NGI Commons research – including complex application procedures, limited awareness of available instruments, and challenges in aligning funding requirements with community-driven development models.

²³ Maximilian Henning, "Quartet of EU countries to cooperate on building sovereign digital infrastructure". Euractiv, 9 July 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/tech/news/quartet-of-eu-countries-to-cooperate-on-building-sovereign-digital-infrastructure/>.

²⁴ Note: This deliverable was marked as due at both M24 and M36 in the Description of the Action. This has been clarified as M36 and a formal amendment has been submitted to codify this. The rationale for prioritising M36 for delivery is given the need to make this the sum total of the insights generated via knowledge products across all of the CSA's work packages.

Moving forward, the results of this activity²⁵ will support understanding of the impacts of funding on Digital Commons, in order to improve future resource allocation – particularly in light of the NGI to OIS transition and the emergence of the Digital Commons EDIC. The plan will be closely related to Task 1.2, in order to prioritise understanding of future funding resources as it relates to the OIS and potential Building Blocks which might be prioritised under the auspices of the OIS.

1.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

NGI Commons has achieved a lot in just 18 months. The first period of NGI Commons has produced significant insights into the Digital Commons ecosystem, strengthening the project's role as a bridge between grassroots communities and European policymakers.

Task 1.1, led by CNRS, delivered the first structured mapping of active commoners and commons, providing an essential evidence base for identifying under-the-radar communities and understanding governance and sustainability challenges. Through a combination of literature review and 23 semi-structured interviews across 14 case studies, the report (Deliverable 1.1) profiled a diverse array of initiatives, from grassroots collectives to established foundations. It revealed the plurality of Digital Commons definitions, emphasising their evolution from (F)OSS movements towards collective governance models focused on sustainability, shared ownership, and community participation. The findings highlighted the need for flexible governance approaches, cautioning against over-standardisation, and underscored the critical but inconsistent role of public support, with calls for more sustainable funding mechanisms.

Task 1.2, led by OFE, created a typology for identifying Digital Commons-based Building Blocks, as well as priorities for how Digital Commons should contribute to European digital sovereignty goals, especially in light of the OIS. Through expert consultations, two major workshops (Amsterdam and Liverpool), and engagement with the DCTF, the task identified strategic Digital Commons priorities relevant to the OIS. These were consolidated in the policy brief “Building Blocks: A Digital and Internet Commons-Based Approach for Provisioning Europe’s Digital Infrastructure” (Deliverable 1.2). The brief advances a Digital Commons-based approach for provisioning sovereign infrastructure, framing Building Blocks not only as OSS, protocols, and hardware but also as governance models and community enablers. These outputs demonstrate Digital Commons’ growing relevance and influence in shaping the EU’s digital sovereignty agenda.

Task 1.3, led by the Linux Foundation Europe, complemented more policy-oriented findings by assessing NGI funding patterns and their impact on open source projects. Following early recognition of the limits of purely quantitative approaches, the task adopted a mixed-methods design, focusing on five case studies. Preliminary findings revealed gaps in publicly available NGI funding data (including unreported grants of up to €150,000), challenges in engaging key contributors after post-project mobility, and the tendency of mature projects to pool multiple funding sources rather than rely on discrete grants. These insights stress the need for funding strategies that consider the ecosystemic nature of open source sustainability. The task also developed a “toolkit” methodology for measuring funding impact, in collaboration with initiatives such as the Sovereign Tech Agency and CHAOSS, to inform future resource allocation under the OIS transition.

Finally, Task 2.3, also led by OFE, builds on these earlier activities to develop a Handbook for Commoners. This practical guide will eventually map funding and support mechanisms and provide commoners with actionable advice for sustaining and scaling Digital Commons

²⁵ Note: The study will not be published until December 2026, at the end of the NGI Commons CSA project.

initiatives, while laying the groundwork for an interactive European one-stop-shop. Although progress was temporarily delayed between March and July 2027 due to staffing and resource constraints, preliminary interviews have already highlighted key barriers such as complex application processes, limited awareness of funding opportunities, and misalignment between funder requirements and community-driven development. Activities are set to resume in late 2027, with completion planned by Month 36. The handbook will provide a structured typology of commoner personas, map funding pathways from EU, Member State, and grassroots sources, and propose best practices for applying for and managing funding, thereby feeding into OIS-related funding strategies and priorities identified under Task 1.2.

While these tasks do not include its policy-focused or community engagement work, they demonstrated how NGI Commons has, at its halfway point, successfully mobilised community expertise to help develop knowledge products that can support future policymaking related to Digital Commons in Europe. In so doing, it has generated new forms of evidence and provided structured input to work being done by policymakers, and established itself as a key actor in aligning Digital Commons practices with Europe's digital sovereignty ambitions.

1.3 NEXT STEPS

In the second half of the project, NGI Commons will focus on refining the findings of its first 18 months, validating them through expanded stakeholder engagement, and translating them into concrete policy and funding recommendations.

These activities will include further alignment of the Building Blocks framework with Member States, civil society, and technical communities through targeted surveys and follow-up workshops under Task 1.2, ensuring that the priorities identified for the Open Internet Stack (OIS) are representative of both community needs and EU strategic objectives. Similarly, Task 1.3 will finalise its mixed-methods analysis of NGI funding impact, producing the first version of its report (D1.3) by Month 24 and providing key insights into how funding mechanisms can better support Digital Commons sustainability and governance. Parallel to this, Task 2.3 will resume in late 2025 with an intensified programme of interviews, focus groups, and surveys to complete the Handbook for Commoners. This deliverable will consolidate lessons from across the portfolio into a practical guide and technical specifications for a future one-stop-shop, directly linking community needs to emerging funding opportunities under the OIS and the Digital Commons EDIC (amongst other considerations).

Together, these activities will ensure that NGI Commons' early influence – evidenced through its policy briefs and mapping work – translates into actionable recommendations and long-term tools to guide both policymakers and Digital Commons communities in building Europe's sovereign digital infrastructure.

2 AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF DIGITAL AND INTERNET COMMONS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The NGI Commons CSA puts community engagement at the heart of its work, embedding it as not just one activity among many but an approach shopping all of its work. The CSA seeks to make sure that voices from grassroots Digital Commons projects and communities actually reach European policymakers and funding decisions. OFE leads this work with Martel Innovate through Work Package 4. This section dives into this work, sharing what has been learned in the first 18 months and exploring where the consortium partners can work together moving forward.

2.1 TOOLS AND MODALITIES

NGI Commons uses many different approaches to bring stakeholders together, build trust, and share knowledge. This includes interactive online spaces like the Digital Commons Community Platform (DCCP), one-on-one conversations, detailed interviews, webinars, events, and collaborative articles. These efforts strengthen connections across the Digital Commons ecosystem while gathering evidence for other parts of our project. NGI Commons combines structured knowledge sharing with informal relationship-building that strives to create a strong network that connects grassroots groups, technical communities, and European policymakers. This positions NGI Commons in a unique way as a bridge for dialogue and collaboration in the Digital Commons space.

2.1.1 DIGITAL COMMONS COMMUNITY PLATFORM

The DCCP was launched as part of NGI Commons to create a dedicated online space for interaction, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among stakeholders in the Digital Commons ecosystem. Hosted on Matrix²⁶/Element,²⁷ the platform serves as both an engagement and advocacy tool. Rather than creating another one-way mailing list – the NGI Commons newsletter provides that function already – the DCCP directly connects community members, policymakers, and technical experts. It currently has 98 members and is growing month after month.

The DCCP aims to bridge conversations between Digital Commons initiatives and EU digital policy discussions. It supports organic community-building and strengthens advocacy around open source, interoperability, public digital infrastructure, and other areas important to European digital sovereignty. The platform includes channels for Policy, Projects, and Announcements, plus a Random channel for miscellaneous thoughts and contributions. Activities center on interactive knowledge sharing, policy and developer discussions, and regular updates from across the NGI Commons network. The DCCP has set up dedicated rooms for projects and policy talks, along with curated expert lists and quarterly updates on trends and policy developments.

Over time, NGI Commons hopes for the DCCP to help shape EU policy processes by connecting grassroots communities with policy actors and gathering input on key legislation and activities. The platform will also become a hub for finding collaboration opportunities and synergies among EU initiatives and industry players, supporting NGI Commons' broader goal of aligning grassroots Digital Commons work with European policy and funding strategies. In

²⁶ See: "Matrix", <https://matrix.org/>

²⁷ See: "Element", <https://element.io/>

the second half of the project, the consortium will continue promoting engagement at key events like the EU Open Source Policy Summit, FOSDEM, and NGI Policy Summit, while coordinating with DCTF calls and NGI Commons webinars.

2.1.2 ONE-TO-ONE ENGAGEMENT

One-to-one community engagement forms the foundation of Task 2.2, helping NGI Commons build meaningful relationships and find collaboration opportunities across the Digital Commons ecosystem. Through at least 50 targeted online and in-person meetings with key stakeholders – from EU institutions and specialised NGOs to public-private partnerships, universities, and innovative grassroots initiatives – this task tries to uncover synergies and gaps in existing investment and support activities. NGI Commons has developed a systematic process for tracking these interactions across project activities, ensuring that insights are captured and actively used to inform other key work, particularly under Tasks 1.3, 2.3, and 3.2. This approach strengthens our ability to connect underrepresented and underfunded initiatives with potential collaborators and funding opportunities, while feeding into broader policy and funding recommendations aimed at improving sustainability and cross-sector cooperation around Digital Commons.

2.1.3 INTERVIEWS

A recent interview with Thibault Martin of the Matrix.org Foundation²⁸ launched a new NGI Commons interview series exploring how leading Digital Commons projects are tackling the intertwined challenges of sustainability, governance, and policy engagement. Through detailed conversations with key players, the series has highlighted how different initiatives navigate funding constraints, build resilient communities, and shape Europe's digital sovereignty agenda. This series started with Matrix.org's work on secure, federated communication infrastructure, and upcoming pieces will feature projects like Decidim and Blender,²⁹ showcasing diverse approaches to maintaining and scaling open, community-driven digital commons and internet infrastructure. These interviews aim to share practical lessons and inspire stronger collaboration between Digital Commons communities and European policymakers.

2.1.4 WEBINARS AND EVENTS

NGI Commons' webinar series, starting with "Digital Commons Towards Digital Sovereignty in Europe" (January 2025),³⁰ provides a dynamic forum where policymakers, technologists, and community leaders explore the most relevant and impactful digital commons and internet infrastructure initiatives shaping Europe's path to digital autonomy. The second webinar, "Public Policies for Digital Commons" (March 2025), surveyed various public policies related to Digital Commons, highlighting the shift from promoting openness to addressing governance and collective management of digital infrastructures.³¹ These webinars, with at least six more planned, blend high-level policy insight with grassroots perspectives to show how Digital Commons can underpin trustworthy and sovereign digital infrastructure in Europe.

²⁸ Nicholas Gates, "Matrix.org and the Fight to Build Sustainable Digital Commons", NGI Commons, 7 May 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2025/05/07/matrix-org-and-the-fight-to-build-sustainable-digital-commons/>.

²⁹ See: "Blender", <https://www.blender.org/>.

³⁰ NGI Commons, "Digital Commons Towards Digital Sovereignty in Europe", accessed on 28 July 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/event/digital-commons-towards-digital-sovereignty-in-europe/>.

³¹ NGI Commons, "Public Policies for Digital Commons", accessed on 28 July 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/event/public-policies-for-digital-commons/>.

Alongside this webinar series, NGI Commons played a prominent role at flagship events like the NGI Forum 2025 (Brussels, June 2025).³² Over two days of rich debate on the NGI and the future Open Internet Stack, the event covered topics including digital sovereignty and digital commons and internet infrastructure as public infrastructure. With panels featuring representatives from Mastodon, IPFS, Nextcloud, and EC DG-CNECT, the Forum showed how digital commons and internet infrastructure is central to Europe's tech strategy. Looking ahead, the planned NGI Policy Summit (November 2025, Brussels) will build on these foundations by focusing on investment frameworks and strategic alignment of EU funding for digital commons and internet infrastructure, ensuring continuity and coherence across policy, community, and funding landscapes.

2.1.5 ARTICLE COLLABORATIONS

NGI Commons has worked closely with DCTF members to co-author articles that highlight key insights and emerging trends from our research and community engagement. These collaborations, published on the NGI Commons website, serve as both advocacy tools and a way to share evidence-based perspectives with policymakers, funders, and practitioners. By drawing on the expertise and diverse viewpoints of DCTF participants, these publications strengthen the credibility of NGI Commons outputs while reinforcing our role as a bridge between grassroots communities and European policy discussions.

Examples include articles on Digital Commons and European DPI³³ and Digital Commons and DPGs.³⁴ As opposed to the topical articles from the first year on topics like maintenance,³⁵ OSPOs,³⁶ and funding,³⁷ these articles aim to amplify new understanding of important topics and how they intersect with the digital commons and internet infrastructure paradigm. The consortium is planning more collaborative pieces in the second half of the project to share findings from our engagement with different communities of practice across the broader digital commons and internet infrastructure ecosystem.

2.2 KEY FINDINGS

The first 18 months of NGI Commons' community engagement activities have shown the critical role of structured, multi-modal interaction in bridging grassroots Digital Commons initiatives with European policy and funding processes. Many successful interactions have been facilitated by the DCTF and DCCP, and the project has opened lasting communication

³² Next Generation Internet, "Next Generation Internet Forum 2025", accessed on 28 July 2025, <https://ngi.eu/ngi-forum25/>.

³³ Nicholas Gates and Emrys Schoemaker, "Can Digital Commons Offer a Way Forward for the European DPI Agenda", NGI Commons, 20 December 2024, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2024/12/20/can-digital-commons-offer-a-way-forward-for-a-european-dpi-agenda/>.

³⁴ Nicholas Gates and Liv Marte Nordhaug, "Digital Commons and Digital Public Goods: Finding Common Ground for Policymakers", NGI Commons, 31 January 2025, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2025/01/31/digital-commons-and-digital-public-goods-finding-common-ground-for-policymakers/>.

³⁵ Nicholas Gates and Jan Krewer, "Responding to XZ utils: Can a Digital Commons Approach Reinforce OSS Security?", NGI Commons, 4 April 2024, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2024/04/24/responding-to-xz-utils-can-a-digital-commons-approach-reinforce-oss-security/>.

³⁶ Nicholas Gates, "OSPOs and Digital Commons", NGI Commons, 22 July 2024, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2024/07/22/ospos-and-digital-commons/>.

³⁷ Cailean Osborne, "Measuring the Impacts of Public Funding on Open Source Software Development", NGI Commons, 12 November 2024, <https://commons.ngi.eu/2024/11/12/measuring-the-impacts-of-public-funding-on-open-source-software-development/>.

channels with institutions including the Digital Public Goods Alliance,³⁸ Framasoft,³⁹ EuroStack,⁴⁰ Software Heritage,⁴¹ the Open Knowledge Foundation,⁴² APELL,⁴³ the Alan Turing Institute,⁴⁴ Mastodon, XWiki,⁴⁵ MyData Global,⁴⁶ Co-Develop,⁴⁷ the United Nations,⁴⁸ Matrix, Commons Network,⁴⁹ Blender, PublicSpaces,⁵⁰ GFOSS,⁵¹ GIZ,⁵² Forgefed,⁵³ Goteo,⁵⁴ the Digital Commons Policy Council, ZUM,⁵⁵ Decidim, Caribou Global,⁵⁶ Coopcycle,⁵⁷ Numériques en communs,⁵⁸ Mozilla,⁵⁹ the Foundation for Public Code,⁶⁰ Gaia-X,⁶¹ Europeana,⁶² and many others.

There have been many highlights during this time. Through interviews, webinars, and events, NGI Commons has successfully amplified the voices of Digital Commons actors, showcasing diverse approaches to governance, sustainability, and community building. The webinar series and participation in flagship events like the NGI Forum 2025 have highlighted the increasing centrality of Digital Commons to Europe's digital sovereignty agenda, while the upcoming NGI Policy Summit will focus on aligning investment frameworks with these priorities. Article collaborations with DCTF members have strengthened NGI Commons' role as a thought leader, translating research insights into accessible policy-oriented narratives and reinforcing our position as a bridge between grassroots communities and EU-level decision-making. Continued engagement and presentations at community events have also created opportunities for commoners and the people that support them to interact with NGI Commons and share their knowledge with the wider Digital Commons and open technology ecosystems.

³⁸ See: "Digital Public Goods Alliance", <https://www.digitalpublicgoods.net/>.

³⁹ See: "Framasoft", <https://framasoftware.org/en/>.

⁴⁰ See: "EuroStack", <https://eurostack.eu/>.

⁴¹ See: "Software Heritage", <https://www.softwareheritage.org/>.

⁴² See: "Open Knowledge Foundation", <https://okfn.org/en/>.

⁴³ See: "APELL", <https://apell.info/>.

⁴⁴ See: "Alan Turing Institute", <https://www.turing.ac.uk/>.

⁴⁵ See: "XWiki", <https://www.xwiki.org/>.

⁴⁶ See: "MyData Global", <https://mydata.org/>.

⁴⁷ See: "Co-Develop Fund", <https://www.codevelop.fund/>.

⁴⁸ See: "United Nations", <https://www.un.org/en/>.

⁴⁹ See: "Commons Network", <https://www.commonsnetwork.org/>.

⁵⁰ See: "PublicSpaces", <https://english.publicspaces.net/>.

⁵¹ See: "GFOSS", <https://gfoss.eu/>.

⁵² See: "GIZ", <https://www.giz.de/de/html/index.html>.

⁵³ See: "ForgeFed", <https://forgefed.org/>.

⁵⁴ See: "Goteo", <https://en.goteo.org/>.

⁵⁵ See: "Zentrale für Unterrichtsmedien im Internet e.V.", <https://www.zum.de/>.

⁵⁶ See: "Caribou Global", <https://caribou.global/>.

⁵⁷ See: "CoopCycle", <https://coopcycle.org/>.

⁵⁸ See: "Numériques en communs", <https://numerique-en-communs.fr/>.

⁵⁹ See: "Mozilla", <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/>.

⁶⁰ See: "Foundation for Public Code", <https://publiccode.net/>.

⁶¹ See: "Gaia-X", <https://gaia-x.eu/>.

⁶² See: "Europeana", <https://www.europeana.eu/en>.

These efforts have been imperfect and at some points moved slowly, but at other times quite quickly, demonstrating the complexity of sustained community engagement. As a result, several challenges have emerged in the first period of NGI Commons' community engagement activities.

One of the most persistent has been ensuring sustained and active participation across diverse stakeholder groups, particularly policymakers who are not otherwise interested in Digital Commons or open technologies. While the DCCP and webinars have attracted growing interest, maintaining consistent engagement – particularly from commoners, thinkers and writers, and underfunded grassroots initiatives – remains a challenge. Similarly, balancing the different expectations and communication styles of technical communities, civil society actors, and EU policymakers has required careful moderation and targeted messaging to keep discussions productive and relevant, as Digital Commons can be both filled with jargon or loaded with academic meaning and ideas, depending on whom you talk to.

Another challenge lies in capturing and systematising the wealth of informal knowledge generated through one-to-one engagements and community interactions. Despite developing a tracking process, translating this input into actionable recommendations for policy and funding alignment is resource-intensive and often done through less structured data aggregation processes, rather than systematic analysis. This makes it hard to attribute a specific finding or insight to a given individual or organization, though this will hopefully change with the introduction of more structured opportunities for feedback, such as surveys. Additionally, bridging gaps between underrepresented initiatives and formal EU policy processes continues to be difficult, as many smaller actors lack the capacity to engage with complex funding instruments or regulatory discussions, making it hard to find them and bring them into these discussions.

The broader transition from NGI to OIS and the evolving funding landscape introduces uncertainty, requiring constant methodological flexibility to ensure that engagement activities remain relevant to shifting strategic priorities. While the EC has done its best to update the community on the status of the NGI and its future ambitions, the rollout of knowledge and awareness related to this has been constrained by negotiations between the EC and Member States, as well as negotiations related to EC DG-CNECT's work programme and MFF budget negotiations. As a result, the rollout of the OIS has been slow, creating confusion and uncertainty in the community about what comes next and what the role of Digital Commons is in that future.

Moving forward, it is hoped that as the NGI to OIS transition continues, NGI Commons will position itself as a strategic hub for identifying collaboration mechanisms and shaping EU policy debates on Digital Commons, regardless of what the NGI itself is called. One-to-one engagement has proven essential for uncovering synergies and gaps in the funding and support ecosystem, particularly for underrepresented and underfunded initiatives. That said, a more systematic process for not only tracking interactions but directly positioning those inputs towards specific activities and outputs under the tasks of NGI Commons will be vital, in order to ensure that insights directly inform other key tasks such as T1.3, T2.3, and T3.2. The process by which this will be done will be elaborated in future weeks, with an eye towards the longer-term sustainability of NGI Commons and its outputs on digital policymaking and investment in Europe.

2.3 FUTURE SYNERGIES AND COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

Building on the strong foundation of relationships developed over the first 18 months, NGI Commons will deepen its role as a strategic hub for dialogue and collaboration between

grassroots Digital Commons communities and European policymakers. The DCCP, webinars, and DCTF-supported articles have proven effective in amplifying community voices, and will further leverage these approaches to encourage more structured and sustained engagement. One priority will be to double down on the successful one-to-one engagement model, which has been critical for uncovering synergies and gaps in funding and support, especially for underrepresented and underfunded initiatives. This will include expanding outreach to actors identified through early engagement, such as the Digital Public Goods Alliance and EuroStack, while ensuring that these interactions are systematically tracked and fed into policy outputs and strategic recommendations under T1.3, T2.3, and T3.2.

Addressing the challenges of inconsistent participation and knowledge integration will be central to the next phase of work. A key focus will be introducing more structured feedback mechanisms – including surveys and targeted workshops – to translate informal insights into actionable findings. This will also allow attribution of specific ideas or recommendations to individual contributors where appropriate. The project will also work to better tailor messaging and communication styles to different stakeholder groups, bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps that often separate technical communities, grassroots activists, and EU policymakers. As the NGI transitions to the OIS, NGI Commons will actively position itself as a trusted intermediary, helping clarify the role of Digital Commons within this evolving policy landscape and aligning grassroots priorities with EU funding and investment frameworks. By reinforcing existing partnerships, strengthening cross-sector collaboration, and ensuring community members remain informed and engaged in shaping the future of open technology in Europe, NGI Commons can turn its early successes into long-term impact.

3 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first half of the NGI Commons CSA project has generated several key findings relevant to both the Digital Commons ecosystem and EU digital sovereignty policy. These findings have helped shape our understanding of both Digital Commons itself, and the ways in which project structures must adapt to help enable its continued success.

3.1 KEY FINDINGS FOR M1-M18

Task 1.1 revealed the diversity and fluidity of Digital Commons definitions, showing that they have evolved from a narrow focus on OSS to encompassing governance models, community stewardship, and sustainability mechanisms. Interviews highlighted tensions between openness and value extraction by commercial platforms, as well as the crucial but inconsistent role of public sector support. Findings caution against over-standardization, instead recommending context-sensitive approaches that respect the unique histories, governance, and social dynamics of individual commons initiatives.

Task 1.2 translated these findings into concrete priorities through two high-profile workshops (Amsterdam and Liverpool) and expert consultations. The resulting brief, "Building Blocks: A Digital and Internet Commons-Based Approach for Provisioning Europe's Digital Infrastructure," outlines key categories of DC/IC-based Building Blocks for consideration and priorities for incorporating them into the OIS and broader digital sovereignty-focused work of the EC. The brief makes the case that the shift from NGI to OIS reflects a maturation of the EU's digital sovereignty agenda, moving from grassroots innovation to the strategic development of open, interoperable infrastructure. Crucially, the findings warn that this ambition will fail without bringing the community along for the journey and continued investment in governance and community capacity alongside technical foundations. This echoes concerns raised in earlier stakeholder engagement activities undertaken by the consortium.

Task 1.3 is still ongoing, but gaining momentum. The adoption of a mixed-methods approach—shifting from purely quantitative questionnaires to case-study-based qualitative interviews—has improved contextual understanding and methodological robustness, allowing the data collection effort to proceed with new speed. So far, the study activities under this task have revealed systemic gaps in publicly available NGI funding records, including underreported grants of up to €150,000, and highlighted that most mature projects rely on pooled resource bases that combine public, philanthropic, and microdonation funding. Future mechanisms could better reflect the ecosystemic and interdependent nature of open source maintenance. These are also factors which must underpin the future logic of the OIS and the EC's broader posture towards supporting the open source ecosystem more broadly.

Task 2.1 demonstrated the value of the DCTF as a voluntary expert body. Motivated by direct influence on policy and strategic outcomes, experts have continued to provide input on things like evaluation criteria, funding impact, and Digital Commons governance models throughout the first 18 months of the project. Structured agendas, clear terms of reference, and focused moderation emerged as essential for productive discussions, while maintaining sustained engagement proved more difficult for open-ended, less structured topics. Feedback underlined that experts should be regarded not as decision-makers but as strategic advisors contributing voluntarily to policy-relevant recommendations.

Task 2.2 and the consortium's broader community engagement activities underscored the importance of structured, multi-modal interaction for bridging grassroots Digital Commons initiatives with European policy and funding processes. These activities successfully opened lasting communication channels with a wide range of stakeholders, amplifying diverse voices

and surfacing governance and sustainability challenges often overlooked in EU-level policy debates. However, participation has been uneven, and translating informal insights into actionable recommendations remains resource-intensive, underlining the need for more systematic and structured feedback mechanisms and tracking of 'inputs-to-action' in the second phase of the project.

Work on the Handbook for Commoners under Task 2.3 has suggested early evidence of the persistent barriers faced by Digital Commons actors in navigating funding and support mechanisms. That said, only a preliminary mapping has been done, as the activity has largely been on hold due to resource constraints and uncertainty related to the aims of the task. With renewed focus on the OIS and the Digital Commons EDIC, the hope is that the handbook will be able to develop a structured typology of "commoner personas," mapping funding pathways, and proposing actionable recommendations for both applicants and funders. Its eventual technical specifications for a "one-stop-shop" tool will be critical to ensuring that these insights translate into long-term, practical support for the Digital Commons ecosystem via future EC policymaking and investment.

3.2 TASK-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following task-specific recommendations build on the first 18 months of NGI Commons, translating early findings into actionable guidance for the second half of the project. They focus on refining methodologies, expanding stakeholder engagement, and ensuring stronger alignment with the emerging OIS and Digital Commons EDIC. Each task requires deeper integration of evidence into policy outputs, more structured and inclusive consultation processes, and clearer pathways for linking grassroots insights to European funding and governance priorities.

3.2.1 DIGITAL AND INTERNET COMMONS MAPPING (T1.1)

Any future updates to the mapping should deepen its analysis of governance models and public sector involvement, which will later be elaborated upon through Task 1.3. Interviewees highlighted that public entities play a transformative but inconsistent role, suggesting that future research should track public funding patterns, procurement practices, and governance support mechanisms. Additionally, the plural and contested nature of openness warrants more detailed comparative work, especially in relation to value reciprocity models and hybrid organisational forms (cooperatives, associations, foundations). The updated Deliverable 1.5 could integrate these dimensions and explicitly link findings to OIS-relevant Building Blocks or aspects of the Strategic Agenda being developed by WP3, which should in turn inform D3.3 specifically.

3.2.2 CONSULTATION OF EXPERTS TO IDENTIFY DIGITAL AND INTERNET COMMONS PRIORITIES (T1.2)

The second phase of consultations should be more structured and focused. While this is already planned with the surveys, it should also be done via other channels of engagement as well. Given the identified risk of underrepresentation, it's important that introducing more structured feedback makes the process inclusive, helping capture more diverse perspectives. Additionally, priorities should be tested against concrete implementation pathways, assessing their feasibility within existing EC funding instruments and the emerging EDIC structure, in coordination with the work being done under Task 1.3.

3.2.3 MEASURING THE LEVERAGE EFFECT OF NGI FUNDING (T1.3)

The mixed-methods approach should be maintained but further refined by incorporating longitudinal tracking mechanisms to capture post-project mobility of contributors. The toolkit

methodology should be tested on additional projects to improve its usability for policymakers. Moreover, the EC should consider piloting streamlined reporting requirements for future funding programmes, ensuring better data transparency while minimising administrative burdens on project maintainers. Ensuring continued integration of inputs into D2.3 will be vital for the success of that output, requiring continued and ongoing collaboration between the Task Leaders for Task 1.3 and Task 2.3 (Linux Foundation Europe and OpenForum Europe respectively).

3.2.4 DIGITAL COMMONS TASK FORCE (DCTF) (T2.1)

The DCTF should evolve towards a hybrid model that combines live discussions with structured surveys and written consultations, ensuring broader participation and capturing input from those with limited availability or who are less vocal in group settings. Clear terms of reference, pre-defined agendas, and targeted guiding questions will remain essential to steer discussions productively, avoid dominance by a few voices, and make efficient use of expert time. Thematic sub-groups could focus on high-priority areas, such as governance models for Building Blocks or maintenance funding strategies, enabling more focused contributions. Crucially, the DCTF's status as a voluntary advisory body – not a decision-making board – should be clearly communicated, with stronger links between expert input and visible policy outputs to reinforce participants' sense of impact. Maintaining this sense of meaningful contribution is vital, as the strongest motivator for participation has been the opportunity to influence real-world policy and engage directly with EC representatives on strategic issues like digital sovereignty and funding mechanisms.

3.2.5 ACTIVE LIAISONS AND SYNERGIES WITH RELEVANT INITIATIVES (T2.2)

The second half of the project should focus on systematising how insights from bilateral engagements and community interactions are captured and translated into actionable recommendations. A system for tracking the influence of specific interactions, and not just logging them, should be developed to track influence on specific activities with more granularity. The consortium should also build on successful early relationships with initiatives such as the Digital Public Goods Alliance, EuroStack, and others by establishing ongoing collaboration frameworks (e.g., shared workshops or co-authored briefs). Efforts should be made to tailor communication styles to different stakeholder groups, bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps between technical communities, grassroots activists, and EU policymakers, ensuring that these relationships are not just ad-hoc exchanges but strategic, long-term partnerships.

3.2.6 HANDBOOK FOR COMMONERS (T2.3)

The development of the Handbook for Commoners should build on the early insights gathered during the first 18 months, with renewed focus on addressing the specific funding and governance challenges faced by grassroots Digital Commons initiatives. The second phase should prioritise completing interviews, focus groups, and the planned survey to validate initial findings and ensure that recommendations are grounded in a broad evidence base. The final deliverable should explicitly map different "commoner personas" to funding pathways, outlining practical guidance tailored to small, distributed communities as well as more formalised foundations or cooperatives. Given the identified barriers – such as complex application procedures and misalignment between funder requirements and community-driven development models – the handbook should also include actionable recommendations for funders, particularly in relation to maintenance and governance support. The technical specifications for the proposed "one-stop-shop" should be developed with sustainability in mind, positioning it for potential integration with existing initiatives like the RIA for the Open Internet Stack and the Digital Commons EDIC.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS IN PROPOSED MODEL OF WORK

The following changes are recommended to the proposed model of collaboration in the NGI Commons CSA consortium, particularly with respect to the need to maximise the impact of its deliverables in light of ongoing changes in the NGI and uncertainty related to the policy positioning of Digital Commons in the context of the EU's broader digital policy ambitions.

3.3.1 Recommendation #1: Continue strengthening methodological integration and cross-task collaboration

Tasks have already generated synergies, many of which are identified for instance, mapping insights from T1.1 informed the prioritisation framework under T1.2, while T1.3's funding research will shape the Handbook for Commoners (T2.3). This is not to mention the myriad contributions of these activities to WP3, which has been out of scope of this deliverable. That said, moving forward these linkages should now be made more explicit, with cross-task working groups or targeted workshops ensuring that evidence is synthesised into coherent policy outputs. The DCTF should play a more active role in connecting these findings, potentially through thematic sub-groups or surveys focused on specific Building Blocks or funding issues.

3.3.2 Recommendation #2: Formalise feedback loops and community participation

Community engagement has been a strength, but informal knowledge capture remains resource-intensive and inconsistent. Structured surveys, targeted follow-up workshops, and clearer attribution mechanisms will help translate grassroots and expert input into actionable policy recommendations in ways that are more tangible and traceable. This will also increase transparency and strengthen trust with underrepresented actors, who have expressed frustration with the opacity of EU policy processes.

3.3.3 Recommendation #3: Work with the EC to focus the NGI to OIS transition, with clearer communication and strategic positioning to the community

The slow rollout of OIS has created uncertainty among stakeholders in the NGI and broader Digital Commons ecosystem, with the continued use of NGI branding remaining confusing. NGI Commons should explicitly position itself as a strategic intermediary, clarifying how Digital Commons priorities inform the OIS agenda and aligning outputs with ongoing discussions about funding under the Digital Commons EDIC. This will require closer coordination with DG-CNECT as a matter of priority, as well as targeted messaging to differentiate NGI Commons from other initiatives such as EuroStack.

4 CONCLUSION

Through various activities such as mapping, expert consultations, research, and targeted community engagement, the NGI Commons CSA has provided the EC and its partners with a strong preliminary evidence base to better understand the governance, sustainability, and funding dynamics of Digital Commons ecosystems.

While the Digital Commons ecosystem has changed a lot since when the project started, NGI Commons continues to offer a place to help it adapt to future policy considerations, such as the NGI to OIS transition. That transition from the NGI to OIS represents more than a rebranding: it signals a shift from grassroots experimentation to the strategic development of shared, sovereign digital infrastructure – which must remain rooted in commoners and commons. By situating Digital Commons as both technical artefacts and governance-driven community enablers, NGI Commons hopes to continue framing them as essential Building Blocks for sovereign, open, and participatory sovereign digital infrastructure in Europe, while also promoting an inclusive, participatory, and non-extractive development process for the scale of open solutions as sovereign digital infrastructure in the EU.

At the same time, the evaluation highlights persistent structural challenges that must be addressed to ensure the long-term success of Digital Commons within the OIS framework. The research underscores the fragmented and context-dependent nature of Digital Commons governance, the inconsistent role of public sector support, and the ongoing difficulty of aligning community-driven development models with existing European funding instruments. Findings from Task 1.3 and early work on the Handbook for Commoners point to the need for more flexible and ecosystem-oriented funding mechanisms, capable of supporting long-term maintenance, governance capacity, and cross-community collaboration. These lessons are particularly relevant as the EC develops new funding instruments and considers long-term governance structures, such as the Digital Commons EDIC and a dedicated instrument for allocating OIS funds.

The next phase of NGI Commons will be crucial in transforming these early insights into actionable policy and investment recommendations. Building on its role as a trusted intermediary, the project will deepen engagement with Member States, civil society, and technical communities to validate and refine its findings, ensuring that community priorities are effectively translated into the emerging OIS agenda. This will require greater methodological integration across tasks, more structured feedback loops, and targeted communication to bridge the cultural and operational gaps between grassroots communities and EU institutions. Strengthening these mechanisms will also help ensure that underrepresented initiatives – often the true innovators in Digital Commons ecosystems – are not left behind in Europe's push for digital sovereignty.

The success of NGI Commons as a CSA will depend on its ability to sustain and institutionalise its bridging role beyond the immediate lifespan of the project. By linking community expertise with policy processes, systematising informal knowledge capture, and positioning Digital Commons as integral to Europe's sovereign digital infrastructure, NGI Commons has laid a solid foundation for long-term impact, but can also do more to position itself for the long-term relevance and sustainability of its contributions. The challenge now is to maintain momentum, build durable partnerships, and ensure that Europe's digital sovereignty ambitions are underpinned not only by open technologies, but by inclusive, open, participatory, and well-governed communities.