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The EBM Toolbox: Funding for Tool Development

Dozens of innovative tools have been created to help integrate scientific research and societal values into management in exciting ways, but many of these tools fail. One reason is that tool developers are unable to find consistent, long-term funding for their work.

A recent article in the journal *BioScience* (Curtice et al., "Why Ecosystem-Based Management May Fail without Changes to Tool Development and Financing", www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/bio.2012.62.5.13) highlights these funding problems and offers recommendations for addressing them. Among the most important recommendations is to find multiple revenue streams to sustain a tool. Potential revenue streams include:

- Venture capital
- Grants from government agencies or philanthropic organizations
- Internal government funding through an influential tool champion within a government agency
- Charging a fee for services related to the tool such as training courses, access to technical support, and tool customization
- Charging a fee for use of the tool
- Donations from users ("shareware") and corporate sponsorship
- Interest-generating endowments, and
- "Skunkworks", the most common source of funding for EBM tool development, in which funding for scientific research or conservation or management work is used to develop a software product even though no money was specifically allocated for it.

The authors urge developers to move away from relying solely on skunkworks projects and to consider scaled fee-for-license and fee-for-service models that allow users with limited funding to adopt them while still bringing in revenue. These revenues will ultimately lead to better, more user-friendly tools that will justify their cost.

Sarah Carr is coordinator for the EBM Tools Network. Learn more about EBM tools and the EBM Tools Network at www.ebmtools.org.

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