

Stage 2 evaluation report

October 2012 – December 2015

We surpassed the target in half of our 10 objectives over 2012-15. We achieved over 50% of the target for all but one of the remaining five objectives. We were particularly successful in the number of publications we produced (144% of target) and the percentage of our income that came from sources other than trusts and foundations (150% of target). Overall, we produced some truly groundbreaking intelligence work during 2012-15 and made several significant interventions in key peace and security debates.

Our targets were very ambitious for a young organisation with a small budget. During 2012-15, there was an overall mismatch between our demanding objectives and the resources we had available to meet those targets. In future, we must lower our ambitions or raise our income; we choose the later path, and have implemented a fundraising plan in order to ensure we have the resources necessary to achieve the groundbreaking work we have planned for the next three years.

“Open Briefing has established itself as singularly well-informed source of information on a wide range of international security issues. It has done so with a tiny budget compared with just about every NGO. Its entry on to the scene really is a breath of fresh air.”
Paul Rogers, professor of peace studies, University of Bradford

Table 1. Summary of progress achieved against each stage 2 objective during 2012-15.

Objective	Status	% of target
Respond to 100 intelligence requirements from civil society organisations	X	30%
Make six significant interventions in key peace and security debates	X	50%
Attain 3,000 subscribers in total	Surpassed	111%
Attract 4,000 unique visitors a month to the Open Briefing website	X	47%
Receive 12 media mentions	Surpassed	117%
Achieve an average online influence score of 60/100	Surpassed	106%
Publish 90 Open Briefing publications	Surpassed	144%
Expand the team to 35 members in total	X	71%
Raise £190,000	X	60%
Generate 8% of income from sources other than trusts and foundations	Surpassed	150%



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1. Respond to **100** intelligence requirements from civil society organisations

Summary: Open Briefing responded to **30** intelligence requests from civil society organisations during the reporting period (30% of target). This included requests from Crisis Action, the Remote Control project and Oak Foundation. Issues we were asked to provide intelligence on included reducing the supply of weapons to Boko Haram, assessing the risk to Western NGO personnel operating in Russia, and limiting the Syrian government's ability to use improvised 'barrel bombs' in civilian areas.

Evaluation: With hindsight, the target of responding to 100 intelligence requests was far too ambitious, as it would have required us to respond to nearly three a month over the reporting period, which is entirely unrealistic given the time and resources needed to respond to each request to the high standard clients have come to expect from us. In the end, we responded to nearly one a month, which is excellent given our all-volunteer team and all the other work we have completed in the same time period.

“Open Briefing has proved hugely useful to Crisis Action and our partners time and again. Their analysis helps us focus our energies on where we can have the greatest impact for the protection of civilians in conflict. The value of that contribution cannot be over-estimated.” **Nick Martlew, UK director, Crisis Action**

2. Make **six** significant interventions in key peace and security debates

Summary: Open Briefing made **three** significant interventions in key peace and security debates during the reporting period (50% of target). These interventions were: the probability of Israeli airstrikes against Iran in the six months following the 2012 US presidential election; the armed drones in use or in development by a range of non-Western countries; and developments in special forces, mercenaries, armed drones, autonomous weapons, mass surveillance and cyber conflict (known collectively as remote-control warfare).

Evaluation: Open Briefing operates largely behind-the-scenes and is not primarily an advocacy or campaigning organisation. We are also a small organisation with limited resources. Despite this, we were able to make several significant interventions in key peace and security debate. Our combined work on remote-control warfare has been particularly significant.

3. Attain **3,000** subscribers in total

Summary: Open Briefing had a total of **3,318** subscribers to its bulletin, social networks, podcast and other outputs at the end of this reporting period (111% of target). Our email bulletin had the most subscribers (1,416), followed by Facebook (713).

Evaluation: As a relatively young organisation with a very limited budget for online promotion, it is excellent that we managed to surpass our target for subscribers.

4. Attract **4,000** unique visitors a month to the Open Briefing website

Summary: The mean number of unique monthly visitors to our website was **1,792** (45% of target). The highest number was 2,989 in October 2012 and the lowest was 1,292 in August 2014.

Evaluation: We have consistently had 1,500-2,000 unique visitors a month to our website over this reporting period. Although short of our ambitious target, these are still significant numbers for a relatively young organisation. However, we are assessing whether a redesign of our website would present our material in a more accessible way and therefore increase visitor numbers. Our budget for the next three years also includes increased funds for online promotion (Google AdWords, promoted posts on Facebook, etc.), which will help increase the numbers of visitors to our website and therefore increase the exposure our work receives.

Open Briefing is rated ★★★★★ on Facebook and Google Play.

72% of people rate Open Briefing good or excellent overall.

Survey of visitors to the Open Briefing website between August and October 2012.

5. Receive **12** media mentions

Summary: Open Briefing's work received **14** media mentions during this reporting period (117% of target). This included coverage by BBC Radio Scotland, *Deutsche Welle*, openDemocracy, Antiwar Radio and Defence Report among others.

Evaluation: Despite being a behind-the-scenes organisation, we surpassed our target for media mentions. Over the next three years, we intend to work hard to receive more coverage in the mainstream press.

“Open Briefing provides clear analysis and intelligence that can add real value to the work of civil society networks. Their political analysis has been particularly useful.”
Mariam Kemple, head of humanitarian campaigning, Oxfam

6. Achieve an average online influence score of **60/100**

Summary: Open Briefing uses a basket of online metrics to measure social media influence and relative website importance. Using these, our online influence score at the end of this reporting period was **63.5/100** (106% of target).

Evaluation: Despite not achieving our target for website visitors, we surpassed our target for online influence, which – together with our high numbers of subscribers – suggests people may be accessing and interacting with our material in others ways than just through our website. The social influence monitoring company Klout currently ranks Open Briefing in the top 1% of people discussing foreign policy, Iraq and terrorism; top 2% of people discussing the military and Afghanistan; and the top 3% of people discussing cyber security, diplomacy, national security and nuclear weapons. Klout also lists us as an 'expert' in many of these fields, including foreign policy, the military and terrorism.

7. Publish 90 Open Briefing publications

Summary: Open Briefing published **130** publications in total during stage 2 (144% of target). This included, among others, monthly briefings on developments in remote-control warfare, the human security consequences of transnational organised crime, international political and security risk, and UK actions against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; briefing papers on corruption within the pharmaceutical supply chain to the developing world, forecasting conflict in Africa, and Russia's airborne forces (as deployed in Crimea and eastern Ukraine); and articles on Iranian politics, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and US drone strikes in Pakistan.

Evaluation: Open Briefing now has a track record of producing innovative publications that are of significant use to civil society organisations and the general public. We are producing an average of three briefings a month – an incredible rate given our tiny budget and volunteer team. The fact that we have project funding for two of our monthly briefings – on remote-control warfare and UK actions in Iraq and Syria – and have had funding for many of our individual publications shows just how valued they are.

“Open Briefing provided an invaluable service to us, conducting high-quality research in an extremely tight timeframe and with a limited budget. The unique and wide-ranging pool of expertise available ensured that our very specific requests were met with the utmost precision.” **Caroline Donnellan, manager, Remote Control project**

8. Expand the team to 35 members in total

Summary: At the end of this reporting period there were **25** members of the Open Briefing team, including staff, consultants, volunteers and advisers (71% of target).

Evaluation: Our team is unique in two ways: it includes intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals and nearly all of them are volunteers. Many of our volunteers have been with us since the very beginning. The limits on expanding the team relate to the amount of time it takes to interview and integrate new team members, rather than to difficulties attracting suitable candidates. As the team expands, managing it will become a full-time role in itself.

9. Raise £190,000

Summary: We raised **£114,288** during this reporting period (60% of target). This included core grants from the Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation, Network for Social Change, Marmot Charitable Trust, Oak Foundation and Philamonic Trust and project grants from the Remote Control project and the Network for Social Change. The total value of grants received was £100,595, with the balance made up of consultancy fees (£12,378) and individual donations (£1,315).

Evaluation: As a truly innovative organisation, it has been difficult for us to attract funding from the larger foundations; however, we were successful in attracting and retaining a small group of dedicated funders that saw the value of our work and generously supported it with multiple core grants over this reporting period. This core support and occasional project funding allowed us to carry out groundbreaking work over this reporting period, which will stand us in good stead with the larger foundations over 2016-19 as well as hopefully encouraging our existing funders to continue their support. Towards the end of this reporting period, we also had an increase in donations from individuals who had found our work inspiring and useful and wished to support our efforts.

10. Generate 8% of income from sources other than trusts and foundations

Summary: During this reporting period, £13,693 of our total income was from sources other than trusts and foundations; this amounted to **12%** of our total income (150% of target). Our non-trust income came from consultancy (£12,378) and donations from individuals (£1,315).

Evaluation: The fact that we surpassed our target in this area during this reporting period is very encouraging given that we wish to eventually generate 50% of our income from non-grant sources in line with the generally accepted definition of a social enterprise. It also demonstrates that our work is of real value to civil society clients and concerned citizens and not only grantmakers.

Chris Abbott, founder and executive director

29 January 2016