

What Research Funders Can Do to Promote Open Access

Put an OA condition on research grants. By accepting a grant, the grantee agrees to provide open access (OA) to any publications that result from the funded research.

- The condition can make reasonable exceptions, e.g. for classified military research, patentable discoveries, and works intended to generate revenue.
- The condition should give grantees a choice of ways to provide OA. In particular, it ought to give grantees the choice between OA archives and OA journals. When grantees choose OA archives, they should be allowed to deposit their work in any OA archive that meets certain conditions of accessibility, interoperability, and long-term preservation. The interoperability condition could be satisfied by complying with the metadata harvesting protocol of the Open Archives Initiative. Qualifying archives need not be hosted by the foundation or funding agency; they could, for example, be hosted and maintained by universities. <http://www.openarchives.org/>
- According to the JISC/OSI Journal Authors Survey Report (February 2004, pp. 56-57), when authors are asked "how they would feel if their employer or funding body required them to deposit copies of their published articles in one or more [open-access] repositories... [t]he vast majority, even of the non-OA author group, said they would do so willingly." (Italics in original.)

When a grant recipient publishes the results of funded research in an OA journal that charges a processing fee, offer to pay the fee. Consider the cost of OA dissemination to be part of the cost of research.

- Even better: encourage grantees to submit their work to OA journals when there are suitable ones in the field.

- Even better: earmark some grant funds for OA journal processing fees. That way grantees will not have to reduce their research funds in order to pay the fees.

Give grants to new open-access journals to help them launch and establish themselves. Give grants to newly formed editorial boards that want to launch new open-access journals.

Give grants to open-access journals to cover the processing fees of authors who cannot afford to pay them.

Give grants to conventional journals to cover the costs of converting to open access.

Give grants to conventional journals to cover the costs of digitizing their back runs, on the condition that they will then provide open access to them.

Allow your grants to be used for building endowments for open access journals and archives. Endowed OA journals and archives will not need to seek further funding from any source.

Ask researchers applying for grants to deposit their existing peer-reviewed research articles in OA archives, and to maintain a standardized, online CV linking to OA versions of these articles. For more details, see this 2003 article by Stevan Harnad, Les Carr, Tim Brody, and Charles Oppenheim. <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue35/harnad/>



A Very Brief Introduction to Open Access

by Peter Suber <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/foc/brief.htm>

Open-access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. What makes it possible is the internet and the consent of the author or copyright-holder.

OA is entirely compatible with peer review, and all the major OA initiatives for scientific and scholarly literature insist on its importance. Just as authors of journal articles donate their labor, so do most journal editors and referees participating in peer review.

There are two primary vehicles for delivering OA to research articles: OA archives or repositories and OA journals.

OA Archives or repositories:

OA archives or repositories do not perform peer review, but simply make their contents freely available to the world. They may contain unrefereed preprints, refereed postprints, or both.

Archives may belong to institutions, such as universities and laboratories, or disciplines, such as physics and economics.

Authors may archive their preprints without anyone else's permission, and a majority of journals already permit authors to archive their postprints. When archives comply with the metadata harvesting protocol of the Open Archives Initiative, then they are interoperable and users can find their contents without knowing which archives exist, where they are located, or what they contain. There is now open-source software for building and maintaining OAI-compliant archives and worldwide momentum for using it. The costs of an archive are negligible: some server space and a fraction of the time of a technician.

OA literature is not free to produce, even if it is less expensive to produce than conventionally published literature. The question is not whether scholarly literature can be made costless, but whether there are better ways to pay the bills than by charging readers and creating access barriers. Business models for paying the bills depend on how OA is delivered.

OA Journals:

OA journals perform peer review and then make the approved contents freely available to the world. Their expenses consist of peer review, manuscript preparation, and server space.

OA journals pay their bills very much the way broadcast television and radio stations do: those with an interest in disseminating the content pay the production costs upfront so that access can be free of charge for everyone with the right equipment. Sometimes this means that journals have a subsidy from the hosting university or professional society. Sometimes it means that journals charge a processing fee on accepted articles, to be paid by the author or the author's sponsor (employer, funding agency).

OA journals that charge processing fees usually waive them in cases of economic hardship.

OA journals with institutional subsidies tend to charge no processing fees.

OA journals can get by on lower subsidies or fees if they have income from other publications, advertising, priced add-ons, or auxiliary services. Some institutions and consortia arrange fee discounts. Some OA publishers waive the fee for all researchers affiliated with institutions that have purchased an annual membership. There's a lot of room for creativity in finding ways to pay the costs of a peer-reviewed OA journal, and we're far from having exhausted our cleverness and imagination.