

Roundtable on Public Access to Federal Research and Data

Proposal

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Over the past several years, open access advocates have proposed free and mandatory access to published scientific journal articles resulting from research funded by the federal government. In response, publishers of peer-reviewed scientific literature have argued that free, mandatory access to their articles undermines the credibility and sustainability of their enterprises with unintended consequences for scientific advancement. The debate has not progressed much in the last few years, but all agree that we must get beyond business as usual.

The House Science and Technology Committee, which has oversight of the federal civilian R&D enterprise, has a strong interest in this issue. The Committee seeks to convene a Roundtable of the key stakeholders to explore and develop an appropriate consensus regarding access to and preservation of federally funded research information that addresses the needs of all interested parties.

Background

The progress of science and technology is very dependent on:

1. The wide dissemination of research results and data from which new science is born;
2. A peer review system that ensures the quality and integrity of scientific research results and analyses; and
3. Preservation and access to the archive of historic and current research results.

The federal government is an important funder of basic and applied research in the United States. As a result of this stewardship, the government should provide resources and establish policies where appropriate to facilitate access to scientific data and publications and preserve an accessible record to both entities. In doing so, the government must take into account the important role of the private sector in this enterprise. The roles of both the public and private sector in the peer review, publication, preservation and dissemination of research results has changed significantly as publications have transformed from print to online forms over the last two decades. Libraries, archives and publishers of scholarly communications had well defined roles in the print era for these respective tasks.

Continuously evolving forms of online publications have greatly improved access to digital information but have also led to a blurring of these traditional roles. For example, large funding agencies within the government have set-up digital repositories and databases for research results – of various types and in various forms - produced by the agencies' grantees (eg, NIH's PubMedCentral, NSF's IRIS, DOE's Science.gov, and NASA's ASO). Similarly many research

universities have established online repositories as a means for providing access and archiving of data, research reports, theses and publications from the university's faculty and research staff. Throughout the transition from print to online, the scholarly publishing community (consisting of both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations), has provided an evolving set of publication products that enhance the dissemination.

The view that publicly funded research results should be made available for free has led to friction among the institutional libraries and publishers. Playing a somewhat lesser but not insignificant role is the prevailing public belief that all web-based content should be available for free. But the private sector contributes significantly to the value chain in scholarly publishing and archiving, and currently publishers recover those costs by charging fees to the user (i.e. institutional libraries) for their content. Given the importance of peer review, scholarly publication and long-term data preservation and archiving to the scientific enterprise, it is in the interest of all parties to reach consensus on a path forward for scientific communication.

To this end, a Roundtable forum is proposed to discuss these issues. The Roundtable will include representatives from the above communities. Participants will be asked to contribute their expertise and proposed solutions on the respective role of the federal government, libraries, institutional repositories and the scholarly publishers on the topics of access and preservation of the results of federally funded research. The Roundtable participants will consider various approaches and models for the dissemination of government-funded research results. Topics that the Roundtable participants may choose to discuss include the following:

- The role of the Federal government (in particular the research agencies) in providing and preserving access to research databases, scholarly publications, research grantee's reports and other appropriate research results;
- The role of universities and other non-governmental organizations (including scientific and professional societies) in preserving and providing access to research databases, scholarly publications, research grantee's reports and other appropriate research results;
- Alternative business models for scholarly publishers that would preserve the 3rd party peer review system and continue to provide resources and incentives for investments in technologies;
- Current funding structure and role of university libraries and alternative models for the future;
- Needs for better data on economics of new models for publishing and access.

Proposed Participants, Ground Rules and Recommended Process

The total number of participants will be limited (to approximately 10) in order to facilitate the scheduling and productivity of the meetings. The initial roundtable meeting will be chaired by representatives of the House Science and Technology Committee with appropriate support and advice from staff in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Roundtable participants will be selected by the S&T Committee based on their interest and expertise on the issue. Participants must be willing to devote sufficient time and resources for the required background research, analysis and committee deliberations.

To promote an open dialogue and exchange and to foster working toward a fair and balanced solution, participants will be at the table as knowledgeable individuals, but not as official representatives of their parent organizations.¹ Participants must commit to a balanced, fair minded discussion of the issues with appropriate confidentiality when needed to allow full and frank discussions by all parties. Participants will be asked to refrain from public disclosure of Roundtable deliberations until a consensus report has been completed.

The following process for the initial Roundtable is suggested:

- 1) Chairman Gordon (and Science and Technology Committee staff) would welcome the participants, outline the process and state the goal of the roundtable of developing a resolution that would meet the twin goals of public access and a viable and sustainable publishing community. A timeline and schedule for completion of the Roundtable process will be proposed.
- 2) Participants would be asked to give brief statements to outline the issues from their perspectives and to suggest appropriate solutions. Participants would be asked to devote their time and expertise to find a fair and balanced solution during the discussions phase of the Roundtable meeting. Participants will be asked to be freed from formally representing their organizations during the discussions and may choose to use Chatham House rules.
- 3) Committee staff and OSTP would lead a discussion and examine various approaches to promoting the dissemination of and access to government-funded research results, including the approach taken in the America COMPETES Act, the NIH model, and other possible models.
- 4) The Roundtable participants will commit to a good faith effort to reach a consensus and any follow up discussion and dialogue that may be needed to perfect and improve the outcome.

¹ Should a consensus be found among participants, each participant will have the responsibility of taking the consensus back to their respective organizations for official action.