

Appendix C

Why OA2020?

OA2020 is an international initiative to convert the existing corpus of scholarly journals from subscription-based access to open access (“OA”). As members of institutions engaged in the OA2020 process, we are writing to express our reasons for becoming signatories and address misconceptions about the initiative prevalent in the United States OA community. Our goal is to encourage other US institutions to think more broadly about OA2020 so that together we can harness the transnational momentum to support and implement a wide range of sustainable OA models.

The global OA movement is well past establishing the viability and potential of OA scholarly journals to provide immediate, unfettered, and worldwide access to the scholarly record. Making everything freely available to everyone is a shared goal of the OA community, and yet the scholarly publishing ecosystem remains a long way off from having OA as the default. Instead, a majority of the scholarly record remains in closed, subscription-funded outlets. In many respects, libraries perpetuate the biggest roadblock to transformative change, regularly and predictably recommitting to expensive, restrictive, multi-year agreements that lock in place subscription-funded, closed access scholarly publishing models. To be clear, none of us wants to replace this current unsustainable system with another unsustainable one that perpetuates the financial and intellectual dominance of any given commercial publisher.

Instead, we want to achieve meaningful and transformative change to advance open as the rule rather than the exception. But in the current ecosystem where most of our money goes to pay for subscriptions, scholarly institutions who are committed to OA must ask themselves how they can use increasingly scarce resources at their disposal to reach this goal. A truly revolutionary solution to this problem is for all of us in unison to shift the majority of our money away from subscriptions and in support of new OA models. To this end, we have signed the OA2020 Expression of Interest (EOI), which we believe presents a path to take this next step. We have signed because we think that we would be regretful if we missed this bold opportunity to leverage the collective power of the whole world, let the anxious attention of the commercial publishers slip away, and failed to reshape scholarly communication fundamentally at this moment in time.

We recognize there are many approaches and models for implementing OA and we support most, if not all of them. Additionally, we believe that OA2020 will enable such diversity to flourish by allowing us to transition funds now spent on closed, subscription journals to OA publishing. This core principle of the current OA2020 Initiative, combined with the global, collaborative approach, is what motivated us to sign. We also recognize that the OA2020 Initiative as originally conceived was focused predominantly on a business model that relies on article processing charges (APCs) as a primary means to move money away from subscriptions and pay for OA publishing. As signatories ourselves, and as attendees at the Berlin 13 Conference, our perspective is very different. In our view, the OA2020 initiative can and must also include as many if not all possible OA models and strategies. We are convinced that with enough key and diverse US stakeholders around the table we can create a roadmap that will be distinctly different from what was originally envisioned by the Max Planck Digital Library in their white paper. While APCs might be suitable for some countries, some disciplines, some journals, and/or some publishers, for others to achieve sustainability and success we will also need a mixture of alternative non-APC-based OA models.

Another reason why we signed is that we believe the principles, goals, and motivations of the OA2020 initiative respect and, indeed, embrace the pluralistic approach of the global OA movement. While there are certainly OA2020 stakeholders who are committed to moving forward with APC-driven transformation of the existing literature, this approach is only one example of how today’s subscription funds can be

repurposed toward OA ends. We do not see the available OA models as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary efforts aimed at large-scale transformation in the service of open scholarship. They are two sides of the same coin.

The presentations, discussions, and outcomes of the Berlin 13 Conference reinforce our pluralistic understanding of the initiative and represent a future that we imagine. John Willinsky for instance, made an impassioned case against APCs and for expanding cooperative approaches to funding OA publishing. Johan Rooryck offered concrete lessons on how discipline- and community-specific action can make real transformative strides in moving entire networks of editors, authors, and peer reviewers from traditional subscription models to “fair open access” journals. CERN’s Salvatore Mele gave two presentations on the SCOAP3 initiative, covering both their experience with governance and structure as well as their collaborative, discipline-focused approach to transformation. In the closed session, speakers from both the dais and the floor criticized the APC model, challenged the community to think deeply about what we want from OA, and pushed us to consider the disparate and far-reaching effects of any one strategy.

In short, this conference was not an echo chamber. Like most ambitious discussions of OA, the conversations at Berlin 13 were contentious and the perspectives were varied. We absolutely must have such a diverse set of insights and criticisms in order to undertake this ambitious project in the right way, and we hope to keep growing the community to ensure that we do not miss or forget the needs of those who are not yet involved. For example, recommendations to address the perspectives and challenges of the global south, including representation on the OA2020 advisory board, were put forward during the conference, and several of us are exploring these issues independently as part of our commitment to principled transformation. Our intention is to make sure we do not leave anybody behind or replace one economic barrier with another as we reconstruct the publishing landscape.

Mindful, imaginative pluralism is a welcome and central component of OA transformation—one which we champion fully as OA2020 signatories, and which we believe the initiative itself can entirely encompass as well. Our community need not, and should not, be distracted by partisanship and divisiveness on the various paths to a more open future. As long as those paths converge on the common goals of breaking our dependence on subscriptions, making everything OA, and enabling institutions to repurpose billions of dollars in resources to support new and transformative OA publishing models, then we can call it whatever we want. There is no reason why all viable and sustainable OA models cannot be included under the rubric of OA2020. In other words, world-wide consensus and collaboration on the core mechanism—repurposing subscription funds—are key to realizing change.

In a global scholarly publishing system, real progress requires initiatives like OA2020 that expand beyond borders and disciplines to embrace the entire community. We remain hopeful that all stakeholders who have not signed on will keep one eye towards the future and contribute their specific preferences and unique perspectives to the conversation so that when the time is right, the choice they make about joining will be an easy one. The bottom line is that the US contributes around 50% of all journal subscription revenue and thus we should be able to control at least half of the conversation by spending our money in support of whatever we as a community choose.

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