Phase III Wrap-Up

By Diane DiEuliis and Courtney Patterson

Today we have reached the end of Phase Three of our public access policy forum.

We sincerely thank every one of you for taking the time to provide such valuable commentary on this topic. As previously mentioned, due to the busy holiday season we will be re-opening the forum for a two-week bonus session beginning immediately. In this final session we will be soliciting comments on all the topics discussed in the three previous phases, and may periodically ask during the course of these two weeks that participants focus on a few key issues that we feel warrant additional attention.

Phase Three focused on management—particularly how to ensure compliance, how to accurately measure success, and the Federal government's role in guaranteeing the most effective public access policy.

One clear theme throughout your comments was the need for a public access policy that is simple and could be implemented quickly. You discussed the drawbacks to a policy process that "sacrifices the good for the sake of the perfect" and encouraged even partial steps that would take the process in the direction of greater access. In terms of compliance, the majority of you focused on the need for a clear mandate that is uniform across agencies. Some suggested the use of monetary sanctions for noncompliance, or withholding future funds for a particular research area until the requirements are met. You said uniform standards across agencies would streamline the submission process.

Many of you provided examples of organizations that could serve as models with regard to evaluation processes. Some suggested measuring federally-funded research citations, or tracking the number of views or hits that each submission receives. Others thought a better metric would be to determine how improved access to electronic resources leads to greater overall productivity, and suggested tracking the requests for certain datasets and then analyzing the product that results.

Finally, you engaged in a great discussion concerning the role of the Federal government. Most of you agreed that the government's main role is to ensure compliance, but you also cautioned that a burdensome compliance mechanism could be counterproductive. Another theme of the discussion was the need for a centralized depository location. Though some of you suggested using university libraries as a depository, the overall consensus seemed to lean toward the belief that this format would be unduly burdensome on universities. Many of you commented that creating one site where researchers may click and deposit their work is the most efficient way to ensure not only compliance but also the greatest degree of public access. One idea was to house a long-term repository within the Library of Congress, which would accept and store articles and make them available to the public.

Once again thank you to all who participated; your comments and suggestions are genuinely appreciated. Now, for those of you who have been caught up with the holidays or have simply procrastinated, please take some time to share your thoughts as we extend this public forum through January 21th.

This entry was posted on Thursday, January 7th, 2010 at 11:30 pm and is filed under News, Public Access Policy, Requests for Comment. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed.

Responses to "Phase III Wrap-Up"

Hope Leman said on January 8, 2010 at 12:40 pm:

Dear Ms. DiEuliis and Ms. Patterson:
Thank you again for the wonderful opportunity you have provided us to learn about the important issue of Open Access. I hope every library science student and student in the sciences will visit this forum and take advantage of the many edifying and thought-provoking comments therein.
One topic that could be addressed profitably is the involvement of the general, non-science-professional part of the population.
For example in Part II: Management Stevan Harnad used the wording "…the whole process of open-access provision out of the hands of the research community, where it belongs." I was a little unsettled by the "where it belongs" wording. Will there be mechanisms for interested members of the public to monitor compliance rates in a user-friendly fashion and to petition the federal agency in charge of the public access policy if certain actors in the research community seem to be noncompliant? After all, the point of your initiative seems to be to maximize public access in the broadest sense. The taxpayer-funded aspect needs to be kept in mind, but much of the discussion up to this point has been research community inside baseball.
I wonder if science educators at the high school and undergraduate levels and those in the disease advocacy realm could discuss how they would like to see any such policy endowed with opportunities for optimal use by laypeople of the materials to be rendered Open Access under your proposal. As Umesh Thakkar, PhD AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow said in Part II of this forum, "No matter what model is followed, I think it would be good to encourage access and meaningful use by a wide variety of people (from K-12 students and teachers to citizen scientists to university researchers)… By accessing research results (e.g., papers, data, and tools), they will learn the skills that are needed of a "data scientist" As we have seen in other posts on the OSTP blog, that is precisely the kind of skill building OSTP hopes to foster.
And it would be nice if those in the research administration community could discuss their experiences showcasing the work of their researchers via new ventures such as the news service Futurity.org
http://futurity.org/

That is, if the Open Access site the feds ran were elegant, easily linked to from the public Web pages of institutions ("See how the work of our researchers benefits the nation at suchandsuch.gov") and welcoming to all public interest in what researchers do would increase and the federal sites would become founts of activity and not mausoleums.

For instance, such a site should, at the very least, include features such as, "Alerts, Print Results, Email Results. Bookmark This Search" and perhaps, "Check out compliance rates in your state." The public can assist as watchdogs, cheerleaders and as citizen researchers.

And there is no conflict between popular science education and good research. Some of the most brilliant scientists have also been superb public spokesman for science (e.g., Richard Feynman, Stephen Hawking, Linus Pauling).

Rosemary Alyea said on January 10, 2010 at 11:10 pm:

I read every piece of reseach information almost daily. This policy of open access is a must for the general public. If there is a plan to expand it, then it should be done.

There are times I have to search all over the net to get a questioned answered on recent research and will look forward to going to a government site to easily access the information that I'm looking for. Please more openness to recent research. Thank you.