

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

GRANTEE & STAFF MEMBER

PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING & RESEARCH

Executive Summary

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The number and sophistication of open access publications have grown during the past two decades. Open access publications are peer-reviewed publications that allow free public access to their contents, sometimes immediately, and typically grant creative commons attribution licenses (“CC BY license”).¹ At the same time, the philanthropic, academic, and other research funder communities, including the National Institutes of Health,² have placed more emphasis on open access because these publications allow for a timely and less expensive flow of research to the end user.

To better understand its researchers’ and staff members’ opinions of open access publishing, RWJF commissioned a series of phone interviews with its grantees and its own staff members, which took place May 2016 through July 2016.³ These interviews also asked researchers for their opinions of open data and open research because they are closely related to the topic of open access publications.⁴ Twenty-seven RWJF grantees participated in an interview (13 worked in non-university settings and 14 worked in university settings), and 16 RWJF staff members participated in an interview.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Both grantees and staff members who were familiar with the concept of open access publications support the idea. Some of the benefits of open access publishing suggested by respondents were similar and included:

1. Open access publications democratize research by allowing anyone, especially those who do not have academic affiliations and thus, access to high-profile, high-quality journals, to more ably scan the evidence base of a literature.
2. By democratizing research findings, open access publications can also serve to further the dissemination efforts of stakeholders on the production end of research.
3. Broader availability of research could result in wider scale policy impact.

Despite their support for open access publishing, all respondent groups also had a few similar concerns:

1. Many grantees and staff members considered the **cost of publishing in open access journals** a hindrance, particularly for junior faculty because they typically have fewer

¹ [Creative Commons](#), a nonprofit organization, formally defines its CC BY license as a license that: “...lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation.” To learn more about Creative Commons' licenses, click [<here>](#).

² The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has required public access to publications resulting from its research investments since 2009, based on Division F Section 217 of PL 111-8 (Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009). <https://publicaccess.nih.gov/policy.htm>. Accessed August 29, 2016.

³ See Appendix 1 for grantee interview guide and Appendix 2 for RWJF staff member interview guide.

⁴ Open data means allowing public access and reuse of scientific data, while open research allows public access to all files, data, protocols, results, and manuscripts for a research project.

resources than more senior faculty. These costs are related to the article processing fees⁵ most open access journals charge when they accept an article for publication.

2. Many interviewees were also concerned with the **quality of open access journals**. Interviewees expressed these concerns in different ways. Some reported that open access journals have or are viewed as having substandard peer review compared to closed, top-tier journals. Some felt that open access journals are viewed as lower tier and have inferior reputations compared to closed peer-reviewed publications. Others expressed the view that open access journals have low-impact factors.
3. **Career advancement** was a concern across all interviewees, regardless of whether they worked in a university setting or not. Academics are motivated to publish primarily in high-impact journals (which tend to be closed) by the tenure track and promotion process. About half of university grantee respondents mentioned career concerns—if required to publish in open access journals, it would impact their careers, particularly if open access journals are not the standard journals in a field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following ideas and recommendations for increasing the availability of open access publications, open data, and open research were extrapolated from the interviews.

1. Work with established, top-tier journals to increase more open access to their content. To accomplish this task, the following next steps are proposed to engage and inform top-tier, closed journals:
 - a. Establish a business case for closed journals to offer open access to more of their articles.
 - b. Convene meetings and publish white papers to help closed journals understand the opportunity costs of closed access.
 - c. Publish a report that outlines semi-open access policies for journals to consider. Some journals already offer this access to some extent by allowing open access to articles related to a public health emergency or have created open access “sister journals.”
2. Consider creating a third party to bridge gaps in understanding between open access publications and researchers. This third party could be established through an RWJF grant or through a consortium of funders, and it would work to:
 - a. Build the reputation of existing open access journals. All respondents felt that existing open access journals could use some PR to help build their reputational capital.
 - b. Support the technical assistance needs of grantees and institutions by: (1) assisting researchers in understanding which open access journals are of high quality, which would also help build their reputation; and (2) providing hands-on support to researchers in following the requirements of any grant agreements, including open access publishing.

⁵ Article processing fees are assessed to authors by a journal to offset the expense of peer review management, production, online hosting, and other costs associated with managing an online, publicly accessible journal. Some journals offer financial support for these fees for authors who demonstrate need, including authors from developing countries.