Come Together Right Now: An Introduction to the Open Access Network

Rebecca Kennison

K|N Consultants / Open Access Network

ABSTRACT

Officially launched just over a year ago, the Open Access Network (OAN) offers a transformative, sustainable, and scalable model of open access (OA) publishing and preservation that encourages partnerships among scholarly societies, research libraries, and other partners (e.g., academic publishers, university presses, collaborative e-archives) who share a common mission to support the creation and distribution of open research and scholarship and to encourage more affordable education, which can be a direct outcome of OA publishing. Our ultimate goal is to develop a collective funding approach that is fair and open and that fully sustains the infrastructure needed to support the full life-cycle for communication of the scholarly record, including new and evolving forms of research output. Simply put, we intend to **Make Knowledge Public**.

INTRODUCING THE OPEN ACCESS NETWORK

Sharing, curating, and preserving scholarship are imperative for the advancement of research. The ready availability of scholarly publications is central to teaching and learning and optimizes opportunities for innovation and development across higher education and beyond. Deep fundamental changes to the scholarly communication system are needed not only to respond to the numerous funding crises in higher education and to encourage emerging and new forms and formats of scholarship, but also to foster and deepen the connections between the academy and the wider public. Only an approach to scholarly communication that builds collective and collaborative alliances across a wide variety of institutions and that engages a range of stakeholders can provide a fair and equitable path to truly open and sustainable forms of scholarship.

The Open Access Network (OAN) offers a bold new model to support scholarly communication, not by becoming a scholarly publisher ourselves or by developing our own preservation archive, but rather by supporting the work and the infrastructure of others. In adopting this strategy, the OAN can be both incremental and forward-thinking: we propose a phased approach that seeks to open up current forms of scholarship (e.g., journals, monographs) while simultaneously establishing the infrastructure necessary to build, support, and sustain new and emerging modes of communication. We focus in the first instance on publications and platforms in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), disciplines that are most at risk in the current turbulent cost-per-unit-driven open-access (OA) environment. Even so, our model seeks to develop support mechanisms for infrastructure that could be used in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines as well.

Institutional Funding
All tertiary institutions pay an annual fee based on their Carnegie (or similar) classification and the number of FTE faculty and students.

Stakeholder Collaboration
Partnerships among scholarly societies, libraries, publishers, and others receive stable annual funding to support operations, convert research output to OA, and embrace new forms and formats of scholarly communication.

Robust Infrastructure
Together these mission-driven alliances develop the infrastructure and best practices needed to support an open and dynamic scholarly information ecosystem.

FINANCIAL MODEL

The OAN financial model is designed to support open scholarly communication infrastructure itself, rather than specific packages (e.g., journals or books), projects, or platforms — an approach that requires a substantive departure from the current system, from business models based on cost-per-unit pricing (e.g., an article-processing charge [APC] or a book-publication charge [BPC]) to a business model that supports the infrastructure and resources needed to create, present, and preserve scholarly outputs of all kinds. The OAN model proposes that all institutions of higher education contribute to systemic support of the research process itself, including its scholarly output. It is a bold rethinking of the economics of OA by way of partnerships between and among scholarly societies/university presses, institutions and their academic libraries, and publishers that would be funded by an institutional fee structure based on a student-and-faculty per-capita sliding scale. Core to the model is its insistence on broad, collective institutional support of the scholarly communication infrastructure itself, not on any particular format (e.g., books, journals, websites).

The idea — originally presented in a 2014 white paper (“A Scalable and Sustainable Approach to Open Access Publishing and Archiving for Humanities and Social Sciences”) authored by Rebecca Kennison and Lisa Norberg — has now been refined to address feedback from stakeholders in terms of the publication partnership inclusion criteria, the funding formula, and the funding dispersion process; however, the core concepts from that paper remain unchanged.

The centerpiece of the financial model continues to be an annual or multi-year payment that is made by every institution of higher education and that is based on a sliding scale tied to the institution’s Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (in the United States) or the International Standard Classification of Education (outside the United States). Our proposal is to begin with US\$0.50 per student per year of study (ranging from US\$2 per year per student at a community college up to US\$5 per student per year at a doctoral-granting institution) and US\$5 per full-time faculty. The payment is modest relative to the overall budget of most institutions, but — when spread broadly across all institutions — results in a sum substantial enough to sustain a vibrant and open scholarly communication environment.

Securing funding from the OAN is comparatively easy. Academic institutions and scholarly societies (and their publishers) or university presses come together in partnership to apply for funds through a lightweight screening process. Partners must meet these minimum criteria:

- Collaboration between at least one academic institutional unit (e.g., department, library) and one scholarly society or university press
- A two-year roadmap that includes plans for growth and product development and that outlines an increased positive impact on the scholarly communication ecosystem
- Financial transparency between the partners and with the OAN administrators detailing costs and workflow processes
- An explicit plan for archiving and preservation
- A clear memorandum of understanding between partners that stipulates procedures for modifying, amending, or terminating the partnership

The funds dispensed by the OAN are then used to provide direct financial support for the distribution, access, and long-term archival preservation infrastructure of these partnerships and their publications, projects, and platforms.

Once a proposal has received funding, an annual audit will be conducted and a report submitted by the publishing partnership to ensure that the applicants are meeting their stated goals and that the funds are being used appropriately.

FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

The OAN will not host any projects ourselves. Instead, the monies collected by the OAN will go to support the scholarly communication infrastructure itself, whatever the form, format, platform, product, or project. Each project by each partnership will appear listed on the OAN funding contribution and distribution site, which will look familiar to those who use crowdsourced funding sites already. Funding through the OAN (which will come from institutions, foundations, organizations, companies, and individuals) can be designated on a project-by-project basis, on a discipline-by-discipline basis, in support at the level of an area of study (humanities or social sciences or both), or by contribution to the general fund. Because all projects are in certain ways unique, we will not list publicly the amount needed to fund any given individual project. Transparency between and among the partners as to the annual project-specific costs is a requirement for OAN funding and so these costs are also known by the OAN administrators, but such project-level financial information could prove difficult to explain succinctly in a public forum and might open projects up to unjustified criticism. (We do not want to put societies or presses in the position of having to justify why, for example, they employ a managing editor or pay a vendor for XML markup.) We have every reason to believe the partnerships, since they will involve stakeholders from different sectors of the scholarly communication system, will strive to keep costs as low as possible.

To acknowledge the investment many institutions are already making in OA publications, projects, and platforms, we have factored into the funding formula the option for an institution to reduce its annual payment by the (self-reported) amount that that institution already spends on other HSS OA initiatives. (The numerous examples of such initiatives include APCs for HSS articles in fully OA journals, the Open Library of the Humanities, Knowledge Unlatched, Luminos, Lever, campus-published journals, open educational resources, discipline-specific repositories for HSS content, digital humanities projects, and so on.) Acknowledgement of these local OA priorities underscores the importance of institutional support for OA infrastructure whether regional, national, or global.

The remaining balance of the institutional annual fee that is spent directly on OAN-supported projects is dispensed to OAN partner projects across subject disciplines, geographic regions, or publishing formats, in accordance with institutional, funder, or individual donor priorities. Funds are then distributed to cover the costs of the partners’ publications, platforms, and projects, providing direct support for the infrastructure and resources needed for the creation, curation, distribution, and long-term archival preservation of scholarly content. Examples of OAN-supported projects include high-impact society- and university press-published journals, university press- and society-published monographs and book series, open educational resources, discipline-specific repositories, and innovative digital projects and platforms.

KEY POINTS

- We are looking to institutions, not necessarily to their libraries, to fund this model. Our emphasis is on OA’s direct educational and societal benefits, particularly in supporting lifelong learning and the social and economic growth that results from ongoing access to research and scholarship.
- We are looking for participation from the entire higher education community, from small community colleges and large research universities alike, eventually at global scale.
- Our approach looks to fund the entire scholarly communication infrastructure, not simply certain types of research output, supporting both current and new modes of communication.
- We are suggesting bringing together societies and university presses, libraries, and institutions in collaborative ways that have not been tried before, at least not at scale.
- We are focusing in the first instance on HSS. Both underfunded and accustomed to paying nothing to publish, scholars in HSS disciplines require a different approach for OA to work for them.
- Our plan is not bound by national borders but can be adapted, with regional modifications, in all countries by those looking for a more equitable and sustainable OA model.

ABOUT THE OAN

Kennison, Rebecca, and Lisa Norberg. “A Network Approach to Scholarly Communication Infrastructure.” *EDUCAUSE Review* 50.3 (2015): 58–59. Web: <http://bit.ly/2cLEzBy>

—. *A Scalable and Sustainable Approach to Open Access Publishing and Archiving for Humanities and Social Sciences: A White Paper*. 11 April 2014. Web: <http://bit.ly/1fLSNrR>

—. “Toward a Scalable and Sustainable Approach to Open Access Publishing and Archiving for Humanities and Social Sciences Societies: A Proposal.” *Learned Publishing* 27 (2014): 223–235. DOI: 10.1087/20140308

Seeley, Alexis, Lisa Norberg, and Rebecca Kennison. “A Scalable and Sustainable Approach to Open Access.” *EDUCAUSE Review Online*. 15 September 2014. Web: <http://bit.ly/2cAmD9S>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Rebecca Kennison, Principal and Executive Director
K|N Consultants and the Open Access Network
E-mail: rrkennison@knconsultants.org
Twitter: @OA_Network, @knconsultants
Telephone: +1.347.746.5931
Web: openaccessnetwork.org