

Subject: Comments on RFI

Date: November 17, 2011 10:54:35 AM EST

I am responding to the RFI entitled "Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research."

I am a NASA-funded astrophysicist, and a Senior Scientist at the Planetary Science Institute based in Tucson. I have been a principal investigator on over \$1M in NASA funding in the last decade. I have been an author or co-author on approximately 35 peer-reviewed publications.

As with any scientists, I spend many hours reading papers and articles from other researchers. While some articles are easy to obtain, others are not.

The internet has made it easy to locate potentially relevant research articles, using services such as the Astrophysics Data System (<http://www.adsabs.harvard.edu/>) and other online search engines. Many mainstream articles published within the last several years are available easily online. However, it is often quite difficult to access older articles, or articles published in smaller journals, or those in journals outside of my area of research.

My institution, the Planetary Science Institute, has a budget for online journal subscriptions and chooses to subscribe to journals most likely to be of interest to its employees. However, because of the diversity of scientific interests, there are always bound to be some journals which we do not have institutional subscriptions to.

These articles are often available on a pay-per-download basis, at prices typically \$30-\$50/article. This price becomes a substantial barrier, because even for low-cost items, institutional reimbursement policies are such that it may take several hours of work to get reimbursed for such a purchase, and such payment may be several weeks or even months down the road. Therefore, the mere fact of charging a per-article cost is a strong disincentive to read such articles. The research within them is ignored, and essentially wasted.

Of course it is possible to contact the author personally and request a copy. But researchers move, e-mail addresses change, messages are ignored, and eventually this may take several hours of work to to avail.

These issues are particularly frustrating when the work I am interested in was done by fellow American scientists, paid for by US tax dollars, under contract to NASA and other agencies just like my own research.

In response to your RFI, I suggest the following:

- 1) Existing publishers do an excellent job of reviewing, editing, producing, and indexing existing research. They provide a valuable service, and deserve to be compensated for this.
- 2) Some journals (such as Astrophysical Journal) have relatively open publication policies. They provide free access after one year, and subscription rates within the one-year proprietary period are reasonable for both institutional and individual subscribers. Page charges are high, but as a fraction of the total research cost, are on the 1% level (\$100K in research funding and \$1K for publications charges, for instance). I encourage this model. Articles published here are easy to access.

3) Other journals (such as Icarus, or Nature) are much more closed about access. These journals assess essentially no page charges, but retain proprietary rights. Subscriptions are difficult and/or expensive. Articles published here can be quite difficult to access, and as a result their research is under-utilized. I do not encourage this model.

4) Conference proceedings and books are a different category. These formats have not adjusted well to the electronic era. In my perception, fewer scientists are interested in publishing in these formats, because of their more difficult accessibility. I encourage new formats to be explored here. In particular, conference proceedings are often supported financially by a conference, so putting these (valuable) results online and accessible is extremely valuable.

Please feel free to be in touch with me if you would like additional feedback on this RFI.

Best regards,
-Henry Throop

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