



Response: To Office of Science and Technology Policy

Request for Information: Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly, Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research

January 11, 2012

On behalf of the public and private academic and research libraries of New York I urge all federal policy makers to embrace and extend public access to scholarship resulting from federally funded research.

Despite the relentlessly rising costs of published research and the current budgetary constraints on library collections, I will refrain from making an economic argument in favor of open access. As moving as that argument may be, it is greatly overshadowed by the case for justice, and the future of scholarship and innovation in the United States.

As a first principle, the taxpaying public has a right to expect access to the results of research for which they paid. The matter is that simple. As a taxpayer has the right to drive on public roads, so should he have the right to read the research he made possible. Note that the published research is already available to the public, so this is not akin to suggesting a citizen be permitted to drive a tank because his taxes contributed to the military budget.

Regarding scholarship, the citizen has no barriers to the work provided he pays a second time – once in addition to the original federal investment. A corollary to the current standard would be to charge taxpayers a membership fee for the privilege of visiting the local public library. That practice would not stand.

Yet it is not merely in the interest of justice to provide access to scholarly publications resulting from federal funding. It is also vitally important to the competitiveness of our nation.

Living in the information age, we must acknowledge that information itself is the raw material of progress – it is the great commodity of our age. Here historical analogies are apt.

During the transportation revolution of the nineteenth century, access to a railroad often determined the life or death of a community. Through most of the

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twentieth century, access to highways, communications, and power grids, spurred economic growth. The richness of our infrastructure and the open access Americans enjoyed helped make our nation an economic superpower beyond any measure the world had ever known. As our economy changes it is vitally important that we marshal our resources to continue making the great resources of the United States available to as many citizens as possible.

Today, as we labor to make high-speed internet access available to all, as wireless networks proliferate, it is incongruous to think that we may actually limit the knowledge that can flow over those networks.

Access to publications resulting from publically funded research is the right of every taxpayer. It is also critical to innovation, entrepreneurialism, and America's standing in the world.

Jason Kramer
Executive Director

The New York State Higher Education Initiative represents the public and private college and university libraries of New York, as well as the libraries of a number of public and private research institutions.

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