MOBIUS Policy on Recommended Principles for Vetting MOBIUS Support of Electronic Resources and Open Access Projects

Created by: MOBIUS Electronic Resources Committee, April 4, 2022
Adopted: MOBIUS Board of Directors, June 8, 2022
Revised: N/A
Replaces: N/A

Purpose of the policy: To provide principles of evaluation that will help to ensure that the open access and e-resources projects MOBIUS sponsors will be beneficial, practical, and cost-effective to the consortium membership and strategic goals.

Content of the policy:

Introduction

The high price of access to academic content and increasing strain on library budgets have created a crisis in scholarly communication. As book, journal, and database prices increase, libraries are faced with the need to make cancellations. That, in turn, reduced publisher revenue, leading to higher prices for their materials. This is an example of what is known as a "negative feedback loop."

Both publishers and libraries have made attempts to curb this destructive cycle. Initiatives include paying for article processing charges in order to ensure Open Access down the road, direct funding for open publications, institutional repositories, incentives for faculty members choosing Open Educational Resources for their classes, and requirements that research funded by the Federal government be made available after publication.

Open Access is a crucial part of creating a more equitable system of disseminating research output, and is an important step in shifting the way that libraries pay for and provide access to content. It can mean different things to different publishers. In some cases, Open Access means free. In other situations, authors or their grants pay "page charges," after which the article is provided at no cost. Organizations such as the Fair Open Access Alliance have adopted *The Fair Open Access Principles* in order to help authors distinguish between reputable journals with page charges and predatory publishers who defraud authors.[1]

---

[1] Fair Open Access Alliance. *The Fair Open Access Principles*.
https://www.fairopenaccess.org/the-fair-open-access-principles/

Proposal

Facilitating the transition from traditional publishing models towards Open Access models requires community investment in the underlying infrastructure that makes Open Access publishing easier and more accessible to researchers. It also fits within the current MOBIUS strategic plan (Goal 3 Objective 5), which states that the organization will "continue exploring initiatives in open education and Open Access."

Funding Open Access initiatives is one way MOBIUS can get involved in and show support for the global Open Access movement and help facilitate the conversion of research to Open Access formats. According to *SPARC*:

> Researchers, scholars, and educators around the world have a tremendous stake in the success of the Open Agenda. Researchers publish in the hope their work will find the widest possible audience, seeking to maximize the impact of their research. Whether that impact means increased understanding, collaboration across borders and institutions, the ability to secure future funding, and/or career advancement, an Open approach to scholarship has myriad benefits for researchers . . . Further, educators and students can leverage an open approach to create customized education programs, using the latest relevant information to improve learning outcomes and make access to quality education more equitable and affordable.[2]

SPARC Europe has enumerated the following significant benefits for open resources:

- Researchers and their institutions benefit from having the widest possible audience.

- Research benefits when the latest techniques can be easily used.

- Breakthroughs often come from unexpected places.

- Funders invest in research to advance human knowledge and ultimately improve lives.[3]

---

[2] Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. *Why Open Matters*. SPARC.
https://sparcopen.org/why-open-matters/

[3] SPARC Europe. (2022). *Open Access Benefits*.
https://sparceurope.org/what-we-do/open-access/oa-benefits/

But how do we decide which projects are worthwhile to fund? The MOBIUS Electronic Resources Committee has reviewed projects funded by institutions[4] and developed a series of principles in order to guide the Board in ensuring that our budget is used in the most responsible and effective fashion possible. The E-Resources Committee recommends measures that should be evaluated as a whole in order to answer questions related to benefits, sustainability, reputation of the vendor or organization, alignment with MOBIUS strategic planning goals or objectives, and whether the project furthers the goals of Open Access movement.

The E-Resources Committee recommends that the following criteria be evaluated non-exclusively. They are not listed in a particular order, and none are more important than the others. These principles of evaluation will help to ensure that the projects MOBIUS sponsors will be beneficial, practical, and cost-effective.

<div align="center">

Recommended Criteria (in no particular order)

</div>

- *Benefit to membership as a whole or a significant portion of the membership.*

  - Open Access projects funded by the MOBIUS Board should benefit the membership at large. Responsible stewardship of organizational funding requires that more than just a few members benefit from these projects. While a "rubric" is difficult to formulate, it seems that the term "significant portion" should be broad enough to include many members while reaching across types of libraries and user communities. Thus, a poor project might only benefit public libraries or seminaries, while a good project would be helpful to public and academic libraries as well as seminaries.

- *Projects that have plans in place to ensure their sustainability.*

  - Open Access projects selected for funding by MOBIUS should be reviewed for sustainability to ensure, as best as possible, that access will be continued in the foreseeable future. This review should address:

    - Does the project have a specific plan for addressing sustainability?

---

[4] For example, *see* University of Kansas Libraries. (2002). *Open Access Initiatives @ The University of Kansas*. https://lib.ku.edu/services/scholarly-communication/oainitiatives. *See also*, *The Fair Open Access Principles*.

- How long has the model/project been in existence?

- How many libraries/consortia are currently contributing funding?

- How much of the funding activity is recent?

- Is a large percentage of the funding from grants, which might have a timer attached?

- How widely accepted is this model (does it have worldwide, national or localized support)?

- Review of the financial set up (do they file public reports, are they a nonprofit, etc.)

- Review of how the project is managed (do those running the project know what they are doing)

- *Projects that have been vetted or are respected within the communities they purport to support or within the MOBIUS membership.*

  - The project has a strong web presence that references partnerships, collaborations, or supportive statements.

  - There is evidence the project was referenced or promoted in relevant conferences, webinars, or published material.

  - Projects with an existing relationship with MOBIUS members will be strongly considered.

- Projects selected should be aligned to MOBIUS strategic planning goals and objectives as outlined in the most current version of the strategic plan. Doing so ensures that projects are furthering the mission and priorities of MOBIUS leadership and providing value to MOBIUS members, while also benefiting the larger community.

- *Quality of content being produced.*

  - Quality of content will be considered through a number of measures. Depending on the type of project, this could include an investigation and discussion of:

    - Content functionality (does it work? How does it work? Does the content appear in accessible format(s)?)

■ Overall reputability (is it well-made and/or well-edited? Is it from a well-regarded source and/or from an organization highly relevant to membership? Has the content been used or supported by other organizations similar to MOBIUS in the past?)

● *Potential impact on overall movement/ability to further goals of the movement.*

○ If investing money in a movement, we want to ensure the money MOBIUS donates will make a direct impact to the goals of the movement. How will our donation be used? What will our donation support? Are there tiers of donation that MOBIUS can select to see what impact the donation will have?

Conclusion

The cost of journal subscriptions has reached a critical level for many academic institutions. Without being able to afford published research, future endeavors are stymied. But yet we can't ask publishers to provide their products entirely free of charge. The system seems broken.

As noted by Alex Holcombe and Mark C. Wilson, "The problem of how the world should transition to Open Access is now urgent. Growth in subscription fees charged to libraries has continued rising even as open access has grown, and open access has its own costs."[5] But how do we make this transition? Many organizations request funding in order to support their Open Access initiatives.

The E-Resources Committee has determined a set of principles that MOBIUS should use in order to evaluate requests for donations. The committee recommends that only those proposals that meet the criteria denoted above be given funding. This will help ensure that the Board is a good steward of the organization's finances and that the projects MOBIUS sponsors will be beneficial, practical, and cost-effective for its members.

---

[5] Holcombe, Alex, and Wilson, Mark C. (2017). Fair Open Access: returning control of scholarly journals to their communities. *LSE Impact Blog*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/10/23 /fair-open-access-returning-control-of-scholarly-journals-to-their-communities/