

A National Open Access Policy for Taxpayer Funded Research: The Time is Now

Open Access Accelerates Research

Empowering scientists to openly share the results of their research, without delay and free of cost, is key to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Open access—the free and immediate sharing of research results—lets scientists build on each other’s work in real time. By making research available under open licenses and in machine readable formats, open access enables powerful text and data mining techniques and makes research AI-ready, accelerating discovery, fueling innovation, spurring economic growth—and improving lives. The United States needs a national open access policy to meet the challenges we now face.

What Would a National Open Access Policy Require?

A national open access policy would require that all articles, data, and code resulting from taxpayer-funded scientific research be made immediately and freely available online to the public in open and machine readable formats, and under a license that allows them to be freely shared and fully used.

How Would a National Open Access Policy Advance American Research?

Congress can end the needless delays that researchers, doctors, patients, students, entrepreneurs, and innovators currently face, and speed up scientific progress. Creating a national open access policy would make taxpayer-funded research more useful and increase our collective return on investment in science. Such a policy is also important to America’s leadership in science by bringing the U.S. to equal footing with governments around the world (including the European Commission, the UK, Canada, China, and Brazil) that have already established strong open access policies to promote their national innovation agendas.

The COVID-19 crisis has taught us that we cannot go back to science as usual, where articles are locked behind paywalls and data is stuck in silos. It is time for the United States to adopt a national open access policy that makes all taxpayer funded research articles—and the data that supports them—immediately open to all.

Why is a National Open Access Policy Needed?

U.S. taxpayers currently spend more than \$65 billion in taxpayer dollars per year on scientific research. Yet our current U.S. policy shuts scientists out of accessing much of this research for up to a year, because most articles are only available through expensive scientific journals. The current crisis highlights the costs of this delay.

When COVID-19 was first reported, researchers around the world immediately rushed to share scientific data, articles, and code related to the virus. This should be the norm for all science—it should not be kept locked behind glass that is only broken in case of emergency.

Providing immediate open access to all taxpayer-funded research would accelerate treatments and cures for diseases from cancer to diabetes to Alzheimer’s, and also pave the way for discoveries in agriculture, energy, and countless other sectors of the economy.