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EXPERT PANEL CALLS ON U.S. RESEARCH AGENCIES TO DEVELOP POLICIES FOR PROVIDING FREE PUBLIC ACCESS TO FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH RESULTS

Policies Should Protect Peer-Reviewed Publications While Ensuring Rapid Access

An expert panel of librarians, library scientists, publishers, and university academic leaders today called on federal agencies that fund research to develop and implement policies that ensure free public access to the results of the research they fund “as soon as possible after those results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal.”

The Scholarly Publishing Roundtable was convened last summer by the U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology, in collaboration with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Policymakers asked the group to examine the current state of scholarly publishing and seek consensus recommendations for expanding public access to scholarly journal articles.

The various communities represented in the Roundtable have been working to develop recommendations that would improve public access without curtailing the ability of the scientific publishing industry to publish peer-reviewed scientific articles.

The Roundtable’s recommendations, endorsed in full by the overwhelming majority of the panel (12 out of 14 members), “seek to balance the need for and potential of increased access to scholarly articles with the need to preserve the essential functions of the scholarly publishing enterprise,” according to the report.

“I want to commend the members of the Roundtable for reaching broad agreement on some very difficult issues,” said John Vaughn, executive vice president of the Association of American Universities, who chaired the group. “Our system of scientific publishing is an indispensable part of the scientific enterprise here and internationally. These recommendations ensure that we can maintain that system as it evolves and also ensure full and free public access to the results of research paid for by the American taxpayer.”

The Roundtable identified a set of principles viewed as essential to a robust scholarly publishing system, including the need to preserve peer review, the necessity of adaptable publishing business models, the benefits of broader public access, the importance of archiving, and the interoperability of online content.

In addition, the group affirmed the high value of the “version of record” for published articles and of all stakeholders’ contributions to sustaining the best possible system of scholarly publishing during a time of tremendous change and innovation.

To implement its core recommendation for public access, the Roundtable recommended the following:

* Agencies should work in full and open consultation with all stakeholders, as well as with OSTP, to develop their public access policies.

*Agencies should establish specific embargo periods between publication and public access.

*Policies should be guided by the need to foster interoperability.

*Every effort should be made to have the Version of Record as the version to which free access is provided.

*Government agencies should extend the reach of their public access policies through voluntary collaborations with non-governmental stakeholders.

*Policies should foster innovation in the research and educational use of scholarly publications.

*Government public access policies should address the need to resolve the challenges of long-term digital preservation.

*OSTP should establish a public access advisory committee to facilitate communication among government and nongovernment stakeholders.

In issuing its report, the Roundtable urged all interested parties to move forward, beyond “the too-often acrimonious” past debate over access issues towards a collaborative framework wherein federal funding agencies can build “an interdependent system of scholarly publishing that expands public access and enhances the broad, intelligent use of the results of federally funded research.”

The report, as well as a list of Roundtable members, member biographies, and the House Science and Technology Committee’s charge to the group, can be found at http://www.aau.edu/policy/scholarly_publishing_roundtable.aspx?id=6894.

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