



**The Open Access 2020 Initiative (OA2020) seeks to foster innovative forms of scholarly inquiry and enable faster and more impactful communication of results by transforming the way research is published and disseminated.**

We are a global alliance of academic and research organizations working to transform the current *subscription* publishing system, an obsolete legacy of the print era, to new *open access* publishing models that ensure articles are open and re-usable and that the costs associated with their dissemination are transparent and economically sustainable.

Counting participation by over 100 research organizations<sup>1</sup>, representing hundreds of institutions across five continents, OA2020 is coordinated as a global effort by the Max Planck Digital Library and supported by numerous national research councils, university rectors' conferences, national libraries, library consortia and individual research and teaching institutions.

Our vision is to finally and rapidly achieve the benefits of the open information environment conceived 15 years ago: **the advancement of science powered by the full potential of our digital environment and barrier-free access to knowledge.**

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### The problem

The bulk of scholarly articles are published according to a *paywall* system in which the latest research is only accessible to scholars whose institutions can afford to pay hefty subscription prices to publisher platforms. **Scholars write research articles for impact, not for money; limited access means limited impact.**

The research process is further hindered as copyright restrictions block researchers from freely interrogating published research in ways that are now possible with new digital technologies. **The paywall system obstructs the advancement of science.**

Over the past 20 years, many thoughtful strategies have been initiated to promote open access in scholarly publishing: funders have issued mandates to require open access publication of results; researchers have been prompted to deposit some version of their articles in an institutional or discipline repository; new open access journals and publishing initiatives have been established; and efforts aimed at replacing scholarly journals altogether have been undertaken. **Yet, roughly 85% of new research is published in journals that are still locked behind mounting paywalls.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://oa2020.org/mission/#eois>

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## Economic considerations

In addition to the hindering effect of the paywall system on the advancement of science, the economic impact for institutions is enormous, totaling **USD 10 Bn of their research money that is being drained by subscription expenditure annually**. Indeed, the scholarly publishing industry is characterized by a distinct lack of competition, making it a highly lucrative business for some publishers:

- 80% of the scholarly journal market share is held by a group of large commercial publishers who succeed in extracting profit margins in excess of 35%,
- Subscription pricing is opaque, widely based on an institution's historic print expenditure with a given publisher rather than on actual cost, and hidden behind non-disclosure agreements.
- In the past decade, subscription prices have risen by nearly 60% in contrast to ~16% inflation, putting unsustainable pressure on research budgets of academic institutions.

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## The OA2020 Approach

While we continue to work toward new, open forms of scholarly communication, the OA2020 Initiative addresses the failings of the subscription system head-on, adopting measures to transition the bulk of today's scholarly journals to open access publishing models.

Robust financial analyses<sup>2</sup> illustrate that the money currently spent on subscriptions is more than enough to cover the costs of a transition to open access publishing. While the average per-article cost to academic institutions under the subscription model amounts to ~USD 5000, empirical evidence<sup>3</sup> points to a conservative estimate of well under USD 2500 per article for open access publication. It is clear that transforming the underlying business model of today's scholarly journals is economically viable, and **academic institutions hold the leverage of their subscription expenditures to drive a swift transition**.

Supporters of the OA2020 Initiative pledge to systematically convert resources currently spent on journal subscriptions into funds to support sustainable, transparent, open access business models. It is the collective action of participating institutions and organizations, adopting diverse strategies to **divest of subscriptions and invest in open access**, that will upend the subscription system and enable barrier free access to knowledge.

Based on current world publication trends, transformative actions from a relatively small number of global research-intensive institutions would be sufficient to drive irreversible and large-scale transformation, but the involvement of institutions from every geographical and academic context are essential for creating a truly open and just information environment.

<sup>2</sup> Schimmer, R., Geschuhn, K. K., & Vogler, A. (2015). Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access. doi:10.17617/1.3.

<sup>3</sup> <https://treemaps.intact-project.org/>



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### Benefits of the OA2020 Transformation

Academic and research institutions will maximize the discoverability and impact of their institution's own research outputs and massively boost the research and learning potential of their students and faculty with access to the world's latest research.

Researchers will retain control over the copyright of their works, gain the ability to share and freely interrogate their latest research, and exercise freedom of choice in the publishing and dissemination services that best convey their results.

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### Potential impact of the OA2020 transformation

The scholarly communications landscape will be transformed by a wave of open access publishing; cost transparency will, in turn, foster healthy competition among publishing entities to control pricing and drive innovation in services that support the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century researchers.

While the OA2020 Initiative holds the promise of rapidly achieving open access on a large-scale in alignment with scholarly journal practices (author workflows, content aggregation, peer review, editorial oversight), the research life cycle is in continuous evolution. Potential savings liberated from the headlock of subscriptions can be used to support new research or repurposed to support the ongoing development of new services for researchers, scholarly publishing models and platforms.

We will all be empowered with unencumbered access to the latest findings, and the opportunity to share, collaborate and build on these, will accelerate the research process, drive innovation, stimulate new discoveries and propel scientific inquiry forward, to the great benefit of society.

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### Take action to drive the OA2020 transformation

All stakeholders in the scholarly communications workflow have a role to play in driving its transformation. The OA2020 Initiative highlights what academic and research organizations [and their libraries] must do to rise to this exciting challenge.

- ⇒ Sign the [Expression of Interest in the Large-Scale Implementation of Open Access to Scholarly Journals](#)<sup>4</sup> to show your support for making this transition for the sake of research.
- ⇒ Be part of the transformation, ensuring your institution takes steps to drive the transition and actively participates in the OA2020 Initiative. To learn more, [contact@oa2020.org](mailto:contact@oa2020.org) or visit <https://oa2020.org>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://oa2020.org/mission>