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## Open Policies 101

**What is an “open” policy?** Open policies promote the unfettered distribution and sharing of research outputs. These policies typically encompass both research articles that summarize the results of scientific and scholarly investigation (commonly known as “open access”) and the factual information from which research findings are derived, including datasets, software, and code (“open data”).

### **Why are research funders adopting open policies?**

The open sharing of research outputs benefits society by getting more information quickly and widely into the hands of researchers, practitioners, patients, students, and policy makers. This accelerates the pace of discovery, reduces information-sharing gaps, and encourages innovation. Ensuring that open sharing includes data and code has the additional benefit of promoting research reproducibility. This helps validate new findings and suggest ways to strengthen experiments for follow-on research. Research funders are adopting open policies because these policies align with their missions. Many funders have bold strategic goals, trying to tackle society’s most challenging problems. Open policies lower knowledge barriers and make it easier for interested parties to pursue promising investigative directions. These policies

lessen the likelihood that multiple research teams will be pursuing duplicative investigations in siloed environments. They decrease the potential for data miscalculation, misinterpretation, manipulation, and fraud by opening raw results up to the broader community. Getting more research outputs into the hands of more researchers with fewer barriers makes it easier for more scientists and scholars to do their jobs. This, in turn, makes it more likely that funders will attain their goals.

### **What basic elements might a funder policy include?**

A well-considered funder policy will explicitly contemplate how and when a funder expects its grant recipients to share research articles resulting from funding, as well as the underlying data, code, and software needed for independent verification of research results. Further, such a policy will detail expectations for how these materials can be reused, how costs associated with policy compliance will be borne, and the extent to which the funder will monitor policy compliance.

It is critical to note that funder policies need not adhere to a rigid ideology in order to be considered “truly open”. Funders can take a range of approaches to each of these issues. What matters most is affirming a commitment to the open sharing of research outputs

and underscoring this commitment's consistency with organizational values.

### **What are some of the common misconceptions about open policies?**

*Open policies are a hassle to administer.* There are a range of activities that funders can take to oversee open policies. At the low-touch end of the spectrum, funders can require grant recipients to document how they intend to comply. Depending on internal resources, some funders spot-check these plans, while other simply rely on the honor system. Other organizations take a more engaged approach, requiring proof of compliance from grant recipients and checking this against internal expectations and guidelines. Funders without open policies may view administration and compliance as daunting tasks. However, many organizations with open policies have initially implemented procedures that have a minimal impact on staffing and resources. As these funders went through several grant cycles, they adjusted their administrative activities to reflect what they have learned along the way. Funders also have created or leveraged current tools to help manage the policy and compliance.

*Open policies are a challenge to reconcile with privacy concerns.* Different disciplines have different data privacy considerations. These concerns are most common in subjects such as biomedicine; projects that involve human subjects may appear to fundamentally conflict with data sharing policies. However, many funding bodies, including the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, have adopted recommendations for de-identifying study participants. These procedures are commonly understood and accepted within the research community. Many funders allow grant applicants to apply for a waiver in the event that de-identification is either prohibitively expensive or renders the data meaningless. Such exceptions provide a mechanism for truly private data to be safeguarded while simultaneously placing the onus on the grant applicant to explain why his/her data cannot be openly shared.

*Open policies are an annoyance that have little relevance to the real world.* Policies that promote the open sharing of research outputs are changing the world. Philanthropic organizations fund research to advance human thought, to fuel breakthroughs, and to improve the way we interact with each other and our world. When that research is shared quickly and openly, it gets discussed, tested, validated,

and built upon. Open policies maximize return on investment by ensuring that the work a funder supports reaches the widest possible audience, with as few barriers to access and reuse as possible.

## Program Officers + Staff

### **An open policy is burdensome for staff to manage.**

Often administrators are concerned about how policy changes can create additional operations work for already busy staff. Policies often require, discussion within the institution, integrating into current workflows, and compliancy checks. However, after the initial work the benefits of the policy outweigh the upkeep. There are also tools being developed to help administrators more easily manage policies.

### **I am concerned about pushback from grant applicants.**

There is no evidence to suggest, drawing from the hundreds of funding bodies that have adopted open policies, that the quantity or quality of grant applicants has been adversely affected by these additional requirements. Every organization already places certain conditions on the projects it funds. Examples include periodic reporting, acknowledgement of funding support on public outputs, and biosecurity risk mitigation. The implementation of an open policy is an incremental additional to these terms and conditions. Many federal agencies and universities are adopting similar policies, which means that prospective grant applicants are becoming increasingly familiar with these types of requirements.

### **It is impossible to monitor open policy compliance and track impact.**

While tracking open policy can appear to be difficult, there is a growing support system to help alleviate this burden. Tools and technology are being created to easily and more effectively facilitate policy in the grant-making process. Policy does not have to be one size fits all - there is a spectrum of open access policies so that you can craft the policy that best fits for your institution. Please see the "How Open Is It?" Guide to Research Funders Policies for more information.



Greg Tananbaum  
Coordinator  
greg@orfg.org