

# Results of a PNAS author survey on an open access option for publication

There is considerable discussion in the scientific community about open access journals. In an open access model, articles are available without charge to the reader; the costs of publication are paid primarily by authors and funding agencies. The advantages of their model are obvious: immediate, unfettered release of scientific results to everyone, everywhere, without the delay and cost of obtaining research articles through journal subscriptions. The difficulties with open access are equally apparent. The majority of journals depend on subscription revenue, and that stream will dry up with open access. It is unknown whether authors will be willing to make up the entire amount of this lost income or will choose to publish instead in journals that do not assess these charges. Even if a journal decides that open access is a desirable end state, it is difficult to imagine a kinetic path that does not have financial deficits at intermediate stages.

Given the uncertainties about the business model and the paucity of experience with open access, PNAS conducted a survey to determine what fraction of our authors would be willing to pay a surcharge (in addition to current author-paid page and color charges) to make their articles freely available online at the time of publication and, if so, how much they would be willing to pay. Such an option would allow those who are committed to the principle of open access to publish in PNAS. Such a surcharge might help defray the cost of canceled subscriptions and related revenue, and of administering the author-pays option. This is particularly important for PNAS, which operates as a nonprofit, break-even operation and is not permitted to maintain contingency funds or capital reserves. It should also be clear that this option would simply accelerate the free availability of PNAS content, which is now accessible without cost immediately in 132 developing countries and worldwide 6 months after publication.

PNAS surveyed 610 corresponding authors of accepted papers from August 22 to October 30, 2003. We received 210

responses, a 34.4% response rate. Like our corresponding authors, roughly two-thirds of the respondents were from the United States. Almost exactly half of the respondents were in favor of the open access option. It was a surprise at this early stage of the discussion that so many would be willing to pay extra for open access. However, the vast majority of these, almost 80%, were willing to pay a surcharge of only \$500, about one-fourth of the amount that might be needed to cover journal operations without subscription income. Responses are tabulated below.

Would you be willing to pay a surcharge to make your PNAS article freely available online at the time of publication?

- Yes: 104 (49.5%)
- No: 106 (50.5%)

If yes, what is the maximum amount you would be willing to pay for open access to your work?

- \$500: 81 (79.4%)
- \$1,000: 15 (14.7%)
- \$1,500: 4 (3.9%)
- \$2,000: 2 (2.0%)

Below are the comments of a number of correspondents. We were struck by the wide range of opinions. Some authors will publish in PNAS only if we offer an open access option, whereas others will eschew PNAS if we do so.

- I fully endorse [an] open access policy for PNAS and for all the journals.
- The cost of publishing and subscribing to journals is already very high for scientist[s] in countries such as Australia. An additional cost to allow for open access to the PNAS will force me to direct my publications to journals that do not currently charge, despite their lower impact factor.
- As a government employee, I am generally able to provide immediate open access to my publications already.
- I think that this idea of charging authors to make scientific papers available for free is delusional. The vast majority of the members of the scientific community belong to institutions that subscribe to major journals. Sci-

entific papers are not medicines: normal people don't need them, don't read them, don't care for them. It would just put another constrain[t] on publications, limiting access to publish to those people in wealthy institutions.

- I think it would be ideal if open access was optional for authors. Having some papers not accessible may keep subscription levels high.
- We already pay page charges for publications in PNAS, so our grants in effect subsidize publication. An extra charge for online access is therefore acceptable. Such a charge should be applied uniformly, however, so that immediate availability is standard for all articles in PNAS. If you don't do this there will be a problem with equity and fairness between the haves and have nots or the simply tightfisted (presumably you will be able to deal with financial hardship cases on an individual basis).
- Thank you very much for considering an open access model. . . such a model will ultimately serve the best interests of the scientific community.
- Open access is an ok idea in principle, but most of my colleagues already have a subscription.
- [I have] no grant funds to afford this. [I would] rather submit to a journal that does not charge fees for investigators without a lot of support. Maybe such fees can be waived for those who cannot afford them.
- Should be available immediately after accepting galley proof.
- My support for this desirable option is thin, only because of financial constraints. . . . If the author is allowed to choose, my support grows.
- Expedite ASAP.

In deciding whether to experiment with an open access option, we will continue to weigh the comments and concerns of PNAS authors and readers, as well as the effect on our finances.

Nicholas R. Cozzarelli, *Editor-in-Chief*

Kenneth R. Fulton, *Publisher*

Diane M. Sullenberger,  
*Executive Editor*