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Summary

For the past year, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has been examining new ways to enhance public access to federally funded research. On September 3, NIH released a proposed plan to make research articles available to the public free of charge on PubMed Central (PMC) within six months after publication in a scientific journal. In addition to the library community, SPARC and other public interest groups, the Council of the National Academy of Sciences, 25 Nobel laureates, scores of patient advocacy groups, many higher education institutions and affiliated libraries have joined the growing chorus advocating enhanced access to biomedical information. These institutions and organizations strongly support the NIH proposal as this approach balances the public interest in having enhanced access to federally funded NIH research, while allowing publishers some market protections and the time to implement new economic publishing models.

Background

Current NIH Grants Policy states " It is NIH policy that the results and accomplishments of the activities that it funds should be made available to the public. PIs and grantee organizations are expected to make the results and accomplishments of their activities available to the research community and to the public at large...In all cases, NIH must be given royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license for the Federal government to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the material and to authorize others to do so for Federal purposes." The September 2 NIH proposal, "Enhanced Public Access to NIH Research Information, " (<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-04-064.html>) builds on this and other long standing NIH policies and notes that "establishing a comprehensive, searchable electronic resource of NIH funded research results and providing free access to all, is perhaps the most fundamental way to collect and disseminate this [biomedical] information." The September 2 NIH proposal also builds on recommendations of the Committee on Appropriations that have since been endorsed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The NIH proposal requests but does not mandate that all grantees and supported Principal Investigators provide NIH with electronic copies of all final version manuscripts once they are accepted for publication by a peer-reviewed journal if the research was supported in whole or in part by NIH funding. NIH will archive the final manuscript and any supplementary data in PMC. Six months after the NIH-funded research is published in a journal, or before if the publisher is willing, the manuscript will be publicly available via PMC.

The six-month embargo on release of the NIH-funded research results provides commercial and not-for-profit publishers significant protections against the possibility of lost subscription revenues. And some publishers are already making their published literature available following a limited embargo period. For example, the American

Society of Cell Biology (ASCB) indicates that its subscriptions increased after making its journal content freely available online just two months following publication. ASCB attributes this to the enhanced visibility and use of their published articles.

The NIH proposal is consonant with the growing movement to open access. For example:

- The UK House of Commons Science and Technology Committee called for higher education institutions to establish institutional repositories where published output can be freely available online and that government funders mandate their funded researchers deposit copies of articles in the institutional repositories.
- The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) has committed to providing up to \$3,000 per year to its investigators to support the costs of open access publishing.
- The Wellcome Trust also permitted the use of contingency funds for Trust-funded researchers to pay for open access publications costs.
- Public statements of support for open access include, among others, the Budapest Open Access Initiative; the Bethesda statement on Open Access Publishing; the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities; and the ARL Board of Directors endorsement of the Budapest Open Access Initiative in February 2002 and the endorsement of the five-year ARL action agenda with a focus on "open access to quality information in support of learning and scholarship" in October 2002.

Next Steps

There is an opportunity to comment on the NIH proposal <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-04-064.html> until November 16, 2004. ARL encourages all members to file comments on the NIH proposed public access initiative.