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# The Johns Hopkins Libraries open access promotion fund

## An open and shut case study

**J**ohns Hopkins University (JHU) is a private institution consisting of nine academic divisions: Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Whiting School of Engineering, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Carey Business School, Peabody Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, and the schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Education—plus the Applied Physics Laboratory, a nonacademic division. More than 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled in these nine schools.

JHU is a decentralized institution with no single faculty senate, academic council, or other body that meets to make decisions for the whole university. Four library systems are spread across these interconnected divisions: Sheridan Libraries & Museums, Welch Medical Library, Mason Library, and Friedheim Music Library. The libraries collaborate and have several committees and working groups to coordinate the services they share.

The JHU Libraries Scholarly Communications Group (SCG) is one of the libraries' cross-campus working groups. Founded by Welch Medical Library Director Nancy Roderer to promote open access (OA) publishing, SCG eventually grew to include librarians, staff, and professionals from the Welch Medical

Library, the Sheridan Libraries, the Mason Library, and the Johns Hopkins University Press. In addition to promoting OA, this group provides input on the use of collection development funds to support OA and other experiments in scholarly publishing. SCG also maintains two Lib-Guides on scholarly communication and metrics.

### Creating the fund

In spring 2012, Sheridan Libraries Dean Winston Tabb and Welch Medical Library Director Nancy Roderer each contributed \$25,000 and asked SCG to develop an OA subvention fund. Their aim was to encourage Hopkins authors to publish in OA journals. The coauthors of this article, volunteered to form the working group that researched, developed, and managed the fund.

We searched the literature and the web for guidance. The most useful document<sup>1</sup> was from SPARC, the results of a survey about subvention funds. The

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survey described eligibility, reimbursement levels, and progress for 17 North American institutions with such funds. We named the fund the JHU Libraries Open Access Promotion Fund (OAPF). The initial eligibility requirements are below, and they held through the first two years of the fund.

- *JHU affiliate.* At least one author on the article must be affiliated with JHU and listed in the JHU enterprise directory.

- *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).* We decided to use the DOAJ as an external registry of acceptable OA journals. To qualify for reimbursement, an article had to be immediately OA. Hybrid journals were not eligible for reimbursement.

- *No other available funds.* We asked authors with funding designated to cover publication costs, such as author fees from grants, contracts, or other institutional funds, to use those funds first and to allow others to benefit from the OAPF. All authors had to do was check a box to show they had no other funding. We discussed obtaining access to the JHU grants database to confirm this, but decided it would slow the process down too much. Researchers were on their honor here.

We decided this would be a reimbursement fund. We considered paying author fees up-front, but our financial unit convinced us that small payments to different journals or publishers would be inefficient. The unit could reimburse JHU employees and students, via JHU budget transfers, more easily and quickly. We therefore made it a requirement that a receipt for the Article Processing Charge (APC) payment must accompany the application for reimbursement. This was a tough decision. We understood this decision favored researchers who could pay the fee and wait for reimbursement. However, this process also meant that once an applicant was approved, reimbursement could take place immediately.

If we allowed authors to request funds before their manuscripts were accepted, the unpredictable length of peer review would require us to track obligated funds. We foresaw unpleasant scenarios whereby applicants submitting late in the year might be denied because of delays with previous applicants' manuscripts. Moreover, in this scenario authors would have to notify us of rejections so that we could then release the funds set aside for them. Our choice allowed for a straightforward workflow.

Following the lead of the other institutions in the SPARC document, we set the initial cap at \$3,000 per year per person and a cap of \$3,000 per article. With the assistance of our institutional repository manager, a copy of each article funded was deposited in JScholarship, JHU's institutional repository, no later than three months after receiving the award or three months post-publication.

A senior systems engineer at Welch Medical Library created an online submission form and database for us. The financial manager at Sheridan Libraries created and performed the actual reimbursement workflow. Applications to the OAPF were reviewed by the authors. If an applicant met the requirements, the application was approved and Robin Sinn initiated the reimbursement workflow and notified the applicant. If the requirements weren't met, Sinn would notify the applicant of the reasons for the denial. Sometimes all that was needed was a proper receipt. Other times applicants didn't meet all the requirements and couldn't be reimbursed.

## **Use of the OAPF**

### *Year 1 (2012–13)*

The OAPF was launched during the October 2012 Open Access Week. Blog posts at Welch Medical Library and Sheridan Libraries promoted the fund, and Welch Library also included an image in its homepage slideshow. Librarians and

informationists were asked to share information with their departments. An article<sup>2</sup> ran in the *Johns Hopkins University Gazette* in April 2013. The first award was made in November 2012, and by mid-June 2013, we had exhausted the fund.

#### *Year 2 (2013–14)*

For FY14, Tabb and Welch Interim Director Robert Gresehover provided a total of \$45,000 in funding. An additional \$27,000 was moved from the shared University Libraries' Collections budget into the OAPF, giving us \$72,000. The additional \$27,000 was available because PLOS ended their institutional membership program. Allotments were kept the same. Four pending applications from June 2013 were rolled over and funded from with FY14. Funds were exhausted by early June 2014.

#### *Year 3 (2014–15)*

Because the majority of authors in the previous two years were from the medical campus, Tabb withdrew his discretionary

funds from the OAPF. Welch Medical Library, under Director Anne Seymour, provided \$25,000, and the Sheridan Libraries collection budget provided \$27,000, giving the OAPF \$52,000 for the third year. This was \$20,000 less than Year 2. To make the money last longer, we agreed to set new limits. Caps were set at \$1,500 per article and \$1,500 per year per author. We requested that only students and early career faculty apply.

Despite these changes, we ran out of funds in early January 2015. In February 2015 we submitted a report to Tabb, Seymour, and the head of shared collections to decide what to do about the OAPF. The data from two-and-a-half years of activity was shared with

the group. Discussion ranged over a variety of topics, but the basic points were these:

- The OAPF is popular with JHU researchers.
- Researchers are excited to receive this support from the libraries, but if we keep closing the fund before the year is out we will tarnish the libraries' reputation.
- There was no room in the collections budget to operationalize the discretionary money from library administration.
- Money from the provost or president wasn't available.

### **Closing the OAPF**

With heavy hearts we decided to close the Open Access Promotion Fund. The announcements about running out of money were changed to announcements that the OAPF was closed, because the library didn't have the funding avail-

able to meet the demand. We offered advice on getting discounts from publishers and looking for alternative monies within the author's academic de-

partment or school.

Inquiries about the OAPF continue to trickle in. Most are from previous recipients or colleagues of previous recipients, verifying that the fund was closed. A few authors wrote asking for a letter—on JHU library letterhead—that the fund was closed and that no funds are available from the library or the university to help the author the APC. Some publishers require this letter for the author to qualify for a discount or waiver. A stock letter was quickly drafted and used four or five times.

### **Lessons learned**

We learned the following important lessons from our experience.

**OAPF by year**

Fiscal Year	Allotted	Disbursed	Number of Articles
Year 1	\$50,000	\$49,592	32
Year 2	\$72,000	\$72,796	43
Year 3	\$52,000	\$53,500	42
Total	\$174,000	\$175,888	117

- *Earlier conversations with university administration.* In STEM fields, OA journals and their APCs have become another budget demand on libraries that offer an OA fund. We, and the library administrators who supported the fund, had hoped that success would encourage JHU administration to financially support the fund. This didn't happen. In hindsight, the libraries should have had earlier conversations with university administration, detailing what we hoped they could provide.

- *Assumptions about grant money.* While we didn't check to make sure grant money wasn't available to pay APCs, we did require researchers to affirm a statement to that effect. We were surprised at the number of research projects undertaken with very little or no grant support for publication costs. JHU has for many years ranked as the top recipient of research money received from federal agencies,<sup>3</sup> which led to our assumption that all research here was externally funded. We now know better.

- *Reimbursement takes time to explain and to do.* We quickly learned to emphasize that the OAPF was a reimbursement fund. Many applicants thought the library would pay the publisher, and time was spent explaining the process to many individual researchers. We also learned to keep in close contact with our financial manager, particularly when the fund was close to depletion for the year. This enabled us to accurately predict a final depletion date and to communicate this fact to our potential fund applicants.

- *Promotion was actually easy.* The few blog posts<sup>4</sup> and slides we created were all we needed. Word of mouth proved to be our best promotional tool. After the first year we didn't spend much time promoting the fund.

- *Little interest from humanities researchers.* We learned there is little interest in OA publishing in the humanities at JHU. Those seeking funding from us were almost exclusively from STEM fields, especially the medical and public health disciplines. The lack of applications from humanities and

social science researchers surprised and dismayed us. We had hoped that a good portion of the funds would go to disciplines with less research money available to them. Our hope that these researchers would have an interest in publishing their research articles openly, without funder mandates, was overly optimistic.

## Conclusion

There is a growing interest in OA publishing, but that enthusiasm is not always matched by funds from either granting agencies or the university. We hope that future conversations with faculty and administrators will find a new way to move forward.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Eric Bechtel, Jack Chen, Liz Mengel, and David Reynolds for their assistance and support.

## Notes

1. SPARC, Open Access Funds in Action, updated 11/30/11, [www.sparc.arl.org/sites/default/files/fundsinaction.pdf](http://www.sparc.arl.org/sites/default/files/fundsinaction.pdf).

2. Victoria Scordato, "Aiding Authors in New Open Access Journal World," *Johns Hopkins University Gazette*, 42 no. 4 (2013), <http://hub.jhu.edu/gazette/2013/april/open-access-journal-world/>.

3. Dennis O'Shea, "Johns Hopkins Leads Nation in Research Spending for 36th Year in a Row," *Johns Hopkins University Hub*, <https://hub.jhu.edu/2015/12/09/research-funding-leader-nsf-survey/>.

4. Some blog posts advertising the OAPF: <http://blogs.library.jhu.edu/wordpress/2012/10/jhu-funding-for-open-access/>; <http://blogs.library.jhu.edu/wordpress/2013/02/jh-libraries-open-access-promotion-fund/>; <http://blogs.library.jhu.edu/wordpress/2013/10/update-open-access-promotion-fund/>; <http://blogs.library.jhu.edu/wordpress/2014/09/jh-libraries-open-access-promotion-fund-our-third-year/>; and <http://blogs.library.jhu.edu/wordpress/2014/10/open-access-happens-more-than-one-week-per-year/> ♪