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Open, Just, & Sustainable Project: April 2020 Report

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Open, Just, & Sustainable Project

April 2020 Report

Paige Mann¹

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Overview of the Open, Just, and Sustainable (OJS) Project

In an increasingly digital and open-access world, libraries and other scholar communities must reconsider what we mean by the term “value”. After World War II, the abundance that characterized higher education enrollments and funding made scholarly publishing profitable and associated a library’s value with the size of its collection (Fyfe et al, 2017; Dempsey, 2017). In the latter decades of the 20th century, the austerity that characterized funding in higher education prompted the serials crisis, publisher mergers and acquisitions, and Big Deals (Fyfe et al, 2017). As a consequence, value grew to include cost considerations.

In recent years, the open access (OA) movement and sites such as SciHub and Research Gate have been working to uncouple access to scholarship from wealth and academic connections. This has disrupted the traditional value propositions of publishers and libraries alike, and prompted communities to consider research visibility, use, and impact when communicating value. Most recently, dominant publishers (e.g., Elsevier, Wiley) and publisher-adjacent corporations (e.g., Clarivate, Digital Science) have been leveraging platforms to extract behavioral data. Already in the business of using their data to rank publications and institutions, corporations can leverage behavioral data to further entrench themselves in hiring and funding decisions as well as teaching and learning practices (Chen et al., 2019; Aspesi et al, 2019). With this in mind, libraries must reexamine the value they seek from vendors, and re-envision the value they provide to their parent institutions.

To help SCEL member libraries with these complex opportunities, the Open, Just, and Sustainable (OJS) Project seeks to inform SCEL discussions, analysis, and strategies. It is an independent, action research project being conducted by a SCEL member librarian.

What is Action Research?

Informed by Kemmis et al. (2014), action research as understood in the OJS Project is a practice-changing practice (p. 27). In this way, action research purposely distances itself from traditional notions of research by intentionally empowering insiders to change their practices to be “more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive” (p. 3). Kemmis et al. (2014, p.22) explain that action research aims to help participants work together to make their individual and collective practices

- more *rational* in the senses of being more reasonable, more comprehensible, more coherent, and more sensible;
- more *sustainable* (including for the long term and for future generations) in the sense that they are more productive, more satisfying, and less wasteful; and
- more *just* in the sense that they are more inclusive, more solidary (fostering solidarity), that they avoid the injustices of domination and oppression... and they do not cause harm to or suffering among particular individuals or groups.

How to Use This Report

As an action research project, OJS is intended to foster community engagement, critical reflection, and concrete actions. SCELCL member librarians are encouraged to discuss the report with colleagues and share individual and collective responses with the author and/or SCELCL representatives. See *Recommendations*.

An Analysis of SCELCL

The SCELCL website and publicly available documents were used to analyze the organization. The Statewide California Electronic Libraries Consortium (SCELCL) is a coalition of 113 member libraries and 225 affiliate libraries located across the United States and largely concentrated in California.² As of April 2019, there were a total of 338 libraries. Members are non-profit, private, academic or research libraries with a physical or virtual collection and staffed by a professional librarian. Affiliate libraries are ineligible for membership, have a research or educational mission, are not classified as a 501(c)(4), and may participate in some SCELCL negotiated packages by paying an additional fee. The OJS Project focuses on SCELCL's member institutions of which about one-half are general academic institutions, one-third are special focus academic institutions, and one-sixth are research institutions and hospitals.

As laid out in the SCELCL Board of Directors Handbook (2018), SCELCL is governed by its Board of Directors, managed by the SCELCL staff, and led jointly by the Board and Executive Director (p. 23-24). The Board's role is that of "policy maker" while the executive staff's role is that of "administrator and implementer". With a philosophy of "govern more, manage

less," the Board is responsible for "speak[ing] with one voice... formulat[ing] policies that make its goals and criteria clear to the staff... [and] setting clear boundaries for staff" so that the staff may "rely on the board... provide policy guidance... manage day-to-day activities... [and] prepare plans that will be approveable." Furthermore, the Board is expected to benefit the organization by being "strong," "committed," and "energetic" (p.14).

SCELCL's vision, mission, and values statements (SCELCL, 2015) center on collaborative practices between libraries, SCELCL, and third parties to foster the acquisition, delivery, and use of information resources and services. SCELCL's Board of Directors is explicitly

"THE COLLECTIVE EXPENDITURE OF SCELCL LIBRARIES ON ELECTRONIC JOURNAL PACKAGES FROM SOME OF THE MAJOR PUBLISHERS EXCEEDS AGGREGATE EXPENDITURES OF THE STATE SYSTEM."

² Data from <http://bit.ly/scelclites> as of April 2019.

tasked with keeping the organization focused on its mission³ to “foster innovation and collaboration in the acquisition and effective use of library resources and services.” However, this mission is becoming increasingly challenging in a digital world with limited government oversight over scholarly goods that are non-substitutable⁴, non-rival⁵, infinitely expandable⁶, priced according to reputation and prestige, and maintain inelastic demand.

In 2019 the University of California terminated negotiations with Elsevier citing higher costs, limited author support, and temporary rather than perpetual access to entitlements.⁷ Later that year, SCELIC posted *An Open Letter from the SCELIC Board of Directors*.⁸ The letter communicated that the SCELIC Board fully supported the University of California's decision to suspend negotiations with Elsevier until more agreeable terms could be reached. The open letter was provocative in its invitation to academic library consortia in the state of California to join forces to advance sustainable models of open access:

California is in a unique position. As the world's fifth largest economy... the state is poised to lead the way to new models of publication and support for research... In California, SCELIC libraries represent nearly all academic institutions that are not part of a state system, and the collective expenditure of SCELIC libraries on electronic journal packages from some of the major publishers exceeds aggregate expenditures of the state system.

SCELIC's Handbook further states that

As of this writing (in 2018) SCELIC licensing revenue is among the top five in the United States, and in California the cumulative dollar value of SCELIC licensing nearly matches that of the UC system, and far exceeds that of the CSU or other California consortia. (SCELIC, 2018, p. 7)

The open letter asserts that SCELIC's role is to build on its “excellent relationships with our publishing partners... [to] create mutually beneficially arrangements... transform unsustainable subscription models... [and] transcend our differences” through “honest negotiation and collaboration.” Yet despite the many benefits reaped from the

³ This mission, based on a print-based world exemplifies what Lorcan Dempsey (2017) refers to as an Outside-In collections model “where the library is buying or licensing materials from external providers and making them accessible to a local audience.”

⁴ Scholarly goods are inherently unique making it difficult, if not impossible, to replace one good for another.

⁵ Digital goods are inherently nonrival in that multiple people can access or use the good without having to compete for it.

⁶ Infinite expandability refers to production costs remaining relatively stable whether producing one or many goods (Quah, 2003, p. 13-16)

⁷ <https://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/uc-publisher-relationships/uc-and-elsevier/>

⁸ <https://www.scelic.org/about/news/press-releases/SCELIC-Supports-the-University-of-California%27s-Push-for-Open-Access-to-Research>

organization's strong relationships with publishers, libraries have to consider the costs associated with operating in an oligopoly. Costs include concentrations of content amongst a handful of publishers, obscene profit margins, and resulting pressures placed on society publishers (Larivière, 2015; Beverungen et al., 2012; Clarke, 2020; Jones, 2020). In turn, this raises concerns about whether striving for “mutually beneficial arrangements” with publishing oligopolists is realistic or desired.

SCELC and Open, Just, and Sustainable

The SCELC staff are supported by seven⁹ advisory committees. Generally speaking, each committee works in isolation from one another, yet are connected centrally through the SCELC office. To distinguish their functions and discern potential collaborations, each committee's roles and responsibilities have been interpreted in Table 1 (SCELC, 2018, p. 7, 30-35).

Although responsibility for OA is not exclusive to the Scholarly Communications (SCC) Committee, the SCC is the only committee whose responsibilities explicitly include open access (OA) and a call to “leverage changes in the scholarly communication system” (p. 33). This is a formidable charge for any committee and may be particularly so for the SCC as a structural

“THIS IS A FORMIDABLE CHARGE FOR ANY COMMITTEE AND MAY BE PARTICULARLY SO FOR THE SCC AS A STRUCTURAL OUTLIER OF THE ORGANIZATION IT IS TASKED TO INFLUENCE.”

outlier of the organization it is tasked to influence. SCELC's core purpose “is the identification, negotiation for and licensing of electronic resources (products)” (SCELC, 2018, p. 47). SCELC documentation highlights an emphasis on vendor products, services, and invoice-based workflows. However, this focus may be too narrow and may benefit from expanding to include vendors and their business practices, the creation of products and services (e.g., publishing), and workflows that support open and nonprofit entities whose financial operations may not rely on billing practices. Scholarly communication practices are also omitted from SCELC's mission, vision, and value statements; strategic plans; and Handbook. Explicit mention of scholarly communication practices may be necessary with an understanding that open, just, and sustainable practices are foundations of such practices.¹⁰

⁹ An eighth advisory committee, the Collaborative Collections Steering Committee (CCSC), was recently created but not included in the Board Handbook. Since comparable information (e.g., size) is not publicly available for this committee, the CCSC will not be included in this report.

¹⁰ See the Association of College & Research Libraries 2019 publication, *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future* at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/booksanddigitalresources/digital/oesc>.

Table 1. Comparison of SCEL C Advisory Committees¹¹

	Functional Role	Intra-Organizational Bridges	Size	Key Responsibilities
PRC – Product Review	Consultative Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), Licensing Programs Manager (ex-officio), Director of Licensing Services (SCEL C staff liaison)	≥ 9	assists Board; evaluates products; advises Director of Licensing Service
PPDC – Program and Professional Development	Organizational Learning Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), Database & eBooks Manager (SCEL C staff liaison)	≥ 7	plans professional development programming; funds member librarian research and professional development
LAC – License Review	Reviewing Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), Director of Licensing Services (ex-officio), eJournal Relations Manager (ex-officio), Licensing Programs Manager (SCEL C staff liaison),	≥ 5	assists Board; assists licensing operations staff on license agreements
MarCom – Marketing and Communications	Communicating Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), Library Relations Manager (SCEL C staff liaison)	≥ 6	assists Board; advises Library Relations Manager and Executive Director; markets initiatives and news both internally and externally
SCC – Scholarly Communication	Scouting Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), Library Relations Manager (SCEL C staff liaison)	≤ 18	advises SCEL C staff on scholarly communication, changes in collection development practices, and potential impacts on SCEL C; communicates with members
RSC – Resource Sharing	Resource Sharing Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), eJournal Relations Manager (SCEL C staff liaison), SPC liaison(s). RSC membership is limited to participating institutions.	6-12	assists Board; recommends and facilitates initiatives; communicates with members; collaborates with SPC
SPC – Shared Print	Resource Sharing Body	Executive Director (ex-officio), other ex-officio members to be determined by the Board, RSC liaison. SPC membership is limited to participating institutions.	≤ 11	leads SP program; advises Board; maintains channels with similar groups

¹¹ Information was drawn from the Board Handbook. To better reflect current practice, *Intra-Organizational Bridges* blends information from the Board Handbook and Advisory Committee web pages on the SCEL C website (as of 4/8/20).

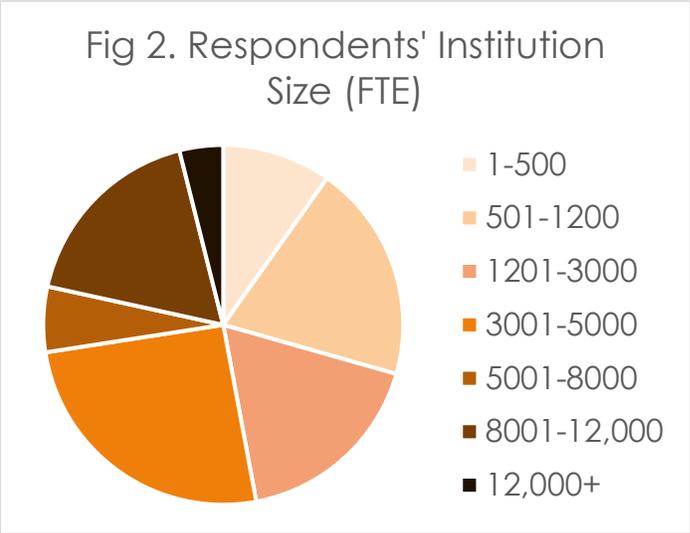
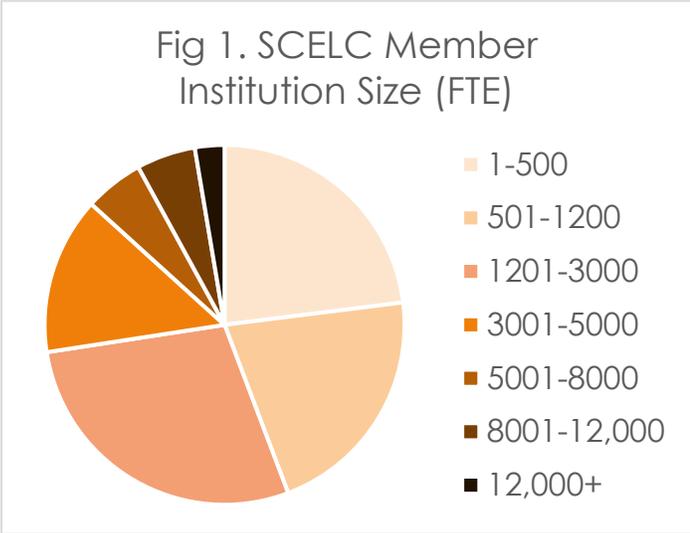
With foresight, the Board Handbook uniquely grants the SCC the ability to “request the creation of sub-committees and task forces” and the authority to “represent SCELCL’s interest in various scholarly communication listservs, conferences,” and “plan, market, and execute SCELCL-branded events in keeping with its Purpose.” While these abilities are certainly not exclusive to the SCC, this signals potential growth and organizational change.

SCELCL Member Survey

To capture perspectives from SCELCL member librarians, the author used SCELCL member listservs to invite librarians to complete a survey between December 2019 – January 2020 (see Appendix A). The invitation encouraged all librarians to participate in order capture a diversity of views across SCELCL and various demographics. Instead, demographic data revealed that of the 51 responses received, 49-50 of them came from unique institutions. Three responses came from doctoral institutions in the state of California with a user FTE between 8001-12,000 and 12 FTE librarians. Since there are only two SCELCL institutions that fit this profile, at least two of the three responses came from the same institution. Thus, the data provides a broad snapshot of librarian perspectives from 43-44% of member institutions.¹²

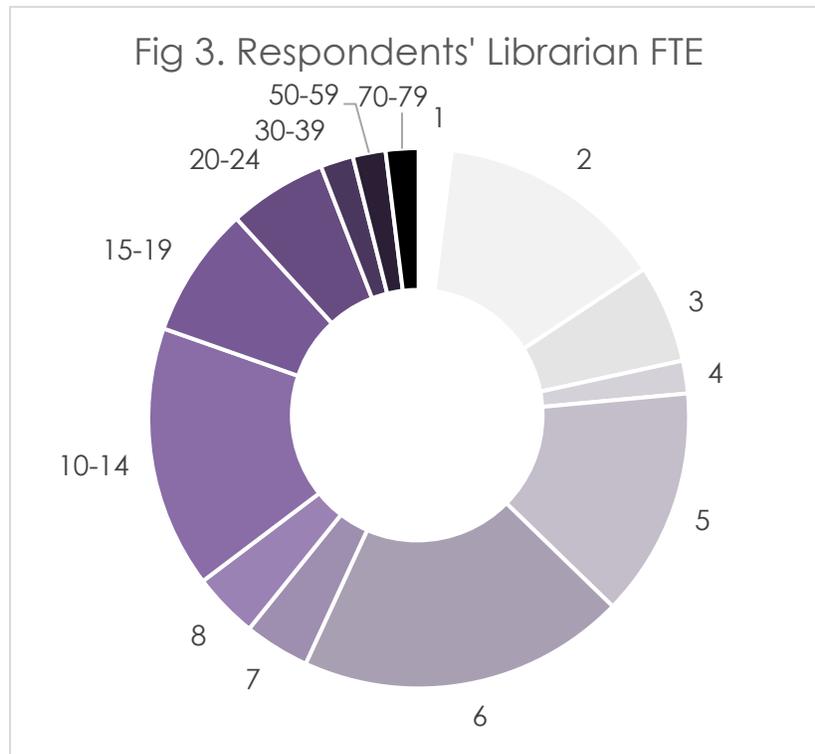
Demographics of Respondent Institutions

86.3% of respondents came from institutions located in California while 13.7% came from institutions outside California. This corresponds with SCELCL member libraries where 86.7% are located in California and 13.3% are located outside the state.



¹² Institutional representation is imprecise because the survey instrument did not ask respondents to identify their institution. This was purposely excluded from the survey instrument to protect respondents' identities since it is not uncommon for member libraries to employ a solo librarian.

Figures 1 and 2 compare respondent institutions against SCEL C member institutions. They show that SCEL C's smallest members were underrepresented in survey responses while libraries with an FTE of 3001-5000 and 8001-12,000 were overrepresented. Figure 3 shows the number of librarians (FTE) employed at respondent institutions and call attention to the constraints under which many SCEL C libraries operate.¹³ Figures 4 and 5 show that baccalaureate and doctoral institutions were overrepresented in the survey data while masters, special focus, and unclassified (research and hospital) institutions were underrepresented.



¹³ FTE fractions were rounded down such that a librarian FTE of 3.75 was grouped with a librarian FTE of 3 and 3.5. This was decided for two reasons. First, rounding up erroneously gives readers the impression that SCEL C libraries have larger staffs. Second, since higher salaries and benefits are usually withheld from part-time employees, it made little sense to treat part-time employees as full-time employees in this report.

Fig 4. SCEL C Member Carnegie Classification

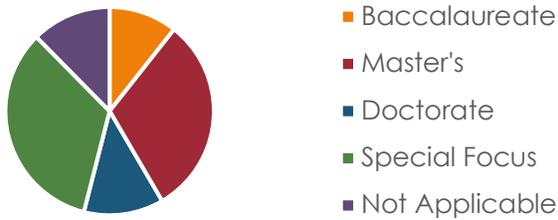
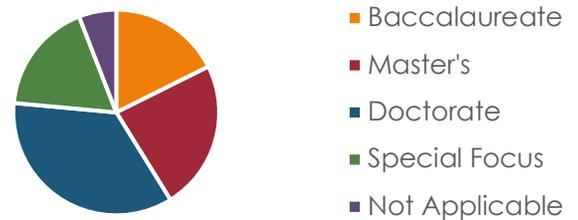


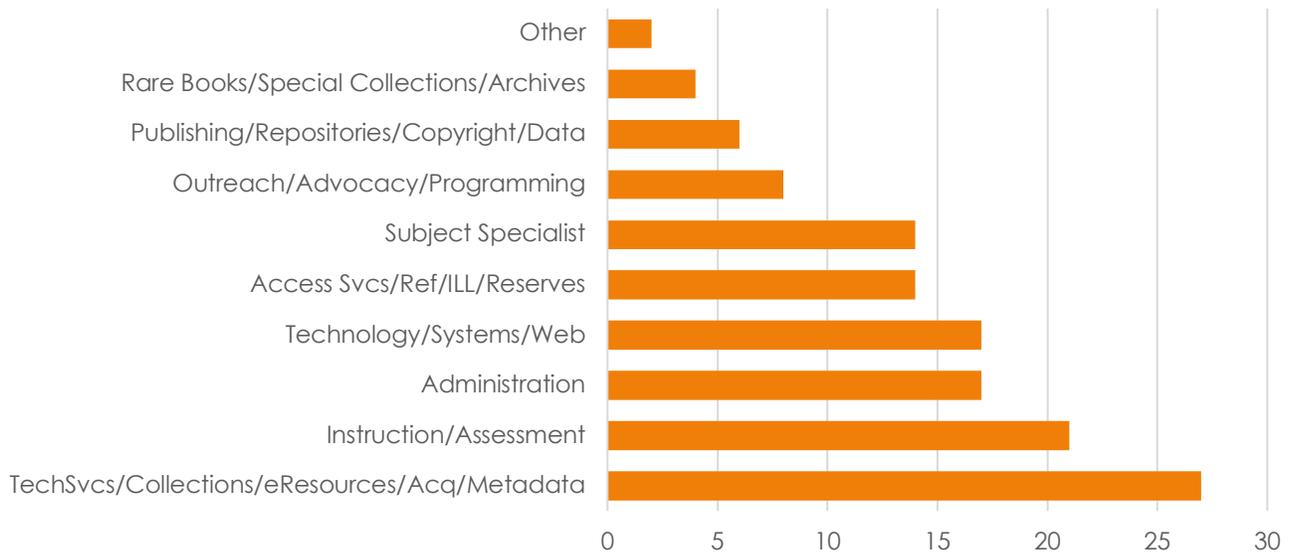
Fig 5. Respondents' Institutional Carnegie Classification



Demographics of Respondents

To help determine respondent engagement with SCEL C, respondents were asked whether they currently serve on a SCEL C committee or had done so in the past ten years. 21 respondents (41.2%) replied in the affirmative, and 30 (58.8%) replied in the negative. To help determine the diversity of perspectives, respondents were asked to identify their primary areas of responsibility. Figure 6 shows that just over half of the respondents have primary responsibilities with technical services, collections, electronic resources, acquisitions, and/or metadata. This is not surprising since the survey was sent through existing SCEL C channels often used for SCEL C-related business. About 40% of respondents have primary responsibilities with instruction and/or assessment. One-third of respondents have administrative responsibilities, and one-third of respondents have primary responsibilities in technology, systems, and/or web.

Fig 6. Respondents' Areas of Responsibility



Respondent Perspectives

To understand where librarians stood on certain issues, respondents were asked three things. First, respondents were asked to read brief excerpts from SCELIC's Open Letter and from ALA's October 2019 report, *Competition in Digital Markets*¹⁴. Second, respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statements provided (Figure 7). Last, respondents were asked to prioritize one option above another (Figures 8a-c) which revealed conflicting views across the board.

Taken together, what is clear is that there is widespread support to have SCELIC use its financial position, size, and diversity to prioritize cost savings for its members, and that equity is broadly understood to apply to smaller member institutions that have fewer resources. While there is also wide agreement that APCs create inequities, there was less unity behind SCELIC working to reduce inequities, promote OA, and address our growing dependence on corporations. Kennison et al. (2019, p. 7) found similar results stating that while "philosophical support for OA was strong among focus group participants, in practice OA content was considered by almost everyone as a supplemental 'nice to have' rather than as core to the collection."

Budget concerns are likely behind lukewarm support for OA. In her 2019 Charleston panel presentation Evans (2019, November) stated, "Across the board, cost control is the number one priority. OA is very desirable as a philosophical goal but primarily as a mechanism to get cost control." In fact, S8 "Open access threatens the ability of libraries to justify their costs" elicited very different responses from participants with one-third in disagreement, nearly one-quarter in agreement, 20% having no opinion or answer, 18% in strong disagreement, and 6% in strong agreement. This is explored further in the section *When Practices and Norms are Disrupted*.

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<http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/mediapresscenter/CompetitionDigitalMarkets.pdf>

Fig 7. How strongly do you agree?

S1. Article processing charges (APCs) or pay-to-play creates inequities between consumer- and producer-heavy institutions (e.g., teaching- vs. research-intensive institutions).



S2. APCs or pay-to-play creates global inequities in scholarly publishing.



S3. SCEL C's financial position carries responsibilities to reduce global inequities.



S4. SCEL C's financial position carries responsibilities to prioritize members' needs.



S5. SCEL C's financial position carries responsibilities to promote open access publishing models.



S6. SCEL C libraries must address our increasing dependence on corporations to fulfill our missions.



S7. SCEL C libraries must address our parent institutions' increasing dependence on corporations to fulfill our missions.



S8. Open access threatens the ability of libraries to justify their costs.



S9. SCEL C must continue to prioritize cost savings to libraries.



S10. SCEL C's size and diversity of members carries responsibilities to advocate for open access models that are equitable and just to smaller, lesser-resourced institutions.



■ Strongly agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 No opinion
 ■ I don't know

Fig 8a. Which is the Higher Priority?

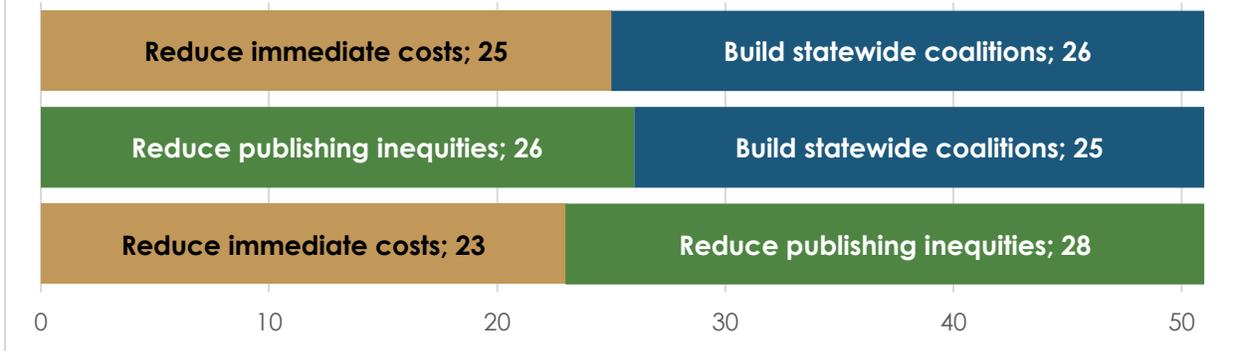


Fig 8b. Which is the Higher Priority?

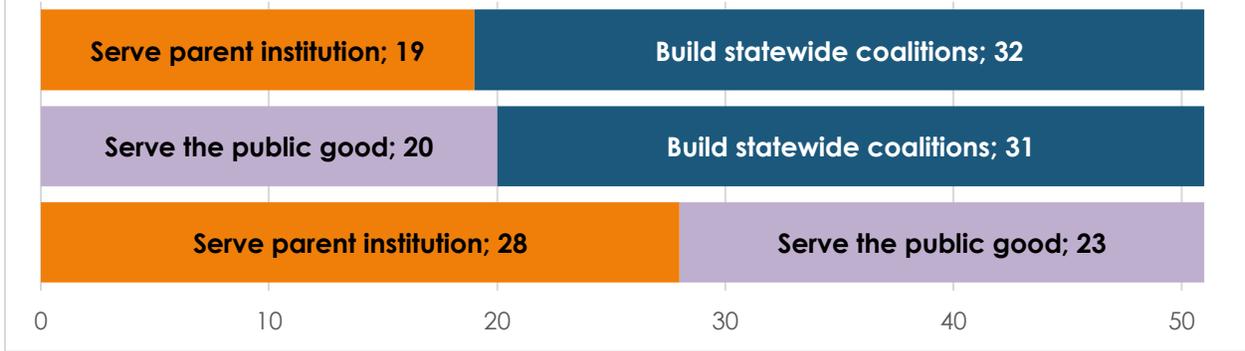
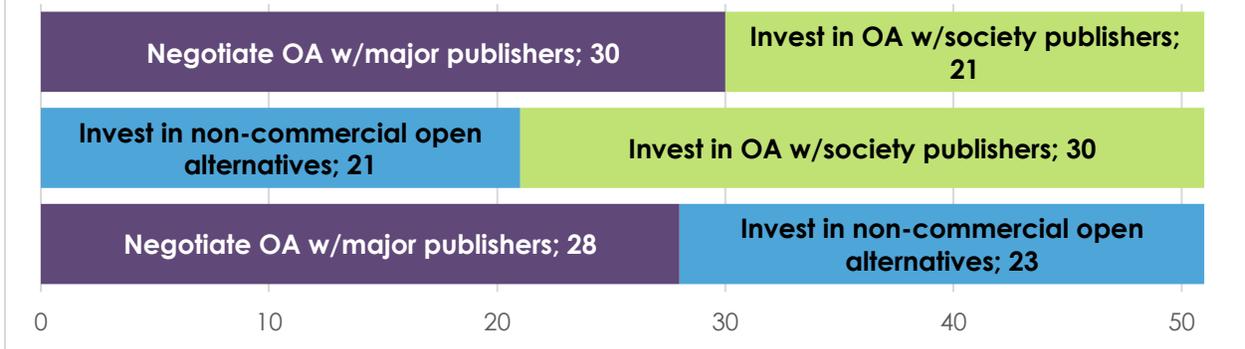
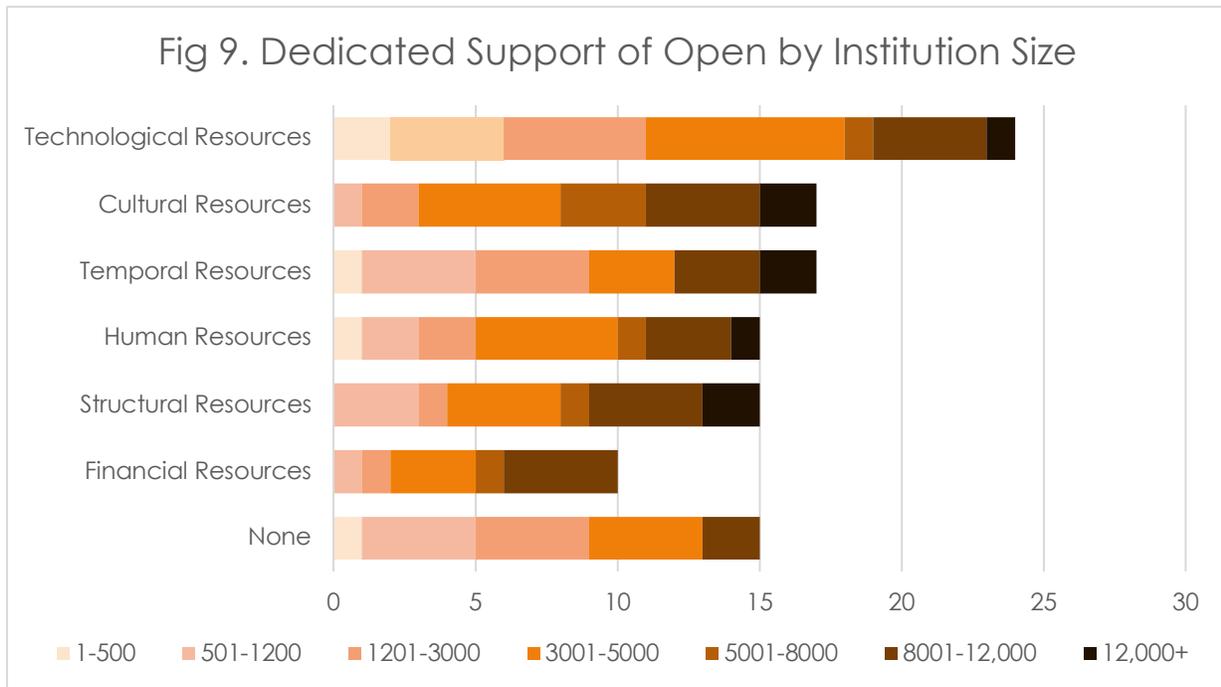


Fig 8c. Which is the Higher Priority?



Active Support of Open

Participants were also asked to share how their institutions were actively supporting¹⁵ Open (e.g., open access, open infrastructure) (Figures 9 and 10).



Respondents were also asked whether they might support an additional SCEL C fee to advance Open in addition to their annual \$750 membership fee (Figures 11-13). Of the 15 respondents who had previously shared that their institutions provided no active support for Open, one-fourth of these respondents supported paying no additional fee, two supported an additional \$5, another two supported an additional \$50, six supported an additional \$100, and one supported an additional \$250.

¹⁵ Support through technological resources could include software; support through temporal resources could refer to staff workflows or other investments of time; support through structural resources might be seen in policies or planning documents; and support through cultural resources might include support for professional development or advocacy work.

Fig 10. Dedicated Areas of Support for Open by Carnegie Classification

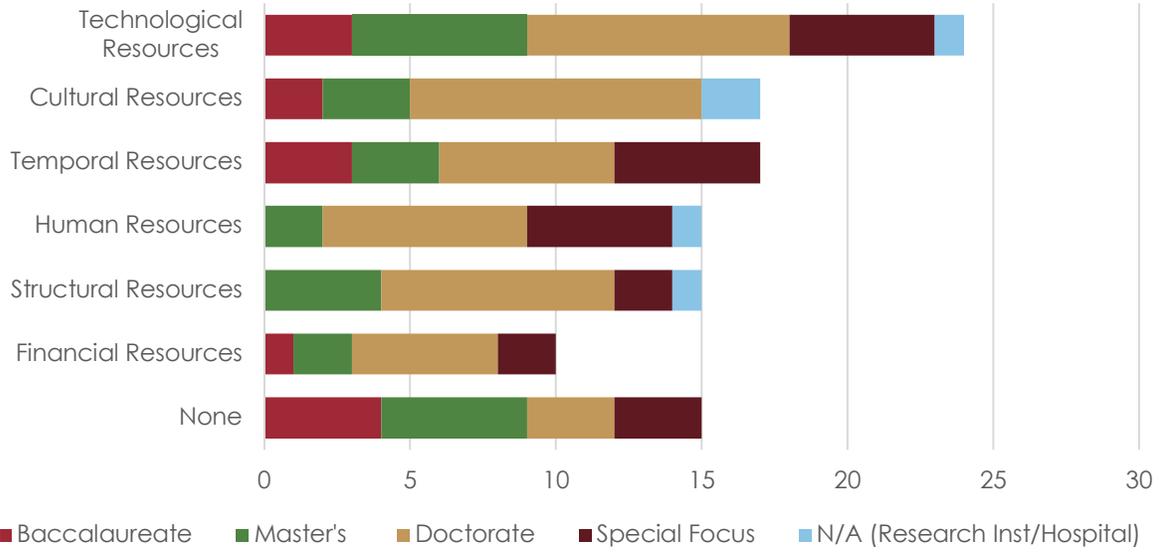


Fig 11. Support for SCEL Open Fees by Institution Size

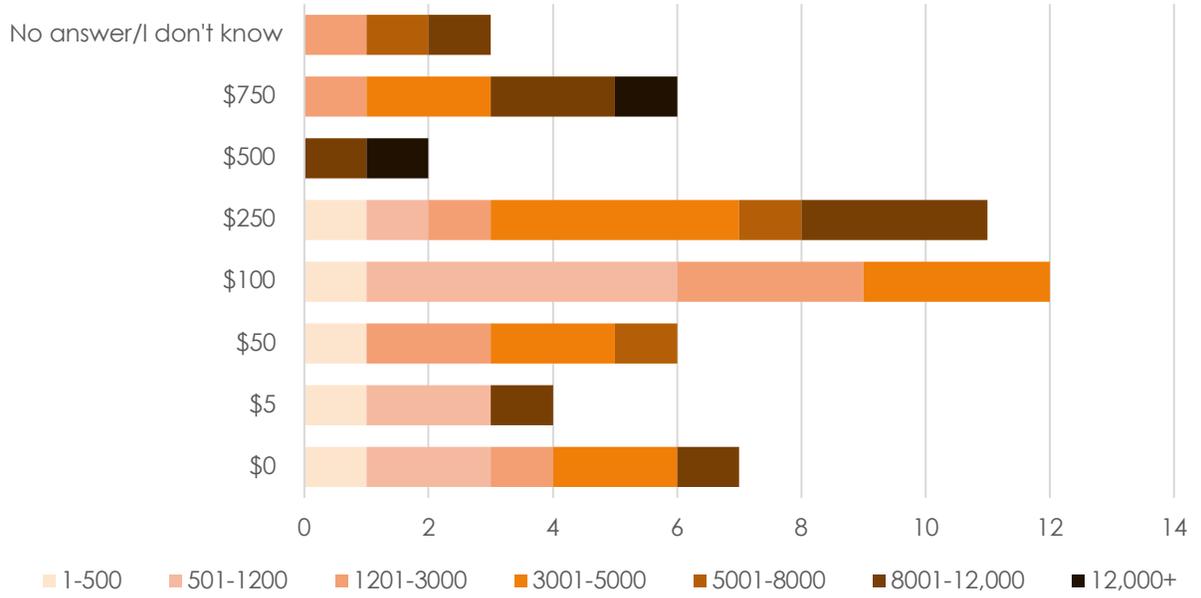


Fig 12. Support for SCEL Open Fees by Carnegie Classification

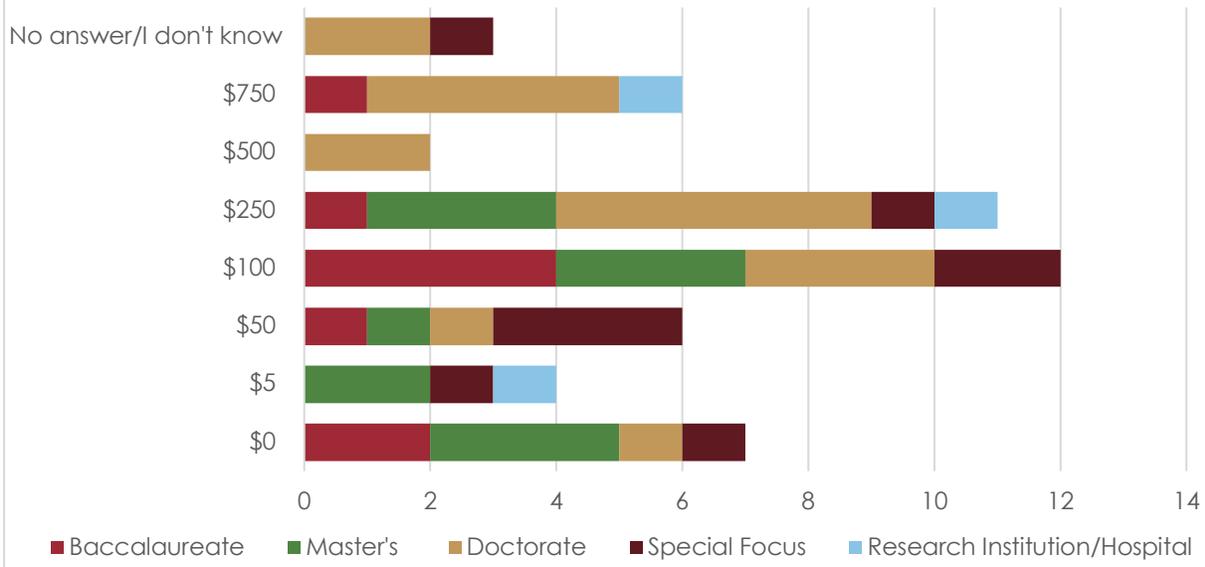
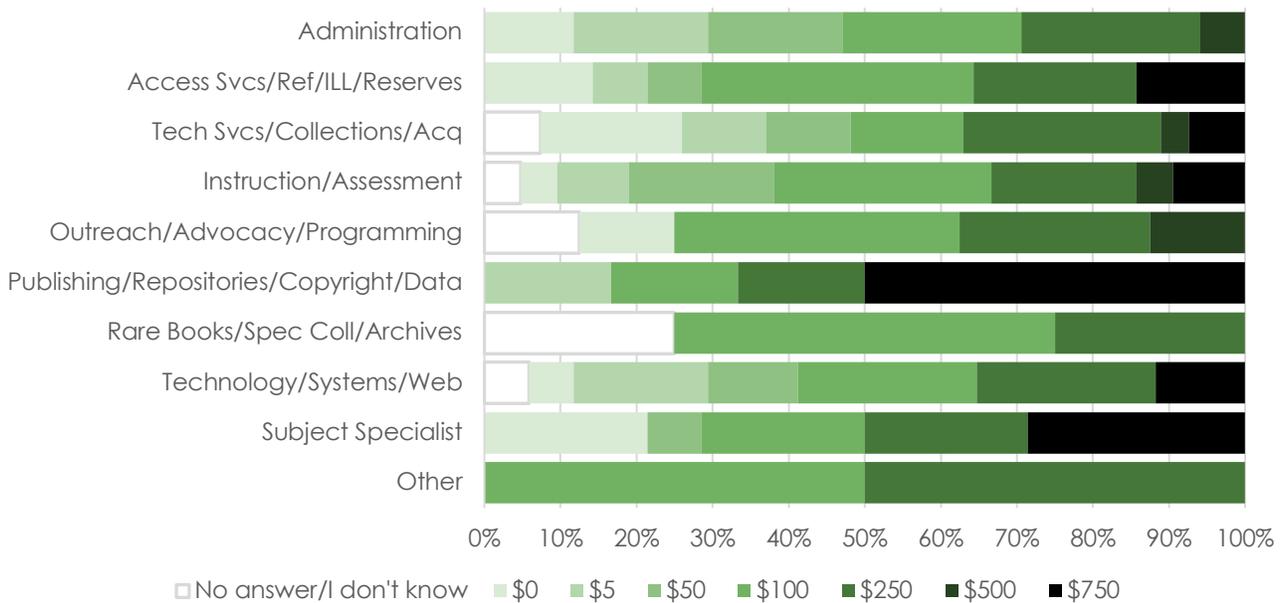


Fig 13. Support for SCEL Open Fees by Areas of Responsibility



Enabling Support of Open

Librarians were asked to speak to those factors that enable current institutional support of Open and factors needed to further the support of Open. Response rates for these questions were abnormally high.

What factors enable current support of Open by your library or institution?

Out of the 34 responses (65% response rate), faculty support and support from within the library were the most highly cited factors (1 in 4). Curiously respondents only cited one of these factors, but never both. Conversely, whenever campus administrative support was cited, faculty support was also cited. These were also the only times that policies or mandates were mentioned.

Responses included

"Prioritization of digital initiatives within our archives department. Desire to increase discoverability and open access to institutional content."

"Our dean has prioritized Open as a model for our library going forward."

"support from university administration and interest/engagement in Open by faculty members"

Not surprisingly, 1 in 4 responses expressed concerns over costs and access.

"The large embargoes on the major databases require us to subscribe to individual journals. Open access would help with some of those subscriptions."

"Ideological support of open source/access. Lack of funds to pay for expensive closed alternatives. Lack of funds to pay for subscription databases, thus forcing us to rely on OA resources."

1 in 5 respondents cited the values or interests of individuals.

"Our librarians value critical engagement with issues of social justice and inequity across the information landscape, so from this perspective Open Access is an important part of the vision for a healthy, informed society that we are working toward. As academic faculty, we have flexibility to keep ourselves informed about developments, inform faculty in our capacity as subject liaisons, and inform students in our role as teachers."

"Staff interest and professional development opportunities"

These comments underscore the potential value of events organized by the PPDC and SCC. Unfortunately, older materials (e.g., recorded webinars) are difficult to find and access.

A few responses indicate library reliance on vendors to support Open.

"We have an institutional repository to share graduate dissertations and theses."

“Current vendors, such as OCLC and JSTOR who bring open access resources to us. We have not been able to actively support Open with our own initiative yet.”

Other respondents attributed other factors that enabled their support.

“Grants from major funders for APCs paid by the institution.”

“Fairly stable budget and faculty support for library's activities.”

One respondent whose library provides no dedicated support to Open provided other ways that their library supported classroom equity weighed against sustainability concerns.

“We don't currently have a program in place but we do our best to purchase materials for classes such as DVDs, e-books, etc. We do not purchase textbooks because of the cost and it's not sustainable to purchase new texts every year.”

What do you, your library, or your institution need to further your support of Open?

36 out of 51 respondents answered this question for a response rate of 71%.

Unsurprisingly, respondents cited institutional engagement and support as their top need with a few mentioning institutional policies.

“I THINK THERE ARE MASSIVE BENEFITS TO BE REALIZED IF WE ALL BAND TOGETHER ON THE SAME PLATFORM AND SHARE RESOURCES.”

“Advocate for faculty to add their articles to our institutional repository, per our campus policy in support of open access. Many faculty still opt-out of adding their articles to our institutional repository that is open access.”

“A university-wide advocacy among faculty; a directive or policy issued from the Provost in collaboration with the Faculty Senate”

“My faculty are mostly of international origin with research connections overseas. They simply feel everything is open anyway since they'll bypass paid subscriptions by calling a colleague from overseas and asking them to email articles to them since their library doesn't have it - and we offer unlimited free ILL to our faculty and students! And yes, they are fully aware of our services and avg 2hr turnaround time for articles. Sadly, we're battling cultural practices and not solely financial decisions.”

Financial resources and advocacy were also top needs. Some respondents mentioned that talking points and discrete educational material would be useful. Others spoke of the need to offer incentives and compensation to scholars for their time and labor. Capacity was also mentioned with respect to staff, time, awareness and expertise.

Correspondingly, a few respondents desired ease and the availability of options with three specifically mentioning the potential benefits of working collectively.

"I would LOVE to see SCELIC offer an institutional repository service that either provides support to institutions maintaining an open source system or runs a consortium-level service itself. I think there are massive benefits to be realized if we all band together on the same platform and share resources."

"More ways to collaborate with other institutions."

"a repository platform that is non-profit and statewide / consortium-based/networked"

When Practices and Norms Are Disrupted

With scholarly communication undergoing such rapid change, there are concerns and questions that do not always have clear answers (e.g., Figure 7, S8). There are tensions between local responsibilities to meet immediate needs and collective responsibilities to meet long-term needs. The former is easier to justify to parent institutions, and the latter can be trickier particularly when budgets are tight. Consequently, the needs expressed below require on-going conversations to make sense of opportunities and risks, to negotiate concrete collective action, and to consider potential impacts on various communities.

"[We need to find a] balance between the desire to fund future open and equitable publishing initiatives and the need for currently operational (and affordable) systems that meet immediate scholarly needs. There is a felt tension between the recognition of the current model's unsustainable nature, and the need to meet current practical needs for scholarly content and publication tools (e.g. Bepress as an institutional repository)."

"Solving inequities in the publishing marketplace will improve access globally and benefit our institutions. A short-term focus on maximizing savings now may not benefit us in the long run if vendors succeed at co-opting open access and ensuring perpetual revenue streams through APCs and hybrid OA. Our institutions and library users will still face economic barriers to accessing information because we will have simply moved the barrier from the 'consumption' to the 'production' side."

"[We need] 1) A better understanding of which models of Open do not tend towards massive unintended consequences for the future of libraries and scholarly communication, such as: exacerbating global inequality in academic publishing, reducing library funding and support, reducing support for modes of publishing outside the traditional academic paper/monograph (e.g. reference works, review articles), and spurring the further growth of the already absurd glut of academic papers. 2) A better understanding of what particular problems Open is meant to solve, and how the currently available models will do that."

“Even for those who are aware of the issue, they would support philosophically, but are not clear about the financial implications. Worse, some would think, if journals are open, then the library would not need as much resource for subscriptions.”

“[We need a] way to justify paying for content viewed as ‘free’”

“[We need a] better way to make the case that my institution benefits from expenditures supporting Open. It often looks like we are paying for something that is free, which would be a good way to lose support and fail to make the case that we are good stewards of the university's resources.”

It is useful to note that the responses above came from librarians whose primary responsibilities include “Technical Services / Collections / E-Resources / Acquisitions / Metadata.” O’Gara and Osterman (2019) explain that scholarly communication librarians look at publishing as part of a global ecosystem and consequently tend to advocate for radical change. On the other hand, collections librarians approach publishing from an on-the-ground, local perspective which can help explain concerns about potential devaluation of libraries by their parent institutions.

Gwen Evans (2019) goes further stating that, “Collections staff understand the ramifications cost and complexities of abandoning the big deal in very different ways than the scholarly communications librarians who often don’t actually do the work that is involved or would be involved and aren’t familiar with the economics of publishing or the economics of APCs. Everyone wants the same thing but the risks, rewards, and timelines are seen very, very differently among those two groups.” Perhaps one of SCELC’s greater strengths is that its members from acquisitions to administration, instruction to ILL, reference to repositories, and systems to subject specialists, are willing to come together to share their thoughts about Open.

PRC Focus Group

In November 2019, SCELC’s Product Review Committee participated in a focus group from which there are three key takeaways.

How do we justify paying for Open? When the topic of paying to publish openly came up, a few participants raised strong concerns about APCs exacerbating the digital divide, reducing equity in publishing, and threatening the research community’s ability to learn from important voices. While participants acknowledged the use of APCs as a good stopgap, it was seen as dangerous if becomes a lasting model.

A greater concern seemed to be how libraries are to justify financial support of open access as consumers. While recognizing that there are many ways to support open

access¹⁶, the main sticking point was explaining to provosts and funders the reasons why they should pay for things that appear to be “free,” describing these conversations as a “big ask.” This misunderstanding—that content is free—obscures the vital role that libraries (and their funds) play. Existing contracts with publishers draw clear connections between library funds and institutional benefits, and open initiatives need to do the same.

What is the role of libraries in an Open world? The topic of justifying costs was accompanied by the need to demonstrate value. There is a fundamental problem when libraries, who must demonstrate value and transparency to upper administrators, cannot also require the same from our vendors. In seeking to contain expenditures and negotiate for better terms, libraries' only option may be to cancel contracts. However, if a library's value is derived from its collections, are libraries undermining ourselves by devaluing these contracts? Are we caught between maintaining unsustainable pricing models or accelerating our demise?

As Open initiatives become more prevalent, the value of libraries may shift from its collections to the influence we can exert on scholarly ecosystems. This begs the questions: Are we trying to work with existing publishers or are we trying to take money away from them? Can we do both? How can we work with existing publishers knowing that they are seeking to maintain, if not increase, their revenues?

When asked whether libraries have an obligation to support open access, there was no consensus. Some asserted that libraries cannot continue operating out of the “old model;” that things are changing so quickly that libraries and SCEL C are obligated to support OA. Others shared that while there is interest in supporting Open, our obligations rest with the communities we serve. Moving forward, SCEL C must consider these differences and the diverse missions of its members, about half of which are general academic institutions, one-third are academic institutions with a special focus (e.g., medical school, faith-based), and one-sixth are either research institutions or hospitals.¹⁷

How can we work collectively to support Open? Participants expressed interest in working with various groups and committees across SCEL C to explore these questions and concerns. Participants expressed a desire to be on the same page with one another, consider what and who SCEL C might invest in, and considering how these decisions are to be made. Since SCEL C is coming out of a renewal season, the

¹⁶ One participant stated the ease with which libraries can support open access referencing Knowledge Unlatched, SCOAP3, and Subscribe to Open as options, emphasizing that not all options require additional resources.

¹⁷ Part of this diversity is the fact that some SCEL C institutions are against OA. One participant shared that an author at their institution published an OA article which was later plagiarized. This placed their grant funding in jeopardy and required that their institution's legal counsel get involved. This institution is still dealing with the fallout which occurred two years ago.

organization may be in a better position to facilitate this work. In addition, some publishers have expressed a willingness to work with SCEL C to advance open access.

Recommendations

The need for libraries to work together is crucial, both in and beyond SCEL C. The unsustainability of traditional business models, the opportunities and uncertainties presented by the Open movement, make clear that we face a social imperative as well as financial and moral imperatives.

In his 2019 Charleston presentation, Jason Price¹⁸ explained how pay-to-publish models create what he calls the “read to publish funding gap.” This gap forms when publisher revenues shift from subscriptions to APCs. In turn this shifts costs from a distributed network where read and publish (or consumer and producer) libraries share costs, to a concentrated network that penalizes libraries with higher rates of publishing. Not only does this threaten publisher revenue streams, it threatens cohesion amongst libraries. Comprising a diverse group of libraries, Price (2019, slide 8) shared how this gap exists within SCEL C.

As data about costs surface, libraries must grapple with questions about how financial burdens and risks are to be shared between libraries. Costs traditionally hidden behind nondisclosure agreements are becoming more visible, tasking libraries to balance our obligations to local communities with obligations to each other. As Allison Mudditt (2019) states, “[T]here is some challenging work ahead to define what a “reasonable” price is (including what level of profit should be allowed),” as libraries negotiate information futures that foster sustainability and equity. Here, SCEL C’s diverse array of institutions offer a rich medley of perspectives and complexity.

A significant hurdle will be unifying SCEL C amidst differences and disagreement. Price (2019, slide 16) acknowledged that SCEL C finds itself “in a bind like never before...in the past we have been able to reach overwhelming agreement” but advancing Open has the potential to disrupt that. Perhaps we can learn from OhioLINK. Evans (2019) shared that “any frank discussions... [resulted in] and I quote, ‘Painting a giant anti-OA target on our backs.’ And I will tell you the moral outrage that is often directed at publishers can get directed at librarians who are saying, ‘Wait a minute we want to think through this.’” Evans (2019) further cautioned that the “fact that institutions are in competition with each other will definitely have an effect on funding models that assume read institutions will pay for the publishing activity of their competitors... Presidents and provosts know that they’re in competition for research dollars, for enrollment... [and] if you’re not getting more money from the state, then tuition” becomes that much more important.

Yet amidst institutional competitiveness, Price (2019, slide 12) warns that libraries must “work together to find a way to transition the current system to avoid disintermediation

¹⁸ Director of Licensing Services, SCEL C

of libraries and consortia. If we don't find a way, and instead allow, or even cause, the system to implode, our role as stewards in this system will come to an end. We will cede our financial influence to individual authors who will not be able to negotiate as a group to control costs nor seek to manage the system for the good of the many, as we have in the past."

When thinking about "value" and support of Open, Wise and Estelle (2019) suggest that

An equitable approach to future pricing is needed, one that does not push systemic costs only to the shoulders of research-intensive universities and instead recognizes that value is provided to authors, readers, institutions and society. Institutions that benefit are not only research-intensive universities but also teaching-intensive ones and organizations in the charitable, government and private sectors. Future pricing approaches would ideally be transparent, equitable around the world, and linked to impact of services on authors, readers, institutions, and society.

SCELC Member Librarians

To help SCELC advance Open, SCELC member librarians must engage in on-going discussions and be open to disagreements¹⁹ with an aim of speaking with one voice.²⁰ Conversations will vary but will largely center on the following questions.

- What does your library value with respect to Open in the short- and long-term?
- What opportunities and challenges might your library encounter when framing its value and contributions to its parent institution in an Open world?
- How, if at all, is your library prepared to support Open through SCELC and why?
- Amidst resource shortages and information abundance, cooperation and competition, what responsibilities do SCELC member libraries have to its local communities, each other, affiliate libraries, and libraries in the Global South?
- Given SCELC's size and financial clout, what are its responsibilities to member libraries in, and beyond, California? To California consortia?

Librarians are encouraged to discuss this report with colleagues and share their thoughts, concerns, ideas, and questions with the author and/or SCELC representatives.²¹

Both SCELC member and affiliate libraries are also encouraged to apply for SCELC's new *Campus Conversations* grants. These grants enable libraries to foster on-going dialogue with institutional colleagues about vendor contract terms, sustainable pricing, social justice in publishing practices, or other scholarly communication topics.

¹⁹ Evans (2019) shared a quote from a discussion participant, "There's so much disagreement about goals, aims, and costs that we're worried about going down that path."

²⁰ Board Handbook, p. 23, "[The Executive Director] should be able to rely on the board to speak with one voice and get its job done."

²¹ The author recognizes that responses are dynamic and will change over time.

SCELC

In light of “the wider scholarly communications environment and its potential impact on the consortium as a whole,” the following structural suggestions are offered to help “leverage changes in the scholarly communication system” (SCELC, 2018, p. 33-34).

Facilitate cross-institutional, intra-committee, and cross-committee conversations

- Consider any necessary revisions to SCELC’s mission, vision, and values in light of “the wider scholarly communications environment and its potential impact on the consortium as a whole.”
- The PRC and SCC may wish to follow the example of the RSC and SPC by having liaisons bridge the two committees. Any changes should be reflected in the Handbook. Committee chairs may also wish to consult one another when building meeting agendas.
- Committees may wish to revise their *Purposes* and *Descriptions* to explicitly address issues in scholarly communications like open access. Any changes should be reflected in the Handbook.
- SCELC and its committees may wish to reflect on guidelines²² from other organizations to review existing documents in use (e.g., Product Review Template²³, Vendor Best Practices Guidelines²⁴, SCELC Contract Points²⁵, SCELC’s use of the Shared Electronic Resource Understanding²⁶, and the Liblicense Model License²⁷).
- The PPDC, MarCom, PRC and SCC who largely operate independently from one another, may wish to work collaboratively to plan events.
- SCELC may need to create a joint task force²⁸ comprised of members from existing SCELC committees and new recruits not currently serving on committees. This task force could research particular topics and propose actionable steps.

Refresh organizational documentation

- Committees may wish to incorporate the SPC’s and the Board Nominating Committee’s practice to recruit members that represent SCELC’s diversity according to geography, library size, and library type.

²² The Efficiency and Standards for Article Charges (ESAC) keeps an inventory of Guidelines at <https://esac-initiative.org/guidelines/>

²³ <https://www.scelc.org/committees/prc/review-template>

²⁴ <https://www.scelc.org/about/advisory-committees/product-review-committee/vendor-best-practices-guidelines>

²⁵ <https://www.scelc.org/committees/lrc/contract-points>

²⁶ <https://www.niso.org/standards-committees/seru>

²⁷ <http://liblicense.crl.edu/licensing-information/model-license/>

²⁸ The Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA) Value Metric Task Force (O’Gara & Osterman, 2019, p. 186) offers one example of this.

- Refresh the SCEL Strategic Plan to prioritize proactive engagement in scholarly communication issues at committee and individual library levels; an updated plan is currently underway.

Facilitate professional development

Currently, archived event materials (e.g., webinar recordings, SCEL Capalooza slides) are not easily discoverable. It would be useful to centrally organize these materials in a way that facilitate discovery and use.

Consider consulting with organizations experienced with scholarly communication

- From the Educopia Institute website²⁹: “Educopia brings more than a decade of research and action in community cultivation and facilitation to its consulting work with a variety of communities and institutions. Using proven methodologies, tools, and techniques, our consultants help clients to accomplish goals that include... change management.” On November 2018, Educopia published *Community Cultivation – A Field Guide*.³⁰
- From the K | N Consultants website³¹ : “Specializing in open access strategies, change management and leadership, and continuing education and curriculum development, K | N focuses on some of higher education's most pressing issues.”
- From the Ithaca S+R website³²: “We help academic and cultural communities know what is coming next, learn from rigorous and well-designed research studies, and adapt to new realities and opportunities...[We provide] guidance on strategic collaborations, organizational structure, and measures of equity, diversity, and inclusion.”

Next Steps

Disrupted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Project will take some time to sense make and regroup. The author had originally planned to conduct interviews and focus groups, but sensitive to the uncertainties raised by the delicate state of our budgets, staffing, general well-being, and public health, next steps are challenging to plan. Action research projects are designed to stimulate dialogue, action, and to be iterative, and the author encourages fellow SCEL librarians to share their thoughts, ideas, concerns, and questions with her at paige [underscore] mann [at] Redlands [dot] edu.

²⁹ <https://educopia.org/consulting/>

³⁰ <https://educopia.org/cultivation/>

³¹ <http://knconsultants.org>

³² <https://sr.ithaka.org/about/>

Appendix A. Survey Instrument.

1. What are your primary areas of responsibility? Check all that apply. (required)
 - Access Services / Reference / ILL / Course Reserves
 - Technical Services / Collections / E-Resources / Acquisitions / Metadata
 - Instruction / Assessment
 - Subject Specialist
 - Administration
 - Publishing / Repositories / Copyright / Data
 - Rare Books / Special Collections / Archives
 - Technology / Systems / Web
 - Outreach / Advocacy / Programming
 - Other

 2. Are you currently serving, or have you in the past ten years served, on a SCEL C committee? (required)
 - Yes No

 3. How many librarians (FTE) are employed by your SCEL C member library? (required)

 4. How many students/researchers/users (FTE) does your SCEL C member library serve? (required)
 - 1-500
 - 501-1200
 - 1201-3000
 - 3001-5000
 - 5001-8000
 - 8001-12,000
 - 12,000+

 5. Where is your library located? (required)
 - Outside the state of California In the state of California

 6. What is your library's basic Carnegie classification? If unsure, click the Member List tab of the most recent [SCEL C report \[new window\]](#). (required)
 - Baccalaureate
 - Master's
 - Doctorate
 - Special Focus
 - Not applicable (e.g., research institution, hospital)

 7. To which areas does your library actively dedicate resources to support Open (e.g., open access, open infrastructure)? (required)
 - Human resources
-

- Financial resources
- Temporal resources (e.g., staff workflows)
- Structural resources (e.g., policies, planning documents)
- Technological resources (e.g., software)
- Cultural resources (e.g., professional development, advocacy)
- None
- Other

Read the following statements to complete the rest of this survey.

The September 2019 Open Letter from the SCELCL Board of Directors, written in support of the University of California's decision to cancel their Elsevier contract states:

California is in a unique position. As the world's fifth largest economy... the state is poised to lead the way to new models of publication and support for research, while preserving access to research for libraries of all types. In California SCELCL libraries represent nearly all academic institutions that are not part of a state system, and the collective expenditure of SCELCL libraries on electronic journal packages from some of the major publishers exceeds aggregate expenditures of the state systems. Consequently, SCELCL plays an important economic role in support of future publication models in California, in particular for open access efforts such as those being led by the University of California.

ALA's October 2019 report, Competition in Digital Markets, to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary states:

Academic publishing is undergoing a major transition from an industry traditionally focused on content toward a business built around data and analytics. As education and research materials move to digital formats, publishers are poised to capture vast amounts of data about students, faculty, research outputs, institutional productivity, and campus life. This data represents a potential multi-billion-dollar market with enormous possibility for network effects and the same kind of winner-take-all dynamics that led to the rise of platform monopolies like Facebook, Google, Amazon, and others... The future of competition in academic publishing—and the ability of academic libraries and institutions to negotiate access to education and research products on behalf of their communities—is at risk.

8. How strongly do you agree with the following statements? **(required)**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion	I don't know
Article processing charges (APCs) or pay-to-play creates inequities between consumer- and producer-heavy institutions (e.g., teaching- vs. research-intensive institutions).						

APCs or pay-to-play create global inequities in scholarly publishing.						
SCELC's financial position carries responsibilities to reduce global inequities.						
SCELC's financial position carries responsibilities to prioritize its members' needs.						
SCELC's financial position carries responsibilities to promote open access publishing models.						
SCELC libraries must address our increasing dependence on corporations to fulfill our missions.						
SCELC libraries must address our parent institutions' increasing dependence on corporations to fulfill our missions.						
Open access threatens the ability of libraries to justify their costs.						
SCELC must continue to prioritize cost savings to libraries.						
SCELC's size and diversity of members carries responsibilities to advocate for open access models that are equitable and just to smaller, lesser-resourced institutions.						

9. Which is a higher priority for SCELC to fund/support at this time? Choose option A or B. (required)

	A	B
Prioritize contracts that serve (A) my parent institution --OR-- (B) the public good		
Prioritize contracts that (A) serve the public good --OR-- (B) build statewide coalitions		
Prioritize contracts that (A) build statewide coalitions --OR-- (B) serve my parent institution		
Prioritize reducing (A) immediate costs --OR-- (B) inequities in scholarly publishing		
Prioritize (A) reducing inequities in scholarly publishing --OR-- (B) building statewide coalitions		
Prioritize (A) building statewide coalitions --OR-- (B) reducing immediate costs		

Prioritize (A) negotiating open access contracts with major publishers --OR-- (B) investing in non-commercial, open alternatives		
Prioritize investing in (A) non-commercial, open alternatives --OR-- open access with society publishers		
Prioritize (A) investing in open access with society publishers --OR-- (B) negotiating open access contracts with major publishers		

10. Currently SCELCE memberships cost \$750/year. I would support my library paying an additional ___/year to advance Open initiatives. (required)

- \$0
- \$5
- \$50
- \$100
- \$250
- \$500
- \$750
- Other

11. What factors enable current support of Open by your library or institution?

12. What do you, your library, or your institution need to further your support of Open?

Appendix B. A Partial List of Focus Group Participants.

Focus group participants were given the option to add their names as a project participant. This was done to recognize them for the time and energy they contributed. With a big thank you to everyone, only those who provided their names are listed below in no particular order.

Jason Price

Jeremy Whitt

Jennifer Cady

Maria Savova

John Tiffin

Jan Kuebel-Hernandez

Randy Souther

Eric-Jan Dol

Alejandra Nann

Rachelle Georger Kierulff

Cheryl Ocampo

Denise Gehring

Livia Hirsh-Shell

Brian Aby

Lavinia Busch

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