

A COMMITMENT TO THE GLOBAL RESEARCH COMMUNITY: THREE US ORGANIZATIONS REFLECT ON THEIR TRANSITION TO OPEN ACCESS

Case study – October 2023

Foreword

By **Carrie Webster**, Vice President, Open Access

The transition to open access (OA) supports the entire academic community by increasing the global reach, impact and reproducibility of research, and providing greater access.

At Springer Nature, we have seen these benefits first-hand: on average, articles published gold OA achieve 6 times more downloads than non-OA articles, as well as 1.6 times more citations and 4.9 times more Altmetric attention.¹

Publishers are working with the research community to accelerate the transition to OA, and have been implementing OA agreements on national, institutional and consortial levels. One example of an OA agreement is the transformative agreement (TA), which combines reading and publishing fees in one license, a model which Springer Nature has been pioneering since 2015.

TAs are playing a vital role in driving the transition at scale. In 2022, TAs supported the OA status of 215,666 publications globally,² and Springer Nature's TAs published 3 times more gold OA articles in Springer hybrid titles than via authors choosing OA but not being part of a TA.³

Data from TAs across Europe is showing how they are vital to powering OA growth and a key part of enabling OA equity. TAs with Springer Nature now support researchers from over 3,500 institutions around the world, and help to deliver equity for OA publishing across academic disciplines, particularly for the Humanities and Social Sciences.⁴

The benefit to both researchers and institutions is clear: TAs enable more articles to be published gold OA, delivering superior value, usage and reach, as well as equity for OA publishing, at scale and speed. Implementing a TA with Springer Nature should not be a concern, especially when moving from a Big Deal agreement, as integration and access have already been established, with only low-touch approvals needed, depending on specific needs of customers.

However, despite clear data from Europe about the benefits of OA and TAs, the transition to OA is not moving at the same pace worldwide. Whilst there has been an increasing number of OA mandates over the years, one of the latest being Plan S in Europe,⁵ the United States (US) has only recently followed suit on a national level with the 2022 memorandum released by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) which calls for federally funded publications and their supporting data to be publicly accessible without embargo from December 31, 2025.⁶

In 2020, we established our first TA in North America with the California Digital Library (CDL), which is demonstrating both an increase in articles and in downloads, as well as more equitable access for global readers including those who would not have had access otherwise (see Impact at University of California).⁷

The following case study explores the experience of transitioning to a TA, based on interviews with libraries and a consortium in the US, and the early impact of the TA in the US. Building on the experiences of the three organizations presented, we are actively speaking with more partners and are committed to playing our part in helping to drive the transition to OA.

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4.9x more Altmetric attention 

¹ https://figshare.com/articles/journal_contribution/Going_for_gold_exploring_the_reach_and_impact_of_Gold_open_access_articles_in_hybrid_journals_white_paper_/16860229

² <https://www.stm-assoc.org/oa-dashboard/transformative-agreements/>

³ <https://www.stm-publishing.com/transformative-agreements-playing-vital-role-in-oa-transition/>

⁴ <https://group.springernature.com/gp/group/media/press-releases/transformative-agreements-playing-vital-role-in-oa-transition/25433850>

⁵ https://www.coalition-s.org/plan_s_principles/

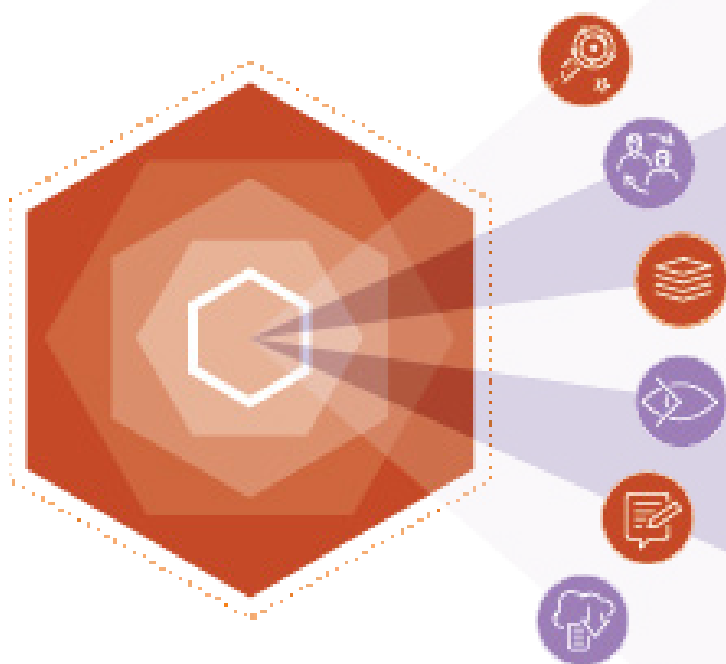
⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-Access-Memo.pdf>

⁷ <https://group.springernature.com/gp/group/media/press-releases/archive-2020/springer-nature-university-of-california/18083344>

Introduction

In the US, the pace of transition to OA is accelerating. An increasing number of libraries are signing TAs that support authors to publish OA, while maintaining access to subscription content. The OSTP memorandum, with its emphasis on public access for federally funded research, has no doubt also prompted some institutions to review the support they provide for researchers whose projects must meet these requirements.

We spoke to three people involved in negotiating TAs with Springer Nature and asked them to reflect on the importance of OA for US research; the process of migrating their licenses; the impact on working practices; and what advice they would share with other organizations considering this route.



What is an open access agreement?

Springer Nature offers different types of OA agreements covering hybrid and fully OA portfolios. The cornerstone of all of these agreements is coverage of publishing fees for authors from participating institutions.



Transformative agreement

OA publishing costs covered for, and access to, the chosen imprint's portfolio of hybrid journals, such as Springer or Nature.

Fully open access agreement

Publishing-only agreement for fully OA journals across the BMC, Springer, Palgrave Macmillan and Nature Research portfolios.

Open access books agreement

Publishing-only agreement covering the OA book publishing charge (BPC) sponsored by either a funding body (e.g. society), consortia, or institution.

Contributors

Institution:

Carnegie Mellon, a research intensive technological university.

Interviewee:

Keith Webster,
Dean of University Libraries.

Description: Carnegie Mellon recently moved from a traditional Springer journals subscription, or 'Big Deal', to an institutional-level TA covering the Springer portfolio. This is one of many agreements that they have signed with publishers. The library now focuses on supporting its researchers to publish, while maintaining an infrastructure that provides access to content for its researchers and students.⁸

Institution:

California Digital Library (CDL) provides digital library services, including centralized agreements for content access and OA publishing, to the ten campuses of the University of California (UC) system.

Interviewee:

Mathew Willmott, Assistant Director for Open Access Agreements.

Description: Their OA agreements cover over 2,200 hybrid journals and 500 fully OA journals across Springer Nature's portfolio.⁹ The institution is well known for its advocacy of OA; its TA program, which covers approximately half of all research articles produced by UC researchers, is just one of many pathways that UC is pursuing to advance open access.

Consortium:

We also spoke with the lead negotiator for the Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC), a major US library consortium representing small to mid-sized academic libraries with up to 10,000 patrons.

Description:

More than 60 institutions participate in their TA. Corresponding authors can publish their articles OA in hybrid journals across Springer's portfolio.¹⁰ Participating institutions have full access to all Springer subscription journal content.

⁸ <https://www.springernature.com/gp/open-research/oa-agreements/carnegie-mellon-university>

⁹ <https://www.springernature.com/gp/open-research/oa-agreements/university-of-california>

¹⁰ <https://www.springernature.com/gp/open-research/oa-agreements/scelc>

Open access and the mission of the library

Publishers and librarians have a shared goal to support ease of, and equitable access to, research. All three interviewees strongly believed in the alignment of OA with the priorities of their mission-driven organizations.

Impacting the global community

As well as serving their own researchers, there was recognition that libraries have always regarded themselves as members of a global research community. "OA really improves how research is done," one librarian pointed out. "Our role is to champion openness across the research enterprise."

Responding to the needs of library patrons

It is not only libraries that are driving these changes. Researchers and faculty are rapidly becoming more aware of the benefits of OA and asking libraries for support. CDL reported, "We are doing our best to be responsive to what our faculty and community wants in terms of open access. We have several stakeholder committees that we consult with."

Supporting the evolution of libraries

The transition to OA means libraries are not only providing access to content, but also supporting publishing, and this requires a shift in perspective. As one interviewee stated, "We are focusing today on the 'inside out' library rather than the 'outside in' one. 'Outside in' was when we bought content from publishers and booksellers and made it available to our community. Today, our journey is much more about how we help our researchers and students share their work with the world. And I think the way we've been working with Springer Nature in recent months really exemplifies that shift in mission."

This changing role of the library was seen as an evolution of the mission of the library; to make the best research available to readers who need it. "We do research that makes a difference to the world," said one librarian. "And the impact of that can only be maximized if it's easy and free for people to dig into it."

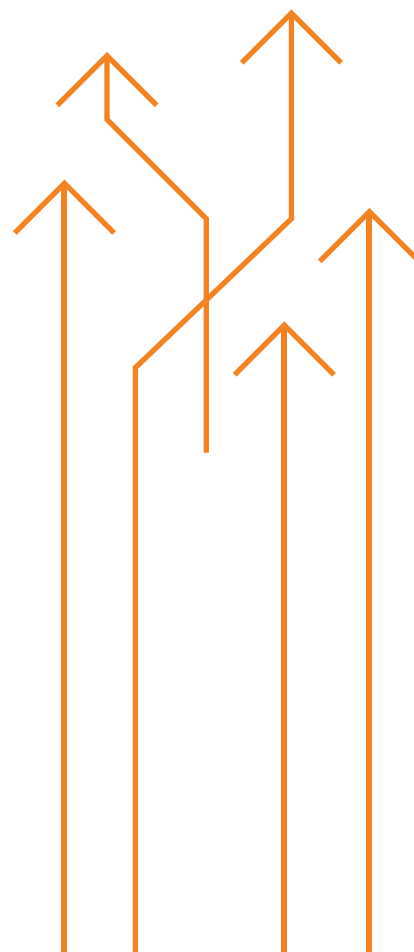
Widening the reach of research

All interviewees agreed that OA widens the reach of content both within existing institutional structures and beyond them. CDL stated, "We're doing a better service to our authors if we help them publish OA, because their research will be read and used in more places. These include public policy uses, or individual patients reading medical journals for conditions they have, or even researchers in less developed nations that wouldn't have access to content."

Accelerating the pace of change

Our contributors also recognized the role libraries play in providing guidance and specialist knowledge, and that they are advocates for increasing the pace of OA transition. A contributor said, "We built a set of values around TAs. There are nine of them, they are prioritized. We are working to try to evaluate agreements based on those values. As we do that, in some ways, that's advocacy. We are advocating for improving agreements and part of the way that you do that is by being in them in the first place."

"We are focusing today on the 'inside out' library rather than the 'outside in' one."



The impact of transformative agreements

One major benefit of TAs is that researchers have more opportunities to publish OA, so it comes as no surprise that they are actively campaigning for their libraries to create as many of these opportunities as possible. Describing their faculty's reaction to TAs, one interviewee recalled their enthusiasm: "Faculty and authors' response to OA agreements can be, 'Oh, this is a great agreement.' In general, more people are being more open to it, more interested in making it happen. So, there is demand from researchers."

Researchers' enthusiasm for OA is driven by a better understanding and acceptance of the benefits than was the case a few years ago. "From the author's perspective, it's obvious; you're going to have your article published open access, you don't need to worry about finding \$3,000 to \$4,000 to cover the cost," said one interviewee, "and I think we're at a point now, because the benefits of open access are generally understood, that you can anticipate greater readership, greater citation impact. The more eyes that are on your work, the greater your chance of collaborators, funders, and graduate students all coming your way."

CDL voiced that "There's a general benefit to academia as a whole, I think, of these types of agreements." Another contributor had a similar opinion that, "From a broader perspective, if you accumulate that greater attention on our work, and that greater citation advantage; that ought to have a positive impact on things like university rank. 30% of the Times Higher World University Rankings are based upon citations. The prestige, the benefit, from being in a highly ranked university - those are the benefits to my community of publishing OA."

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Tell us
about
yourself

Please complete this short
readership poll



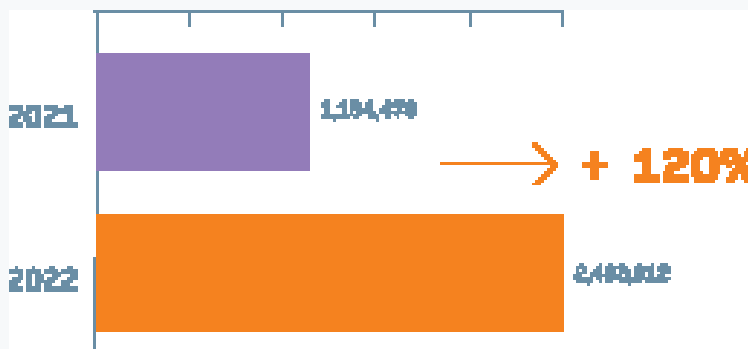
Impact at University of California

Data from the Springer TA with CDL demonstrate both an increase in articles and in downloads:

- In 2021 and 2022, OA articles published by UC authors through the Springer TA reached over 3.6 million downloads globally.
- While OA article output rose by an additional 15% in 2022 compared to 2021, downloads of these articles increased by 120% globally from 2021 to 2022.
- All major continents registered more than 50,000 downloads over the two years, indicating how a TA can create more equitable access to publications.

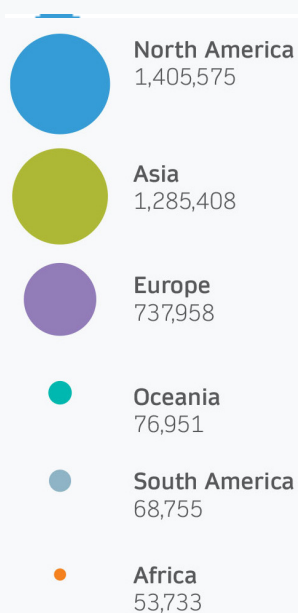
Global usage impact of OA articles published by UC researchers through a Springer TA

There is global visibility and impact for UC authors and for US research



In 2021 + 2022, CDL OA articles = over 3.6 million downloads globally

2021-2022 Downloads by continent



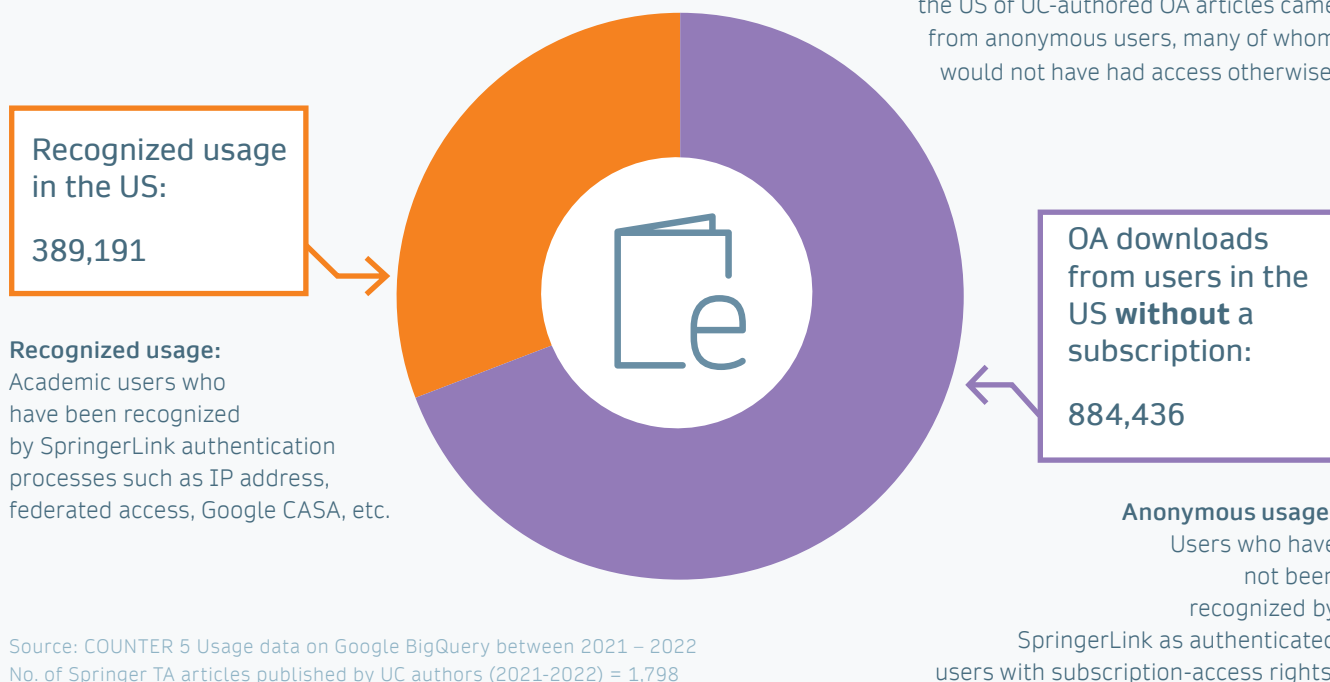
Source: COUNTER 5 Usage data on Google BigQuery
No. of Springer TA articles published by UC authors (2021-2022)

Impact at University of California

What's at stake?

Without the CDL Springer TA, users in the US would have missed out on almost **885k downloads**

- In 2021 and 2022, 69% of downloads in the US of UC-authored OA articles came from anonymous users, many of whom would not have had access otherwise.



Making the leap - transitioning to a TA

Embarking on a TA can feel daunting for any library. It is, after all, a different way of supporting researchers. However, many libraries and publishers have now had agreements in place for a number of years with a positive impact on institutions and readers.

Our contributors outlined a number of considerations they had to take into account while implementing a TA.

First steps

When choosing a pilot agreement, contributors all tried to identify a publisher that publishes plenty of their researchers' work, so that the impact and value of their pilot TA could be demonstrated more quickly. "Springer Nature seemed like a natural partner for a couple of reasons," noted CDL. "We had been talking with a lot of publishers and early

on, our conversations with Springer Nature were some of the more advanced. We saw that Springer Nature had a couple of agreements already that set a little bit of a precedent that we thought we could build on for ourselves.”

All three contributors agreed that their previous Big Deal arrangements made them well placed to move to a new type of agreement, as access to the majority of Springer content was already established. “We took an existing deal and were able to just truly transform that existing agreement,” explained one interviewee. Another contributor added that existing journal packages also simplified the process of transition, with little to no new integration or access needed, thus “maximizing the ease with which our community can navigate scholarly content.”

“We took an existing deal and were able to just truly transform that existing agreement.”

Negotiating the agreement

When negotiating their agreement, our contributors acknowledged some data collection challenges since TAs require different data, particularly on numbers of articles published, compared to a simple subscription package renewal. The pandemic - and its impact on the pattern of publications - added an extra level of complexity when forecasting output using previous years’ data. However, it is worth noting that once a TA between an institution and a publisher is signed, publication data that was not previously centralized becomes visible, giving institutions a clearer picture of their publishing and impact.

Changing workflows

Interviewees reported that approving eligible articles, whilst a new element of workflow, had not been onerous. “We are alerted when an article is eligible for the TA,” explained one interviewee, “and we will tick a box to confirm that the author is a member of the community. It generally works in a very straightforward fashion.”

Through Springer Nature’s Article Approval Service, we surface all of the key information needed for institutions to make approval decisions, to make the process easier and less time intensive for institutions and consortia.

One contributor opted for an automatic approvals process, arguing that the chances of abuse of this system are relatively low, and regular evaluations were as likely to pick up errors as article-by-article approval. He noted, “We will do analysis at the back end and make sure there aren’t a lot of articles getting through that shouldn’t be and we’re not funding what we shouldn’t be funding.”

Communicating change and ensuring uptake

Communicating changes to stakeholders is also a vital part of the transitional phase: “I think there has been an element of promotional work on campus, particularly in the early wave of agreements where we were alerting the community to the opportunities,” said one interviewee. “It’s really key that in the author journey, they know what’s going on and can make informed decisions,” commented CDL.

Springer Nature assists with this process through conducting webinars for approval managers and authors, as well as providing resources for institutions to raise awareness of the agreement amongst researchers. In addition, a dedicated marketing package is provided for each agreement upon launch.

While the transitional process did involve some thought and implementation, contributors felt that it was not a painful one overall. As one interviewee summarized, “I don’t think we made a big song and dance about it. It was just part of our evolving process.”



Advice for the transition to a TA

When discussing what advice our contributors would give to libraries looking to sign their first TAs with publishers, there were a few common themes.

Gather the right data about your institution's current holdings and articles:

“Focus on what the overall data picture looks like, I think this is a key piece of what libraries should try to do as they're going into these agreements. It's a critical piece of thinking about what this transition would mean for an individual library.” CDL

Understand your own negotiating position, and that of the publisher:

“Understand the publisher you're negotiating with; their attitude towards OA; their financials. Then think about your relationship with the publisher... Figure out the outcome you're trying to achieve.

Is it about maximizing OA?

Is it about maximizing financial savings? Is it about maximizing readership?”

Recognize that faculty are a key part of the institution-publisher relationship:

“Understand who on your campus serves on editorial boards. We're negotiating with a publisher on how much our community values that publisher and the work that it does, our researchers cite the work in the journals, and serve as editors and reviewers. All of that is a positive story around which we can frame a positive outcome.”

Summary

Despite coming from different OA backgrounds and having different TAs, our US partners relayed the shared view that the TA model supports the role of the library by broadening the visibility of academic research, improving access for their patrons, promoting their institution, and driving progress within subject areas.

Our contributors advised that the key areas that need to be in place are:

- A complete picture on holdings and articles published
- Support from faculty
- New workflows for article approval (if not opting for automatic approval)
- Dedicated conversations, especially for pilot agreements.

To make the best research available to those who need it and to drive knowledge and equitable access forwards, the TA is the best placed resource to do that at scale and sustainably. To harness the potential of TAs and the migration to OA in general, we need to collectively find answers to the questions that affect us all: from how to encourage researchers to take advantage of the opportunities that TAs provide, to how to preserve the integrity of science, and ensure equality of publication and access.



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