



### Position Statement on Journal Article Processing Charges and Other Supports for Open Access Publishing

#### Background

Publishers increasingly provide authors the opportunity to publish articles open access, so that the articles are immediately and freely available to anyone in the world. Because open access publishing involves the same or similar costs as publishing in subscription journals, and because open access publishing necessarily leads to a loss of revenue for publishers, there is usually an article processing charge (APC) to publish articles open access in journals. Paying an APC to publish open access in a journal is often called “gold open access.” In general, APCs can often be covered by grant funders, but not all articles result from grant funded research. Over the past decade or so, some libraries have established pilot funds, which we might call “blank funds,” to support open access publishing, usually with restrictions on the total amount of funds available for all requests and a limit per article. While successful by some measures, these pilot projects have not always proven sustainable or scalable. Over time, alternatives to this blank funding model have emerged or grown increasingly prevalent.

One alternative to establishing blank funds is for libraries to provide an institutional repository. In this case, authors publish their articles traditionally in subscription journals, and later, or sometimes simultaneously, depending on the time period specified in the publishing agreement, they will post a manuscript version of the article in an institutional repository openly accessible to a global audience. Self-archiving manuscripts to make them openly accessible through institutional repositories is often called “green open access.” Another alternative is for libraries to seek “transformative agreements,” which can also be called “read and publish agreements,” with publishers. In these agreements, libraries negotiate the option for authors to publish articles open access in some or all of the journals offered by a specific publisher. The APCs included in these types of agreements are charged to the library in addition to any subscription costs, so libraries must still manage these costs very carefully, often in exchange for other resources, or with supplemental funding. However, the costs are negotiated in the overall context of the library’s subscriptions with the publisher, so there can be discounts on the APCs or subscriptions, or both.

#### Considerations

In order to establish a blank fund to support gold open access, libraries must define a total of funds available and set limits for individual articles, because APCs can vary substantially. In addition, libraries must establish guidelines for the approval of funding, to include assessment of the reputability and quality of journals. Unfortunately, not all publishers provide the same publishing controls, and some journals are not considered as valid, scholarly venues for the dissemination of research results. The administration of blank funds can be costly and even contentious. A library’s investment in blank funds can also fail to achieve substantially any of the desired ends of these funds. The funds are often expended to publish just a few articles, so there is minimal wider impact for open access publishing. In addition, there is often little effect for the research profile of the university. APCs can be surprisingly high, and the funds are usually expended on a “first-come, first-served” basis, which can be unfair and not optimally effective. A single APC can cost as much as a high-priced journal. For example, some APCs range as high as three or four thousand dollars, or even higher. This price is in the range of, or higher

than, some of the most expensive journals individually subscribed by Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services, such as *Pediatrics*. Students and faculty downloaded 1649 articles from *Pediatrics* in 2020 in support of their curricular studies and research. The library would not want to be asked to choose between funding a single APC or providing access to *Pediatrics*.

When libraries complete read and publish agreements with publishers, they do not incur the same or similar administrative costs as they incur when managing blank funds. They also do not need to assess journal reputability or quality, because these agreements are completed with known publishers. These agreements are considered more sustainable and scalable than blank funds because they can be managed more carefully, often in the context of a university-wide conversation about the funding for these agreements, particularly as publication under the terms of these agreements grows over time and as the value of these agreements are proven to a university.

### Options at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services provides [Cornerstone](#), an institutional repository to collect, preserve, and provide digital access to the scholarly and creative works of Minnesota State University, Mankato faculty, staff, and students.

The Digital Initiatives Librarian partners with faculty and staff to deposit works into [Cornerstone](#) and advises faculty and staff of their rights as authors, including advice on self-archiving rights as agreed with publishers. This is a free service to Minnesota State University, Mankato faculty, staff, and students and the Digital Initiatives Librarian stands ready to consult, advise, and provide support.

Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services has also recently concluded a 3-year read and publish agreement with Cambridge University Press. This agreement, which is a pilot, provides Minnesota State University, Mankato authors the option to publish open access in Cambridge University Core Journals at no cost to themselves ([see list of journals](#) & [the step-by-step](#)). Library Services is using this pilot to study the viability of agreements like these for Minnesota State University, Mankato. Agreements with other publishers could be possible, but any other agreements could involve different terms, and would have to be separately negotiated.

Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services does not supply a blank fund to pay APCs to any other publishers, because these blank funds are not sustainable or scalable from the budget of Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services.

Minnesota State University, Mankato Library Services does provide an additional option often called “platinum open access,” which is to support the publication of open access journals that do not charge APCs. For more information about how to publish a journal in partnership with Library Services, see the contact information below.

### Contact

Contact the Digital Initiatives Librarian, Heidi Southworth, for more information.  
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See <https://libguides.mnsu.edu/openaccess> for more information.