

New study examines the economic returns of public access policies

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Delivering timely, open, online access to the results of federally funded research in the United States will significantly increase the return on the public's investment in science, according to a new study by John Houghton at the Centre for Strategic Economic Studies at Victoria University. The study, "The Economic and Social Returns on Investment in Open Archiving Publicly Funded Research Outputs," co-authored by Bruce Rasmussen and Peter Sheehan, was released today by SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition).

Public funding of scientific, technical, and [medical research](#) assumes that economic and social returns to taxpayers will exceed the amount of the research investment. A proposal currently before the U.S. [Congress](#) - the Federal Research Public Access Act, H.R. 5037 and S. 1373 (FRPAA) - seeks to ensure and maximize the public's return by delivering open online access to the results of research funded through 11 federal agencies no later than six months after publication in a journal. The Victoria University study outlines one approach to measuring the potential impact of this policy on returns on public investment in [research and development](#) (R&D).

The new study examines the effect of key variables that influence the potential return on investment from this research. These variables concern both access to research - including content embargoes - and the efficiency with which research is applied in practice. The study also defines the additional data and model developments necessary for an accurate estimate of the policy's likely impact.

Depending on the assumed cost of data repositories, the study's preliminary models suggest that FRPAA's enactment could lead to a return on the public's investment of between four and 24 times the costs. Two thirds of this return would accrue within the United States, with the remainder spilling over to other countries. In the U.S., the study suggests that the benefits of public access might total between three and 16 times the cost of the public's investment.

The study closely examines the model's sensitivity to critical assumptions and concludes that the benefits of public access would exceed the costs over a wide range of values. As the study's authors note, *"t is difficult to imagine any plausible values for the input data and model parameters that would lead to a fundamentally different answer."*

"It's important that discussions about the risks and benefits of public access to government-funded research focus on empirical evidence and rational argument," added Raym Crow, SPARC Senior Consultant. "The model Houghton and his colleagues have developed facilitates such a logical approach and provides a framework for assessing objectively the economic effect of various scenarios."

The report's findings are based on available evidence. To enable others to explore the modeling, an online model is available from <http://www.cfses.com/FRPAA>. The full study, "The Economic and Social Returns on [Investment](#) in Open Archiving Publicly Funded Research Outputs," is available on the SPARC Web site at <http://www.arl.org/sparc>.

Provided by SPARC

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