

# Researchers' Perceptions and Experiences with an Open Access Subvention Fund

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Article abstract

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**Methods** – In spring 2021, two librarians conducted an anonymous survey using a convenience sample to recruit participants. The survey was directly distributed to 113 University of Idaho (U of I) affiliates who had received funding from, or expressed interest in, the open access subvention fund during the previous three years (FY 2019 to FY 2021). Other U of I affiliates were also offered the opportunity to participate in the survey via a link shared in the U of I's daily email newsletter as well across the U of I's graduate student email list. The researchers received 42 usable survey responses. The survey included 26 closed and open-ended questions and analysis included cross-tabulations based on fund applicant status as well as respondent role. Of the 26 questions, 4 were modified from a colleague's previous study with U of I faculty members (Gaines, 2015).

**Results** – Survey responses showed that interest in and support for open access were common among respondents. Although a majority of respondents had published an open access journal article and would like to continue to publish open access in the future, only 17% agreed that they had departmental support to do so. Results also demonstrated that researchers were less willing to pay article processing charges (APCs) out-of-pocket and preferred for funding to come from grant budgets first, followed by Office of Research Budgets, department or college budgets, and library budgets. Respondents expressed support for many of the open access subvention fund's current criteria and processes, but they also indicated an interest in establishing a more equitable fund distribution cycle and allowing researchers to seek pre-approval once their article was accepted for peer-review. Findings related to open access publishing perspectives built upon previous research conducted at the U of I (Gaines, 2015) and across other institutions.

**Conclusion** – This study confirmed the importance of evaluating and assessing library programs and services to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of campus communities. Through the study results, the researchers demonstrated that respondents were interested in open access publishing and the continuation of the open access subvention fund, as well as offering the U of I an opportunity to adjust the open access subvention fund's processes to better serve researchers. These results also highlighted the need for those involved in open access publishing support to investigate new open access advocacy and education efforts to ensure that researchers receive the philosophical and financial support they need to pursue different models of scholarly publishing.

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*Research Article*

**Researchers' Perceptions and Experiences with an Open Access Subvention Fund**

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**Abstract**

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42 usable survey responses. The survey included 26 closed and open-ended questions and analysis included cross-tabulations based on fund applicant status as well as respondent role. Of the 26 questions, 4 were modified from a colleague's previous study with U of I faculty members (Gaines, 2015).

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## **Introduction**

Open access subvention funds are “pool[s] of money set aside by an institution or other research-sponsoring entity specifically to defray or cover processing fees for articles published by members of the institution in open-access journals” (SPARC, n.d., “What is an open-access fund?” section). These funds are often upheld as opportunities for libraries and other campus units to heighten the visibility of affiliated research, help change the scholarly publishing landscape, reduce barriers to access, encourage diversity and competition in the publishing services market, and support authors who would otherwise be unable to publish their research in an open access journal. Between FY 2019 and FY 2021, the University of Idaho (U of I) Library, Office of the Provost, and Office of Research and Economic Development (hereafter, “OAPF fund partners”) invested a combined total of \$110,000 into their open access subvention fund, the U of I Open Access Publishing Fund (OAPF). During this three-year pilot period, the OAPF allocated between \$30,000 and \$50,000 each fiscal year, and supported the publication of 80 open access articles, authored by a total of 144 U of I researchers. Use of the OAPF was consistent each year, with the fund disbursing its entire allocation by the end of February (FY 2019), the beginning of February (FY 2020), and the end of March (FY 2021). Although fund performance data demonstrated that the OAPF filled a need on campus, the researchers were interested in building upon prior research and utilizing other data sources in their assessment of the OAPF.

## Literature Review

### *Open Access Funding Models*

Numerous models for funding open access publications are in the midst of experimentation and development by academic institutions, research funders, non-profit organizations, and others. Models include allowing direct charges to grants by funders (Solomon & Björk, 2016; Springer Nature, 2021), creating open access subvention funds (Click & Borhardt, 2019), academic libraries pursuing institutional open access memberships (Björk & Solomon, 2012), and pursuing transformative agreements (Borrego et al., 2021), among others. One of the reasons given for a shift away from subvention funds by some libraries is the unsustainability of those funds (University of Arizona, 2021). Some argue that scaling up a fund based solely on paying for institutional researchers' APCs will eventually exceed the funding available to the library. For large research institutions, this appears mathematically correct. The under-appreciated *Pay It Forward* report from the University of California (2016) system highlighted this, showing that for its larger institutions and their comparables, subvention funds were not a scalable approach to ensuring its articles are open access. Thus, these institutions have moved toward transformative agreements, which achieve a similar commitment of funds to APCs (albeit capped at a specific level) while reinvesting in a "Big Deal" approach to journal subscriptions and other methods, such as institutional memberships, to discount publishing fees. However, buried in the report was the implicit suggestion that smaller (or "low-output") research institutions, e.g., those with under approximately \$200 million in research expenditures or that publish around 1,000 articles per year or less, may actually find a subvention fund sustainable, if not transformational (University of California, 2016). This finding suggested that smaller libraries may find value in subvention funds. If anything, this highlights the problematic class divide in library science literature – the largest institutions drive the conversation and trends (for obvious reasons), but their models may not apply beyond the largest institutions or to the long tail of smaller academic libraries. Exactly what the right mix of funding strategies ought to be, relative to local institutional dynamics, is a question for further research.

### *Subvention Funds*

Literature on open access subvention funds has taken the form of institution-specific case studies that detail factors related to fund performance, uptake, and sustainability (Beaubien et al., 2016; Gyore et al., 2015; Hampson & Stregger, 2017; Korolev, 2018, 2020; McMillan et al., 2020; Nabe & Imre, 2015; Otto, 2019; Pinfield & Middleton, 2016; Sinn et al., 2017; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016) as well as multi-institution research (Click & Borhardt, 2019; Fernandez & Nariani, 2011; Monson et al., 2014; Tananbaum, 2014; Yates et al., 2015). Of most interest to this project were the studies and reports that looked beyond descriptive statistics and investigated fund recipients' perspectives on open access publishing, their opinions about the criteria and processes used by open access subvention funds, and changes made to open access subvention funds based on their feedback (Beaubien et al., 2016; Gyore et al., 2015; Korolev, 2018, 2020; McMillan et al., 2020; Nabe & Imre, 2015; Sinn et al., 2017; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016).

### *Perspectives on Open Access Publishing*

When choosing to publish an open access article, previous research demonstrated that open access subvention fund recipients were interested in increasing the visibility of their work; when asked, many indicated that articles published with open access subvention fund support were more visible and accessible (Beaubien et al., 2016; Gyore et al., 2015; Nabe & Imre, 2015; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016).

Another positive outcome of receiving an open access subvention fund award was that recipients reported being willing to publish an open access article again in the future (Beaubien et al., 2016; Nabe & Imre, 2015). Even though fund recipients experienced benefits from open access publishing and were interested in pursuing open access publishing again, they believed that authors should not pay the associated article processing charges (APCs) out-of-pocket. When prior open access subvention fund recipients were asked who should pay these APCs, they listed grants, the university, and the library/open access subvention fund as their top three choices; almost no recipients indicated that authors or co-authors should be responsible for paying APCs out-of-pocket (Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016). Related to the desire of having agencies or institutional entities pay for APCs was the finding that the availability of an open access subvention fund was one of the primary factors in a recipient's decision to publish an open access article (Beaubien et al., 2016; Nabe & Imre, 2015; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016). As described by Teplitzky and Phillips (2016), fund recipients "[were] not necessarily open access advocates but [were] willing to try open access" (p. 573) if funds were made available to them.

### *Opinions on Open Access Subvention Fund Criteria and Processes*

Overall, open access subvention fund recipients expressed positive opinions about the existence of the funds and wanted them to continue, while also suggesting ways to improve the criteria and processes (Gyore et al., 2015; McMillan et al., 2020; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016). These suggestions ranged from allocating more money each year, seeking out money from other campus units, helping potential applicants identify reputable journals, streamlining the process of paying APCs, allowing applicants with active grant funding to apply for an award, making hybrid journals eligible, and removing the requirement that articles must be accepted for publication before submitting an application (Gyore et al., 2015; McMillan et al., 2020; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016).

### *Changes Made to Open Access Subvention Funds*

Multiple researchers also reported the changes made to open access subvention funds based on fund performance and feedback from fund recipients. Some open access subvention funds made changes to their fund caps to ensure that funding was available throughout the year (Gyore et al., 2015) or to ensure that authors received enough funding to cover the majority of an APC (Korolev, 2018; McMillan et al., 2020; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016). Feedback and fund performance data also led some open access subvention fund operators to prioritize authors with certain roles, such as graduate students and early career researchers, for funding (Gyore et al., 2015; Sinn et al., 2017; Zuniga & Hoffecker, 2016). One open access subvention fund reported adding the requirement that articles must be accepted for publication before they could be considered for funding (Korolev, 2020).

### **Aims**

Through this study, we sought to increase the U of I's awareness of their campus community's perspectives on open access publishing and the ways in which the OAPF's criteria and processes could evolve to meet campus needs.

The research questions used to frame this study were:

- What beliefs do those who applied for or expressed interest in the OAPF hold about open access and open access publishing, and have they changed since Gaines' (2015) study?

- Why did U of I affiliates choose or choose not to apply for the OAPF during the three-year pilot period?
- Are the OAPF's current criteria and processes supported by those who applied for or expressed interest in the OAPF?
- How can the OAPF's criteria and processes change to better support U of I affiliates?

By conducting this study, the researchers wanted to build upon previous research and assessment related to open access subvention funds and highlight the needs and experiences of campus affiliates at a Carnegie R2 institution (doctoral university – high research activity), with approximately 10,790 enrolled students, and a land-grant mission to share research and information with the general public and engage with our local communities. The U of I publishes approximately 1,000 articles per year and expends approximately \$110 million in research expenditures annually. Although the current study is not the first to examine this topic, documenting how to gather campus affiliates' perspectives and use their feedback to evaluate and inform changes to an open access subvention fund provides other libraries with a framework to do the same on their own campuses.

## **Methods**

In spring 2021, the researchers sent a Qualtrics survey to 113 current U of I affiliates who received funding from or expressed interest in the OAPF during the previous three years (FY 2019 to FY 2021). These two groups were the main target respondents as the researchers sought to learn more about their experiences with open access publishing and the OAPF in order to investigate whether changes to the fund were necessary. However, because those who received funding or expressed interest in funding likely had an open access-positive response bias, the researchers also chose to share the survey twice in the U of I's daily email newsletter and via the U of I's graduate student email list.

The 26-item anonymous Qualtrics survey included closed and open-ended questions about open access publishing, the OAPF and its criteria and processes, as well as demographic information (Appendix A). These included four modified questions used by Gaines' (2015) to investigate U of I faculty perceptions and knowledge about open access. The researchers chose to conduct a survey because it allowed us to gather quantitative data, in a timely manner, and compare the results to previous survey research that examined open access subvention funds. The survey research described in this article was approved by the U of I's Institutional Review Board (Protocol # 21-110), who classified this study as exempt under Category 2 at 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2), meaning that the ethical standards of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice must be followed, but expedited or full IRB review of this project was not required (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Survey responses were collected between May 3, 2021, and May 27, 2021. Data were initially analyzed using the Qualtrics cross-tabs feature, which is similar to the PivotTables feature available in Excel. This feature allowed the researchers to review trends in the data based on respondents' OAPF applicant status. The Qualtrics cross-tabs were then imported into Excel to create the charts and tables included in this article. To ensure respondent anonymity, all data presented in this article have been aggregated. All direct quotes included in this article are not reported in connection with the respondent's demographic information to ensure that specific respondents cannot be identified by readers.

## Results

### *Demographics*

Forty-nine respondents completed the survey. Six incomplete survey responses and one response from a non-U of I respondent were excluded from analysis, resulting in a total of 42 usable responses. Respondents included current U of I faculty (n = 28), staff (n = 1), postdoctoral researchers (n = 5), and enrolled graduate students (n = 8) of various ages, with most respondents being between 26 and 45 years old (n = 27). Respondents included researchers from agriculture and natural resources (n = 22); science and engineering (n = 13); as well as education and human sciences, humanities and social sciences, and other (n = 7). Of the 42 survey respondents, 15 had not applied to the OAPF (36%), while 27 reported that they had previously applied (64%), totaling 25% of all currently affiliated fund recipients contacted. While these results can be analyzed across these categories in different ways, we chose to focus on the differences between the OAPF applicants and non-applicants in the results below because this is the most pertinent lens for evaluating the fund.

### *Open Access Publishing: Perspectives and Experiences*

#### *Journal Selection Criteria*

When asked about the importance of specific criteria when selecting a journal to publish in, more than 85% of respondents indicated that the journal's relevance and prestige within their discipline were important when considering both open access and non-open access journals. Slight differences in the importance of specific factors were seen when comparing respondents based on OAPF applicant status (Table 1). For example, across open access and non-open access journals, a higher percentage of those who had applied to the OAPF rated the anticipated speed of peer-review to publication as important when compared to those who had not applied to the OAPF.

Table 1  
Percentage of Respondents Rating Criteria as Important for Journal Selection

Criteria	Applied to OAPF		Didn't apply to OAPF	
	OA Journal	Non-OA Journal	OA Journal	Non-OA Journal
Prestige w/n discipline	85%	92%	86%	93%
Whether is OA or not	58%	42%	77%	29%
Cost to publish	78%	67%	79%	73%
Relevance to your discipline	93%	100%	92%	93%
Impact factor	70%	74%	62%	80%
Speed of review and publication	66%	67%	54%	50%

#### *Perspectives on Publishing Systems*

All but one respondent (98%, n = 41) believed that their discipline or research field benefits from open access journal articles. However, slight differences emerged between respondents when asked whether they preferred a system of publishing in which it is free to publish, but requires subscriptions to read or one in which it is free to read, but requires fees to publish. Those who had applied to the OAPF (74%, n = 20) expressed a stronger preference for a system in which it is free to read, but requires fees to publish.

Those who had not applied to the OAPF also expressed this preference over the alternative, but at a lower rate (47%, n = 7). In the “other” text-box associated with this question, four respondents stated that they saw the benefits of both systems; two discussed the challenges of both systems; two stated that they preferred a system that is free to publish and free to read; and one stated that they preferred “non-profit based open access,” where content is “free to read, with lower APC than for-profit.”

### *Perspectives on and Experiences with Open Access*

Respondents also agreed that it was important for the general public to be able to access and read their research (93%, n = 39) and that publishing open access would increase the visibility of their work (88%, n = 37). However, when respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with “I have departmental support to publish open access,” 55% (n = 23) disagreed, 17% (n = 7) agreed, and 29% (n = 12) selected neutral. Yet, the majority of respondents reported publishing an open access journal article before (79%, n = 33) and almost all respondents (95%, n = 40) would like to publish in open access journals in the future. Differences in prior experiences with open access publishing were seen across respondents, with a higher percentage of OAPF applicants (93%, n = 25) indicating that they had previously published an open access journal article when compared to those who had not applied to the OAPF (53%, n = 8).

Of the respondents who had previously published an open access journal article, most estimated that they had published between one and five articles (70%, n = 23). A smaller number of respondents reported publishing 6 to 10 (n = 4), 11 to 15 (n = 4), or 16 or more open access articles (n = 2). Respondents who selected “no” or “not applicable” to publishing an open access journal article before were asked to share some of the reasons why. Responses included concerns about the cost of open access publishing, apprehension about lower impact factors and standards for open access journals, as well as statements about career stage and that they had not published any journal articles yet.

### *Open Access Funding Sources*

When asked to rank potential funding sources for APCs, respondents listed grant budgets as the first source, followed by Office of Research budgets, department/college budgets, library budgets, and “other” (Figure 1). When ranking the “other” funding source, respondents were given the option of filling-out a text-box to specify the funding source, but all respondents left this box blank. The ranking of funding source preferences did not differ significantly across respondents based on OAPF applicant status.

When respondents were asked how much they would be willing to pay out-of-pocket to publish an article in an open access journal, a plurality indicated that they would only be willing to pay up to \$250 (36%, n = 15), while a majority selected various options that added up to \$1,000 (64%, n = 27). Of the respondents who selected “other” (n = 7), 6 listed \$0 in the open text-box and one stated they had “never paid out of pocket” (Figure 2). No respondents selected \$2,501 to \$3,000.

### *Experiences with the U of I – OAPF*

When those who had applied to the OAPF (64%, n = 27) were asked about their motivations for seeking funding, a slight majority indicated that it was a practical decision (n = 20) and a smaller number of respondents indicated that it was a desire to change publishing for the better (n = 12). Respondents could select multiple answers. When those who had not applied to the OAPF before (36%, n = 15) were asked



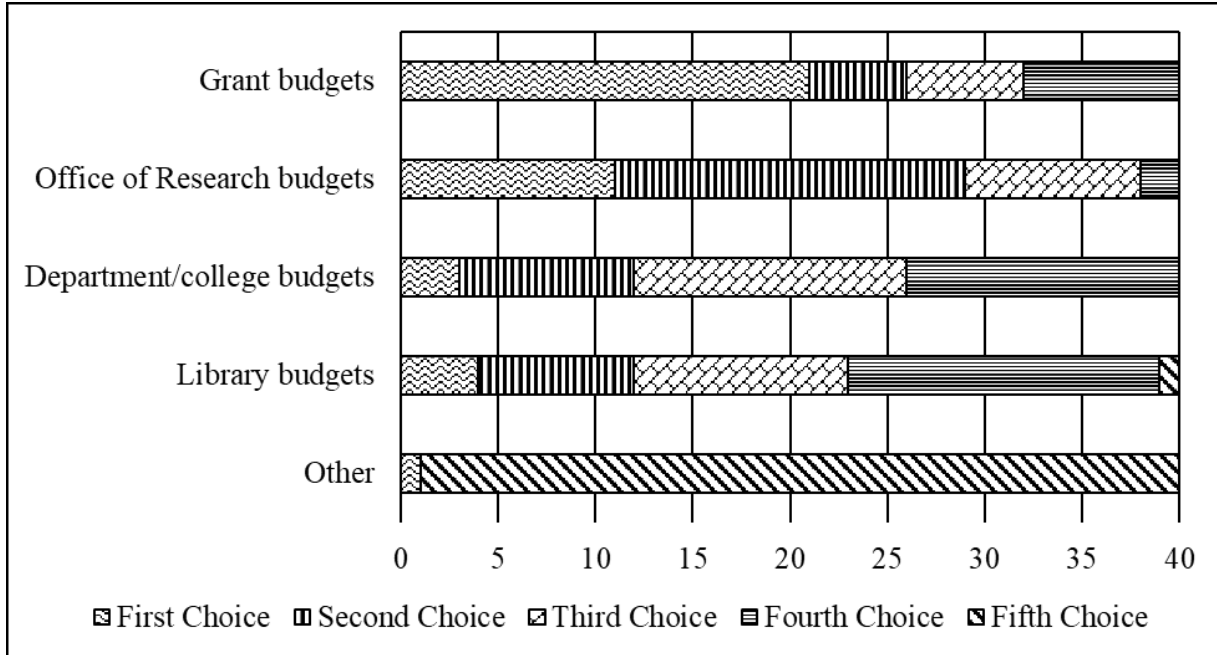


Figure 1  
Funding source preference for APCs, by respondent count (n = 40).

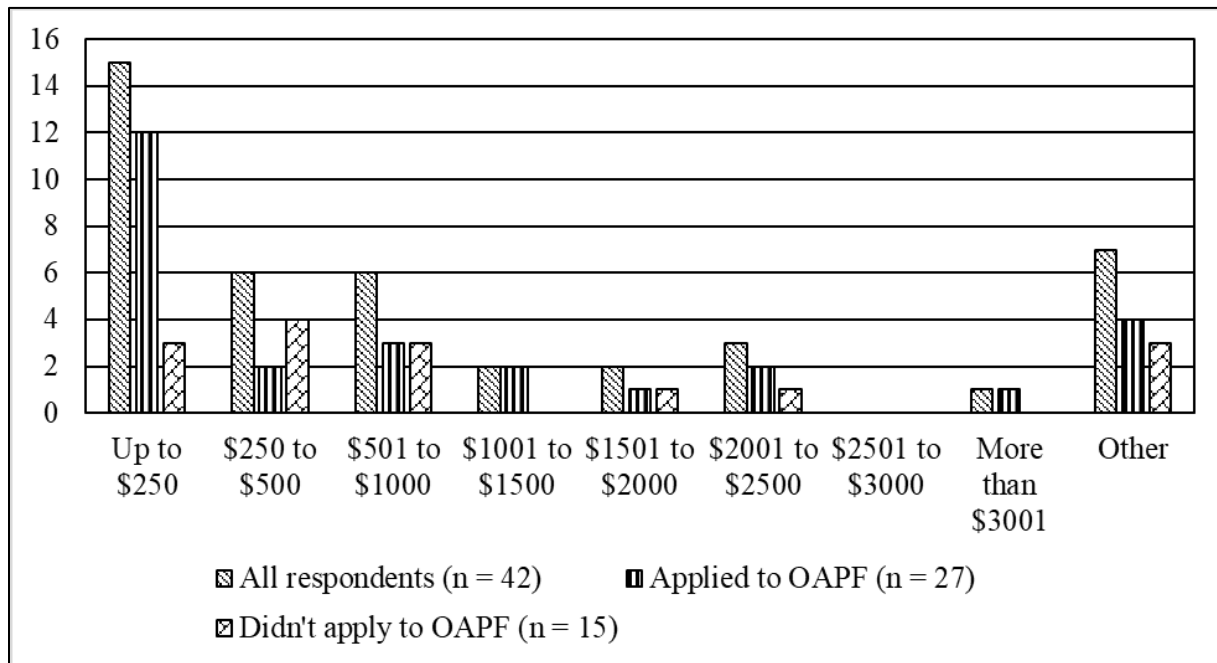


Figure 2  
What is the highest amount you would be willing to pay out-of-pocket to publish an article in an open access journal? (by respondent count).

why, responses included that they did not know it existed (n = 7), the OAPF was already closed (n = 4), and that their application did not meet all of the eligibility criteria (n = 4). Six of these respondents also selected “other” and shared more information in an open text-box, stating that they “never intend to publish in open access vanity journals,” “journals covered by the fund were too restrictive,” and “I have been able to cover the costs through grants, however, costs seem to be going up and I would like to publish more in open access journals.”

#### *Feedback on the U of I – OAPF’s Current Eligibility Criteria and Processes*

During the three-year pilot period, applicants had to meet specific article, journal, author, and documentation criteria and requirements in order to qualify for the fund. These were as follows: 1) Articles must be accepted for publication in the current fiscal year and funding per article is capped at \$2,000.00; 2) Journals must be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), utilize peer-review, and make articles fully open for publication; 3) Journal publishers must be members of or comply with the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA); 4) Hybrid journals are ineligible for funding; 5) The applicant must be a current U of I affiliate and funding per fiscal year is capped at \$3,000.00 per author; and 6) Priority will be given to OAPF applications without other sources of funding available. These criteria and requirements were established following a review of open access subvention funds at other colleges and universities as well as discussions with the OAPF fund partners about their goals for the fund.

The requirements that received the highest levels of support from respondents were that a journal must utilize peer-review (95%, n = 40) and make articles fully open upon publication (95%, n = 40), the affirmation that authors may apply for funding multiple times until their cap is met or funds are exhausted (85%, n = 35), only current U of I affiliates can apply for funding (83%, n = 34), and the prioritization of OAPF applications without other sources of funding available (71%, n = 29). The funding cap of \$3,000.00 per author per fiscal year (66%, n = 27) and the per article cap of \$2,000.00 (57%, n = 24) were also supported by a majority of respondents.

In comparison, the ineligibility of subscription journals that publish only certain articles open access (hybrid journals) was opposed by a plurality of respondents (oppose = 45%, n = 19). This was the only current criterion that received more opposition than support from respondents. Other requirements that received lower levels of support included that a journal must be listed in the DOAJ (support = 50%, n = 21), an article must be accepted for publication before submitting an OAPF application (support = 50%, n = 21), and that a journal publisher must be a member of or comply with the OASPA (support = 41%, n = 17).

Slight differences in the levels of support or opposition for specific criteria were seen based on OAPF applicant status. As seen in Figure 4, a higher percentage of those who had applied to the OAPF (67%, n = 18) than those who had not applied (20%, n = 3) expressed support for the requirement that articles must be accepted for publication before submitting an OAPF application. A higher percentage of OAPF applicants (96% n = 25) than non-applicants (67%, n = 10) also expressed support for the affirmation that authors may apply for funding multiple times until their cap is met or funds are exhausted. While a higher percentage of those who had not applied to the OAPF (87%, n = 13) than those who had applied (62%, n = 16) expressed support for the prioritization of applications without other sources of funding available (Figure 3).

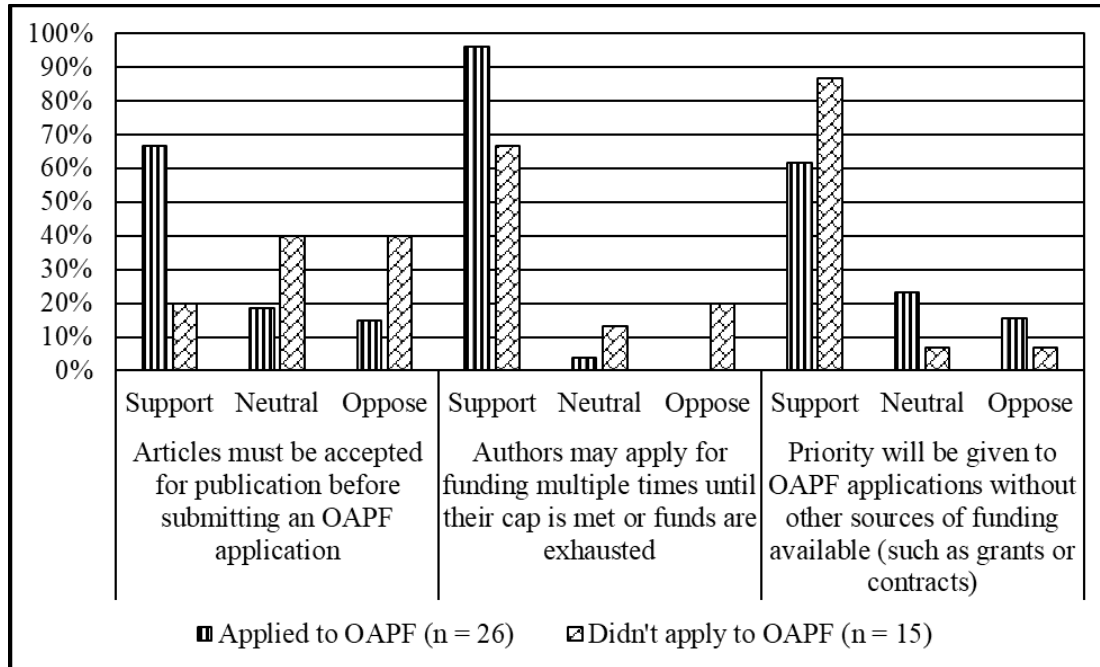


Figure 3  
Feedback on OAPF criteria and processes.

#### *Feedback on Proposed Changes to the U of I – OAPF's Eligibility Criteria*

Within this survey, respondents were also asked to indicate their support for changes suggested by members of the U of I community during the OAPF's three-year pilot period. The proposed changes with the highest levels of support from respondents were splitting the fund allocation during the fiscal year (63%, n = 26), allowing applications to be submitted for pre-approval when an article is undergoing peer-review (59%, n = 24), and making subscription journals that publish only certain articles open access (hybrid journals) eligible for funding (54%, n = 22). The proposed change with the highest level of opposition was that authors could only receive funding once per fiscal year (oppose = 56%, n = 23).

Slight differences in the levels of support or opposition for potential changes were seen based on OAPF applicant status. As seen in Figure 4, a higher percentage of those who had not applied to the OAPF (53%, n = 8) expressed support for setting aside or earmarking a portion of the funding for U of I affiliates at specific career stages when compared to those who had applied to the OAPF (31%, n = 8). While a higher percentage of those who had applied to the OAPF (62%, n = 16) expressed support for making hybrid journals eligible when compared to those who had not applied to the OAPF (40%, n = 6). When asked about setting aside or earmarking a portion of the funding for U of I affiliates in non-STEM disciplines, a slight plurality of those who had applied to the OAPF (46%, n = 12) opposed this change while a majority of those who had not applied to the OAPF (60%, n = 9) were neutral (Figure 4).

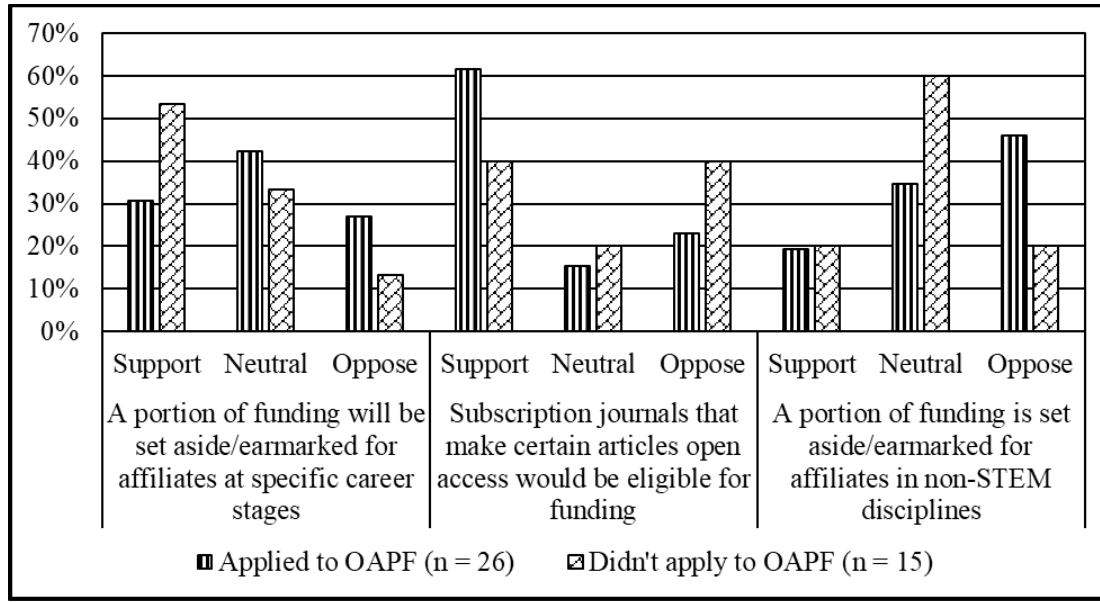


Figure 4  
Feedback on proposed changes to OAPF criteria and processes.

### Discussion/Limitations

Findings from this survey demonstrated that respondents agreed their research field/discipline benefits from open access journal articles, that publishing open access would increase the visibility of their work, and that the general public should be able to access and read their research. These findings are in line with previous research on open access publishing (Beaubien et al., 2016; Boock et al., 2020; Dallmeier-Tiessen et al., 2011; Dalton et al., 2020; Gaines, 2015; Greussing et al., 2020; Gyore et al., 2015; Jamali et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2016; Nabe & Imre, 2015; Odell et al., 2017; Rowley et al., 2017; Segado-Boj et al., 2018; Tenopir et al., 2017; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016; Togia & Korobili, 2014). Current survey respondents also affirmed that a journal's relevance to their discipline and its prestige were important factors when choosing both open access and non-open access journals (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019; Boock et al., 2020; Gaines, 2015; Greussing et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2016; Odell et al., 2017; Rowley et al., 2017). As found in prior research, respondents also appeared to hold positive opinions about the OAPF, and when asked to share their feedback, many commented that they wanted the fund to continue and that it would be difficult to publish in high quality journals without it (Gyore et al., 2015; McMillan et al., 2020; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016). Respondents to this survey also indicated a willingness to pursue open access publishing in the future, which is consistent with earlier research (Beaubien et al., 2016; Nabe & Imre, 2015).

Even though respondents were interested in open access publishing, they were less willing to pay the associated fees out-of-pocket. Most stated they would only be willing to pay up to \$1,000 out-of-pocket and preferred for APC funding to come from grant budgets first, followed by institutional funding sources, and finally library sources; these results are similar to those found in prior research (Sheikh, 2019; Tenopir et al., 2017; Teplitzky & Phillips, 2016; Togia & Korobili, 2014). One hypothesis as to why current respondents ranked agency and institutional funding sources higher than library funding sources is that authors may be prone to a status quo bias. If authors view paying APCs as the final stage in their research process, they may look to funding sources that are traditionally associated with research to pay these charges, such as grants, the Office of Research, and their own departments. Even though library and

out-of-pocket funding sources may be available, authors may not view these sources as viable funding options for APCs if they do not typically use them for their own professional research activities. A librarian's tendency to see APCs as the "flipside" of a subscription – both are types of funds that go to supporting a journal's operations – is not viewed in the same way by researchers. Additional research is necessary to investigate the relationship between funding source preferences for APCs and general support for library-funded open access subvention funds.

Overall, respondents indicated that they sought funding from the OAPF for practical reasons, but some were interested in changing publishing for the better. Those who had not sought funding from the OAPF admitted that they did not know it existed, that it was already closed when they attempted to apply, and that their applications did not meet all of the eligibility criteria. These results confirm that some of the OAPF's education and outreach is working, but additional work needs to be done to ensure that the entire campus community knows that this program exists and is kept informed about the fund's status and criteria. Survey responses and open text-box comments demonstrated that respondents supported most of the U of I OAPF's current criteria and processes, but were also interested in specific changes. Although U of I affiliates were interested in receiving financial support to publish in hybrid journals, the OAPF decided not to make hybrid open access journals eligible for funding. This decision was made following discussions with the OAPF fund partners in which they reaffirmed their commitment to only support articles that are published in fully open access journals. OAPF fund partners felt that hybrid open access journals did not support the OAPF's goals of promoting diversity and competition in the publishing services market nor would they advance open access publishing models that embrace equitable access to research. They also recognized that the consistently higher APCs charged by hybrid open access journals (see Budzinski et al., 2020; Pinfield et al, 2017) could result in fewer authors receiving support each year.

U of I affiliates were also interested in allowing authors to seek pre-approval for funding, but because of the potential issues associated with earmarking funding throughout the fiscal year, this suggestion has not been implemented at this time either. However, the OAPF will continue to investigate the "pre-approval for funding" option, in concert with the library's and university's financial experts, as the current "accepted for publication" criterion is likely a barrier that discourages some authors from pursuing open access publishing as they would be unable to pay the APCs without guaranteed financial support.

The change with the most support from survey respondents, splitting the fund allocation during the fiscal year, was something that seemed feasible and beneficial, if subsequent data also demonstrated that this change was necessary. After examining OAPF application data, the researchers discovered that 61% of the allocation in FY 2019, 89% of the allocation in FY 2020, and 100% of the allocation in FY 2021 had been disbursed by the end of the first six months of the fiscal year. The researchers were able to secure an additional \$20,000.00 in FY 2021 and reopen the fund in January 2021, but these funds were disbursed by the end of March 2021. As a result of this data and support from survey respondents, the OAPF proposed a change to its funding distribution cycle for FY 2022. With approval from its three original funding partners and a new donor, the OAPF's allocation was split 50/50, with half of the allocation (\$17,500) made available for articles accepted for publication between July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021, and the other half (\$17,500) made available for articles accepted for publication between January 1, 2022, and June 15, 2022. With this change, the OAPF seeks to create a more equitable funding cycle and give those who publish their research during the second half of the fiscal year an opportunity to receive financial support.

Looking ahead to future funding cycles, it will be necessary for the OAPF and its fund partners to continue to take the needs and suggestions of the U of I campus community into account, while also considering whether their perspectives correspond with the needs, interests, and goals of the OAPF and its fund partners. At times, as evinced by U of I affiliates' suggestion to make hybrid open access journal eligible for funding, the needs of researchers might be in conflict with the perspectives of the OAPF and its fund partners. The U of I's Faculty Senate Committee on Library Affairs gives us a means to discuss and evaluate these conflicting perspectives in a forum designated for handling faculty preferences with respect to library and institutional goals. Navigating conflicting perspectives is never an easy task; the fact that a conflict exists gives the OAPF fund partners an opportunity to listen and learn more about the needs and experiences of their affiliates and potentially find common ground.

### ***Comparison to Previous Research at the U of I***

This survey also built upon and modified four questions used in a previous study of U of I faculty members (Gaines, 2015). These questions focused on the benefits of open access to a researcher's discipline, prior open access publishing experience, the factors used when selecting where to publish, and perspectives on open access. In 2013, 57% of survey respondents believed that their research field/discipline "currently benefits or would benefit from journals that publish open access" (Gaines, 2015, p. 7); 96% (n = 27) of faculty respondents to the current survey believed the same. In total, 41% of faculty in 2013 had published an open access journal article before (Gaines, 2015, p. 7) compared to 89% (n = 25) of faculty respondents to the current survey. Although both survey samples were small, these data demonstrated that in the last eight years, it is likely that perspectives on open access have grown more positive and more faculty are engaging in open access publishing across campus; however, it is also necessary to recognize that the 2021 respondents may have an open access-positive response bias as more than half of respondents had sought support from the OAPF. Across both surveys, a higher percentage of faculty selected "relevance of the journal for their discipline" as important for both open and non-open access journals when compared to other factors (Gaines, 2015, p. 9). In 2013, 80% of faculty "strongly believed that publicly funded research should be made available to the public without barriers" (Gaines, 2015, p. 8), while 93% (n = 26) of faculty in the current survey agreed that "it is important to me that the general public can access and read my research." Gaines' (2015) findings demonstrated that 67% of respondents agreed that "publishing in open access journals would increase the visibility of their research," while 72% of respondents agreed that they "would like to publish in open access journals in the future" (p. 9). In the current survey, 89% (n = 25) and 93% (n = 26) of faculty respondents agreed with these statements, respectively. These data indicated that interest in open access appears to be growing at the U of I and more respondents agreed with many common philosophical and credit-based arguments about open access.

However, all of the findings were not as positive. When asked in 2013 whether they "felt they had institutional or departmental support to publish open access," 15% of faculty respondents agreed, 48% were unsure, and 35% disagreed (Gaines, 2015, p. 9). In the current survey, 14% (n = 4) of faculty agreed, 29% (n = 8) selected neutral, and 57% (n = 16) disagreed. These data showed that for some U of I faculty, departmental support for open access publishing might have decreased over the last eight years.

As neither survey defined "support," it is possible that respondents answered this question with different types of departmental support in mind, such as philosophical support, financial support, tenure/promotion support, or other types of support. Even though faculty respondents' may have interpreted "support for open access publishing" differently, the researchers affirm that these results are still relevant when examined in light of other findings. Although faculty respondents are interested in

publishing open access and see how this decision could potentially lead to both professional and broader public benefits, they do not feel that their departments are aligned with these pursuits. Looking ahead, additional research is necessary to investigate researchers' experiences and perceptions of various types of departmental support for open access publishing, as any efforts to increase departmental support for open access publishing will need to be tailored to the types of support that are currently lacking.

### **Limitations**

Although these data added to the U of I's knowledge of affiliates' perspectives on open access and the OAPF and led to proposed changes to the funding distribution cycle, it is important to acknowledge that there were limitations. One limitation is that the convenience sample of respondents—those who had applied for or expressed interest in the OAPF—likely had an open access-positive response bias. This bias did not negate the usefulness of these findings, but it did suggest that additional research with the U of I campus community is necessary to confirm whether these findings apply to the broader community. Other limitations included a small sample size, which limits both the local and broader generalizability of the results; a limited ability to ask follow-up questions; and the potential for respondents to interpret questions differently. To address the small sample size, researchers could seek additional IRB approval and pursue further engagement by asking library liaisons to share a link to the survey with faculty and students in their departments. Researchers could also ask the OAPF fund partners to send a joint email to campus affiliates, encouraging them to participate in the survey. To increase participation among an expanded convenience sample, the researchers could also add a link to the survey within the OAPF award decision emails and share a link to the survey with anyone who expressed interest in the fund. The lack of follow-up questions available when using the survey methodology could be addressed by adding open-ended “tell us why you selected that response” survey questions in specific locations. The researchers could also conduct interviews or focus groups to give participants an opportunity to share their perspectives in a less structured way. To ensure that all respondents approached questions in a consistent manner, researchers could also add definitions or clarify questions, when necessary. For example, the researchers could change the general phrase “departmental support” to “financial support from your department,” “philosophical support from your department,” or other options.

### **Conclusion**

As the OAPF's three-year pilot period has come to an end, it is evident that this program met a campus need by providing financial and philosophical support for those who were interested in open access publishing. Findings demonstrated that interest in open access journal publishing was high among a subset of the U of I campus community, but a perceived lack of departmental support was also common. Respondents supported most of the U of I OAPF's current criteria and processes, but they also supported changes that sought to make the fund more equitable. These included disbursing the allocation biannually to ensure that funding was available for researchers throughout the year and utilizing a pre-approval award process to ensure that funding was still available once an article was officially accepted for publication. During its FY 2022 award cycle, the OAPF was able to split the total allocation in half, ensuring that researchers publishing in either the first or the second half of the fiscal year had a similar opportunity to seek funding. More research is needed to determine whether this change to the disbursement cycle will be effective. The researchers will also continue investigating whether and how pre-approval of applications prior to article acceptance could be implemented. In investigating the feasibility of the pre-approval process, the researchers will leverage the expertise of the library's and university's financial experts as well as seek additional input from the OAPF's funding partners and members of the campus community.

This survey is just one piece of the data-driven assessment strategy that is necessary to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of an open access subvention fund. Although these results are specific to the local setting, the survey protocol as well as the experiences and needs of respondents could potentially inform OA subvention fund assessment and library practices at other institutions. For example, other institutions with open access subvention funds may choose to replicate this survey and add questions that reflect their unique institutional contexts. They might also consider investigating whether their fund could benefit from some of the changes suggested by our respondents and whether these changes would be feasible on their own campuses. Overall, these results demonstrated that the provision of a subvention fund is just one step in the process; libraries and institutions must continue to assess whether the fund's criteria and processes reflect the practices and needs of their own unique scholarly communities. Ongoing assessment should include a combination of data related to fund performance; the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of campus community members; and the impact of funded articles. Gathering data from a variety of sources will allow open access subvention funds and their fund partners to gain a well-rounded perspective on the impact of these funds; such work is already occurring at the U of I. To determine whether the open access subvention fund met its user-centred program outcomes, research analyzing citation data and researchers' publishing behaviours before and after receiving an OAPF award is also ongoing. Looking ahead to the ever-changing open access landscape, it will be necessary for those involved in open access subvention funds to continue their assessment efforts to ensure that these funds consistently meet the needs of their campus communities.

### Author Contributions

**Jylisa Doney:** Conceptualization (equal), Methodology (equal), Investigation (equal), Formal analysis (lead), Writing – original draft (lead), Writing – review & editing (equal) **Jeremy Kenyon:** Conceptualization (equal), Methodology (equal), Investigation (equal), Formal analysis (supporting), Writing – original draft (supporting), Writing – review & editing (equal)

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## Appendix Survey Questions

1. Do you believe your discipline or research field benefits from open access journal articles?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
  
2. Which system of publishing do you prefer?
  - a. One in which it is free to publish, but requires subscriptions to read
  - b. One in which it is free to read, but requires fees to publish
  - c. Other [text-box]
  
3. Have you published an open access journal article before?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not applicable [text-box]
  
4. Approximately how many open access journal articles have you published? (if Yes on Q3) [text-box]
  
5. What are some of the reasons you haven't published an open access journal article before? (if No on Q3) [text-box]
  
6. When you select a journal to publish in, how important are the following factors? (Likert scale: Not Important, Neutral, Important)
  - a. Non-open access journal
    - i. Prestige of the journal within your discipline
    - ii. Whether the journal is open access
    - iii. The cost to publish in the journal
    - iv. Relevance of the journal for your discipline
    - v. The journal's impact factor
    - vi. The anticipated speed of the peer-review to publication process
  - b. Open access journal
    - i. Prestige of the journal within your discipline
    - ii. Whether the journal is open access
    - iii. The cost to publish in the journal
    - iv. Relevance of the journal for your discipline
    - v. The journal's impact factor
    - vi. The anticipated speed of the peer-review to publication process
  
7. What is the highest amount you would be willing to pay out-of-pocket to publish an article in an open access journal if you had no financial support from grants, the U of I – OAPF, your department, etc.?
  - a. Up to \$250.00
  - b. \$250.00 to \$500.00
  - c. \$501.00 to \$1000.00
  - d. \$1001.00 to \$1500.00

- e. \$1501.00 to \$2000.00
  - f. \$2001.00 to \$2500.00
  - g. \$2501.00 to \$3000.00
  - h. More than \$3001.00
  - i. Other [text-box]
8. With 1 (one) being your top preference, please rank these common funding avenues based on where you believe funding for article processing charges (fees to publish in an open access journal) should come from.
- a. Grant budgets
  - b. Department/college budgets
  - c. Library budgets
  - d. Office of Research budgets
  - e. Other [text-box]
9. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements. (Likert scale: Disagree, Neutral, Agree)
- a. I have departmental support to publish open access
  - b. I prefer to publish in open access journals
  - c. I would like to publish in open access journals in the future
  - d. Important researchers in my field are publishing open access
  - e. Publishing open access would increase the visibility of my work
  - f. It is important to me that the general public can access and read my research
  - g. There are open access journals that match with my research interests/field
10. Have you applied for the U of I – OAPF during the last three years?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
11. What motivated you to apply for funding via the U of I – OAPF? (select all that apply) (if Yes on Q10)
- a. Desire to change publishing for the better
  - b. A practical decision
  - c. Other [text-box]
12. Did you receive funding for at least one article from the U of I – OAPF? (if Yes on Q10)
- a. Yes
  - b. No
13. Did you ultimately publish your article through other means? (if No on Q12)
- a. Yes: In an open access journal
  - b. Yes: In a non-open access journal
  - c. No
  - d. Other [text-box]
14. What are some of the reasons you haven't applied to the U of I – OAPF before? (select all that apply) (if No on Q10)
- a. Didn't know it existed
  - b. OAPF was already closed

- c. My application didn't meet all of the eligibility criteria
- d. Other [text-box]

15. What feedback do you have about the U of I – OAPF's application, notification, invoice payment and reimbursement, or other aspects of the process? Questions about criteria and processes appear on the next page of the survey. [text-box]

Please indicate your support for the U of I – OAPF's current criteria and processes.

16. Article criteria (Likert scale: Oppose, Neutral, Support)

- a. Articles must be accepted for publication before submitting an OAPF application
- b. Funding per article is capped at \$2000.00

17. Journal criteria (Likert scale: Oppose, Neutral, Support)

- a. The journal must be listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
- b. The journal must utilize peer-review
- c. The journal must make articles fully open upon publication
- d. Subscription journals that make certain articles open access are ineligible for funding
- e. The journal publisher must be a member of or comply with the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA)

18. Author criteria (Likert scale: Oppose, Neutral, Support)

- a. Only current U of I affiliates are able to apply for the OAPF
- b. Funding per author is capped at \$3000.00 per fiscal year
- c. Authors may apply for funding multiple times until their cap is met or funds are exhausted
- d. Priority will be given to OAPF applications without other sources of funding available (such as grants or contracts)

19. Award process (Likert scale: Oppose, Neutral, Support)

- a. Applications are evaluated on a first come, first served basis
- b. The OAPF will pay invoices directly
- c. The OAPF will reimburse funded applicants for out-of-pocket invoice payments

20. Please indicate your support for the following changes to the U of I – OAPF, as suggested by members of the U of I community. (Likert scale: Oppose, Neutral, Support)

- a. An OAPF application can be submitted for pre-approval when an article is undergoing peer-review
- b. A portion of funding will be set aside/earmarked for U of I affiliates at specific career stages
- c. Authors can only receive funding once per fiscal year
- d. A portion of funding is set aside/earmarked for U of I affiliates in non-STEM disciplines
- e. Subscription journals that make certain articles open access would be eligible for funding

- f. Split OAPF allocation within the fiscal year (e.g. Half the allocation is available for applications submitted between July and December; half the allocation is available for applications submitted between January and June)
21. What other changes would you like to see the U of I – OAPF make to its criteria and processes?  
[text-box]
22. Do you have any additional feedback about the U of I – OAPF? [text-box]
23. Are you a current U of I ...
- a. Faculty member
  - b. Staff member
  - c. Postdoctoral researcher
  - d. Enrolled graduate student
  - e. Enrolled undergraduate student
  - f. Other [text-box]
24. What is your age?
- a. 18 - 25
  - b. 26 - 35
  - c. 36 - 45
  - d. 46 - 55
  - e. 56 - 65
  - f. 66 - 75
  - g. 75 +
25. Which college do you primarily work in?
- a. Agricultural and Life Sciences
  - b. Art and Architecture
  - c. Business and Economics
  - d. Education, Health and Human Sciences
  - e. Engineering
  - f. Law
  - g. Letters, Arts and Social Sciences
  - h. Natural Resources
  - i. Science
  - j. Other [text-box]
26. Which department do you primarily work in? [text-box]