

Scholarly Communications in a Rapidly Changing US Policy Landscape

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Recent policy changes from the current US government administration have had a significant impact on scientific communications.^{1,2} In this panel discussion, scholarly publishing and academic experts reflected on how these changes affect the scholarly communications industry and what they have been hearing from the communities they serve. The audience was able to anonymously submit questions, which were also addressed by the panel.

Topic: How can we support researchers affected by these policy changes?

The panel acknowledged that a major outcome of the current policy changes has been grant and funding termination. Some studies are being halted midway through, while others will not be able to start. Wherever possible, we should offer support and let researchers know the community values what they do. If resources allow, provide funds to bring research to an orderly rather than abrupt finish, or look into organizations that will provide funding for this purpose. Do not close more doors.

Topic: What can publishers and preprint servers do to support scholarly communications?

Publishers should continue publishing and making decisions following standards and best practices, as they always have, adhering to existing policies and remaining committed to the academic record. Be flexible with lead times and author responses, knowing that many authors are going through uncertain times. Due to fears of loss of employment or funding, there may be an increase in author requests to remove their names from or redact certain parts of their work in order to comply with new policies. In these cases, we should strive for a balance between protection and integrity. Panelists suggested approaching these requests

on a case-by-case basis. It is important for publishers to maintain standards for quality and integrity, but it is also important to protect authors and researchers. Some publishers, including Science³ and JAMA Network,⁴ as well as publishing services companies like Scholastica,⁵ have issued statements reaffirming their commitment to science and opposing censorship.

An uptick in the number of preprints is expected, as the number of authors who can no longer afford article processing charges (APCs) is expected to increase. If your publisher or journal has the means to do so, consider supporting authors who can no longer afford APCs due to funding cuts.

There may be a need for new guidance (e.g., what to do about articles that cite references that no longer exist).

Topic: Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

DEI is a hot button topic due to the current administration's policies. Panelists were asked to provide suggestions for how to continue to support DEI. One panelist suggested finding creative ways to deliver education and knowledge while still following the changing laws. Diversity goes beyond gender, race, and ethnicity, and as researchers and communicators we should think creatively about how to achieve our DEI goals in different ways. For example, using blanket terms such as "underrepresented" without saying how a group is underrepresented, or changing terminology when possible to avoid banned words. It was acknowledged that taking these approaches might lead to feelings of guilt, cowardice, or unwilling compliance. Panelists reiterated that workarounds may not be ideal but may be necessary right now. Additionally, keep in mind that while there are certain topics we will not see papers on from the United States, this does not mean research on these topics is not happening elsewhere.

Topic: How can we educate the public about the value of scientific communications?

Change does not need to be large to be impactful. As scholarly communications professionals, we can have real conversations with real people to enact change. Educate

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people about what you do, why it is important, and how it affects them. Encourage others in the industry to do the same. Tailor your communications to the recipients' preferences in order to effectively communicate the information you want to deliver. Not every conversation you have will move the needle, but little by little they help make a difference. Remain confident that we have principles to stand on and policies to back.

Topic: When to take a stand

There was a lot of discussion around taking a stand—when to do it, what we can do, etc. As mentioned previously, some publishers have released statements defending science and opposing recent policy changes. Some attendees expressed a desire to “get loud” about the policy changes. Others questioned at what point we are making a mistake by accommodating instead of pushing back. Panelists encouraged attendees to keep in mind that not everyone has the same resources and professional support or flexibility to take a stand. We are in a unique position now in which support for the current administration might be wavering and some former supporters are expressing regret. We can use this opportunity to connect with people who might be in this position and therefore might be more receptive to hearing a different perspective.

The overarching message of the session was to strive for balance and solidarity. As professionals in scholarly communications, our goal is to continue publishing excellent research. We might need to have some workarounds for the time being, but this too shall pass—we should continue to keep science at the forefront of what we do and focus on communicating research and findings in effective and creative ways, if necessary. We have the ability to reach people and change minds—let's use that ability as best we can.

References and Links

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