F.O.R.M.

OPEN SCIENCE RESOURCES

BUILDING A ROBUST OPEN ACCESS POLICY

Open Access policies lay the foundation for equitable knowledge sharing. A well-developed policy empowers researchers, aligns with global mandates, and strengthens institutional visibility.

CORE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A ROBUST OPEN ACCESS POLICY

Open Access policies define the principles and requirements for making research outputs freely available. A strong Open Access policy defines what is expected of researchers, outlines the types of outputs covered, and provides clear guidance on licensing, rights, repositories, and support.

- **Clear Definitions:** Define key terms such as Open Access, repositories, embargo, APCs, etc.
- **Institutional Commitment:** Include a public statement of support for Open Access and Open Science.
- **Reference to national or funder frameworks:** Align with relevant national policies or funder Open Access mandates.
- **Scope:** Outline what types of research outputs are covered (e.g., journal articles, data, theses).
- **Mandates & Timelines:** Consider who will deposit content, when this should happen (e.g. upon acceptance vs. post-publication), and whether there will be embargo periods.
- **Repository Use:** Specify which institutional or subject repositories should be used for depositing research outputs.

- **APC and Funding Guidelines:** Provide guidance on how/when APCs will be covered (or not).
- **Licensing & Copyright:** Encourage or require use of Creative Commons licenses (e.g., CC-BY).
- **Monitoring & Compliance:** Outline how adherence will be monitored, and how compliance encouraged / enforced.
- **Support Structures:** Point to institutional support (library, Open Access office, etc.)

Let's explore in more detail the major elements of Open Access policies:

Scope and Coverage

The types of research outputs included (e.g., journal articles, books, data).

Open Access policies define which research outputs must be made openly accessible, often including journal articles, books, and datasets. Some policies apply only to publicly funded research, while others extend to all institutional outputs. Policies may also vary in their requirements for different disciplines, recognising that Open Access practices differ across fields.

Data Sharing and Reproducibility

Policies on making research data and software openly available.

Many Open Access policies now emphasise open data to enhance transparency and reproducibility. Researchers may be required to deposit underlying data in repositories (e.g., Zenodo, Dryad) and provide software or code associated with their research. While openness is encouraged, exceptions exist for ethical, legal, or security reasons, particularly in sensitive fields like medical research.

Licensing and Copyright

Conditions for content reuse, including Creative Commons licenses.

Open Access policies often specify whether researchers retain copyright or must transfer it to publishers. Many policies mandate the use of Creative Commons (CC) licenses, particularly CC BY, which allows unrestricted reuse with attribution. These licenses ensure compliance with Open Access principles while enabling broader dissemination and reuse of research.

Publication Guidelines

Requirements for Open Access journal publication, hybrid models, or preprint sharing.

Researchers may be required to publish in fully Open Access journals, hybrid journals with Open Access options, or share preprints for early dissemination. Some institutions and funders negotiate transformative agreements with publishers, allowing authors to publish Open Access without direct fees. These agreements are part of the shift toward making Open Access publishing the default model.

Deposit and Archiving Requirements

Where and how research should be stored

Many Open Access policies mandate researchers to deposit their work in designated repositories. These policies specify accepted formats (some require the published version, while others allow the accepted manuscript), and embargo periods (timeframes before research becomes openly accessible, often determined by publisher agreements). Repositories may be institutional (e.g., university archives) or subject-based.

Funding and Support

Financial assistance for Open Access publishing costs, such as APCs.

Many Open Access policies outline how APCs and other publication costs are covered. Support may come from institutional Open Access funds, research grants that allocate funds for Open Access publishing and national or international Open Access funding initiatives. However, challenges remain, as not all institutions can afford to support widespread Open Access publishing, and researchers in low-resource settings may face barriers to publishing in high-impact Open Access journals.

Compliance and Monitoring

Responsibilities, enforcement mechanisms, and penalties for non-compliance.

To enforce adherence, institutions and funders implement various monitoring mechanisms:

- Pre-publication checks: Many journals verify that submissions comply with Open Access and data-sharing policies.
- Digital compliance tracking: Tools like Unpaywall and Plan S Journal Checker help funders and publishers monitor Open Access adherence.
- Sanctions for non-compliance: Some funders, like the NIH, withhold grants or disallow costs if researchers fail to meet Open Access requirements.

Increasingly, institutions and publishers collaborate to streamline Open Access compliance, ensuring that researchers can meet requirements without administrative burdens.

KEY STEPS TO START DRAFTING YOUR POLICY

By taking a structured and collaborative approach, you can create a policy that reflects your institution's goals and is embraced by your research community.

1. **Set Up a Working Group** – include stakeholders from library, research office, legal, faculty, etc.

2. **Review Examples** – adapt from strong policies and similar institutions

3. **Map Existing Practices & Gaps** – what are researchers already doing? What's missing?

4. **Draft and Consult** – circulate a draft and consult widely

5. **Endorse and Communicate** – seek leadership endorsement and launch with a communication plan

KEEPING THE OPEN ACCESS POLICY UP TO DATE

Policies should be reviewed at least **every 2-3 years**, or sooner if there are major changes in national or regional research mandates, new technological advancements, or shifts in funding requirements to make sure institutional support mechanisms are in line with current needs and external trends.

Feedback from stakeholders, such as faculty and researchers, should be incorporated to address compliance challenges and ensure the policy aligns with evolving practices, like the inclusion of new research outputs and Open Science initiatives.

GUIDE TO BUILDING AN OPEN ACCESS POLICY

This guide provides flexible and adaptable guidelines to help institutions develop their own Open Access policies. The table below outlines typical sections of an Open Access policy. Institutions are encouraged to customise the structure, content, and tone according to their own mission, governance style, and strategic objectives and priorities.

Note: Some institutions opt for concise, principles-based policies and provide further guidance in separate FAQs or annexes. Others prefer a more comprehensive policy from the outset. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Section Title	Description / Examples
Header	Include the seal/logo of the institution, the official title of the document (e.g. Institutional Open Access Policy), and, if applicable, a reference to the approving resolution or document ID.
Preamble / Institutional Relevance	Open the policy with a statement aligning it with the institution's vision, mission, or strategic research goals. This grounds the Open Access policy in the institution's identity and values (e.g. knowledge equity, academic excellence, or societal engagement).
Definitions	Provide clear definitions for key terms included in the policy such as: – Open Access – Institutional Repository – Article Processing Charges (APCs) – Embargo Period – Green/Gold OA – Final Author's Accepted Manuscript (AAM)
References	Mention relevant global, regional, or national declarations, funder mandates, and open science principles. If your country or the region have national science or open science strategies, aligning with these adds legitimacy and relevance. Examples: – Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002) – Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003) – UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (2021) – Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information (2024)
Purpose / Rationale	Clearly state the policy's purpose. Explain the benefits of OA for the institution and society at large - e.g. increased visibility, collaboration, impact, and alignment with global research practices.

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Scope and Application	Define who the policy applies to (e.g. faculty, researchers, students, affiliated research centers), and what types of content it covers (e.g. peer-reviewed articles, theses, datasets). You may also note if future iterations will include additional research outputs (e.g. software, multimedia, etc.). “This policy applies to all scholarly publications, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and datasets produced by faculty, researchers, and staff affiliated with the institution.”
Policy Body/ Statements with Guidelines	This is the core of the policy, where expectations are laid out. It may include recommendations, requirements, or both, depending on the institution’s readiness. This section may include: • Publication Guidelines for hybrid OA models, preprint sharing, and journal policies. • Licensing and Rights Retention to clarify what rights authors are expected to retain or assign (e.g., applying a Creative Commons license or including rights retention statements in publishing agreements). • Institutional Repository Details and Deposit and Archiving to ensure clarity on how and where to deposit manuscripts (who does it, metadata needed, embargo management, etc.). • Data Sharing and Reproducibility to emphasise the institution’s commitment to open data, transparency, and reproducibility in research. (Recommendation) Examples of Policy Statements: “Researchers are encouraged to retain sufficient rights to allow deposit in the institutional repository and to apply a CC-BY license where appropriate to promote reuse and attribution.” “Authors are encouraged to publish in Open Access journals where feasible, to ensure broad accessibility of their work.” “Researchers are encouraged to deposit a copy of their peer-reviewed publications in the institutional repository to maximise accessibility and long-term preservation.”

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Policy Body/ Statements with Guidelines	"Researchers are encouraged to deposit their research data and accompanying documentation in the institutional repository or recognised open data platforms to facilitate reuse and reproducibility." "Authors are encouraged to submit preprints of their work to recognized platforms, such as (list of platforms), to foster early dissemination and community feedback." (Mandate) Examples of Policy Statements: "Researchers must ensure that any manuscript submitted for publication retains sufficient rights for deposit in the institutional repository, and must apply an open license (e.g., CC-BY) where appropriate, unless restricted by publisher agreements or funding requirements." "All research funded by external agencies must comply with Open Access requirements as stipulated by the funding body, ensuring immediate or delayed access based on funder policies." "Researchers must deposit the final peer-reviewed manuscript in the institutional repository within (e.g., 6 months) of publication to comply with institutional policy and ensure broader access to research outputs." "Researchers must deposit all datasets required for reproducing their research findings in the institutional repository or a recognized open data platform within (X months) of publication. All data must be accompanied by metadata and documentation to ensure the data's reusability and reproducibility." "Researchers must submit preprints of their work to recognized platforms, such as (list of platforms), if applicable to their field, in accordance with institutional open access strategies."
Support and Implementation	Describe how the institution will enable and promote OA, e.g.: – Training and awareness sessions for faculty and researchers – Guidance on copyright and publisher agreements – Provision (or plans) for an institutional repository – Support for APCs (Article Processing Charges), if relevant

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Monitoring and Compliance	Outline how policy implementation will be tracked and evaluated. Example: “The University Library and Research Office will monitor deposit rates and publish annual reports. This policy will be reviewed every two years to ensure relevance and effectiveness.”
Exceptions	State any legitimate exemptions (e.g. publisher embargoes, confidentiality, national security, or third-party IP rights). Example: “Exceptions may apply where publications involve confidential data, third-party copyright, or publisher-imposed embargoes.”
Approval and Review	Indicate who approved the policy and when. Include a scheduled date or cycle for future review.
FAQs and Suggested Resources	FAQs or supplementary guidance help clarify key points, define processes, and ensure consistent internal communication. These may be published on a website or included as annexes. Highlighting FAQs can help ease implementation and reduce confusion among researchers.
Version Control / Change Log	For transparency when the policy is updated or revised. Include version number, date, summary of changes.

RESOURCES

For further resources, guidelines and templates, you can access the following links:

- CARL/ABRC Open Access Toolkit (Canada)
- Open Access Network (Germany)
- Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University (USA)
- OpenAire (EU)

For some examples of policies, please check the below:

- University of London (UK)
- Simon Fraser University (Canada)
- York University (Canada)
- University of York (UK)

ABOUT FORM:

The Forum for Open Research in MENA (FORM) is a non-profit membership organisation supporting the advancement of Open Science policies and practices in research communities and institutions across the Arab region.

Learn more by visiting us at www.forumforopen.org