



Why Open Doesn't Mean Free: Sustaining High-Quality Publishing in an Open Access World

Open Access is revolutionizing the world of scholarly publishing, but there's a common misconception: Open Access means "free" publishing. While it's true that Open Access makes research freely available to the public, it doesn't mean that there are no costs associated with publishing high-quality, peer-reviewed research. Sustainable publishing requires a significant investment in key areas like editorial oversight, peer review, and digital infrastructure - elements that are crucial to maintaining the integrity of research. At ACM, we are committed to striking a balance between making research accessible to all and ensuring the financial sustainability of our publishing program. ACM Open, our Open Access initiative, is designed with this goal in mind. We've developed a sustainable model that provides equitable access while also ensuring long-term viability for the institutions and researchers that rely on our platform.

The True Cost of High-Quality Research Publishing

To understand why Open Access isn't free, we need to examine the true costs of high-quality research publishing. The process goes beyond simply publishing papers; high-quality research publishing requires vigilant efforts to combat plagiarism and ensure academic integrity. As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, publishers face increasing challenges in distinguishing between human-authored research and machine-generated texts.

Protecting the originality and authenticity of scholarly work is crucial, necessitating advanced detection tools and evolving editorial practices to uphold trust in the research process:

- Peer review ensures that research meets rigorous academic standards.
- Editorial work helps shape research into articles that are clear, accurate, and meaningful.
- And a robust digital infrastructure is necessary to store, protect, and share research across the globe.
- All of these elements require significant resources - human, financial, and technological.

Simply making research "free" without sustainable funding models doesn't ensure that these costs will be covered. In the absence of solid financial backing, publishing quality research can become difficult or impossible, and this threatens the integrity of academic publishing.

How ACM Open Provides a Sustainable Solution

Recognizing the importance of these factors, ACM offers ACM Open, a model that supports both the needs of institutions and the long-term sustainability of scholarly publishing.

- **Institutional Investment:**
ACM Open spreads the costs across institutions, which ensures that financial pressure is distributed fairly. Rather than relying on article processing charges (APCs) that place the burden on individual authors, ACM Open allows institutions to invest in the broader publishing system, ensuring stability for all.



- **No APCs for Authors:**

A key advantage of the ACM Open model is that it eliminates APC fees for authors. Unlike traditional Open Access models that charge authors a fee for each article they publish (APCs), ACM Open allows authors from participating institutions to publish unlimited Open Access articles at no extra cost. This is a crucial step in making Open Access truly equitable, as it removes a potential financial barrier to publishing research.

- **Long-Term Stability:**

ACM Open operates on a predictable pricing model that helps avoid sudden cost spikes. By setting prices based on a fixed fee calculated from each institution's average publishing output over the past three years, the model provides long-term predictability. This ensures that institutions can plan their budgets with confidence, while also reducing the financial burden on smaller institutions.

The Future of Sustainable Open Access in Computing Research

At ACM, we are committed to the transition to **100% Open Access by January 2026**. This transition is a major step toward making computing research accessible to all, but it requires careful planning and collaboration with the academic community to succeed.

As more institutions join ACM Open, we move closer to a future where all computing research is openly available. But it's not just about the transition to Open Access, it's about ensuring that this transition is financially sustainable for the long term. We're building a community-driven model that depends on the involvement and support of academic institutions, funders, and libraries.

Nearly 2,000 institutions have already dedicated precious budget resources to become ACM Open participants, supporting both this initiative and the global Open Access transition as a new model. Many have achieved this through strategic partnerships with multiple departments or by banding together as consortia, creating a shared financial commitment that can help alleviate individual institutional burdens. We're building a community-driven model that depends on the involvement and support of academic institutions, funders, and libraries, working together to make this vision a reality.

How Institutions Can Take an Active Role in Shaping Open Access Sustainability

Institutions are not passive participants in the Open Access movement, they play a crucial role in shaping its future. By supporting models like ACM Open, institutions can help create a sustainable ecosystem for Open Access publishing. The success of the transition to Open Access depends on their active involvement, ensuring that the needs of both researchers and publishers are met.

Institutions can also take advantage of their unique position to advocate for fair funding models that support Open Access without burdening researchers. Nearly 2,000 institutions have already dedicated precious budget resources to become ACM Open participants, supporting both this initiative and the global Open Access transition as a new model. Many have achieved this through strategic partnerships with multiple departments or by banding together as consortia, creating a shared financial commitment that helps alleviate individual institutional burdens.



This is why community-driven funding models like ACM Open are so important - they distribute the cost of publishing across the entire institution, rather than leaving individual authors to pay for their work to be made open. We're building a community-driven model that depends on the involvement and support of academic institutions, funders, and libraries, working together to make this vision a reality.

Final Thoughts

The shift to Open Access is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It requires careful consideration of funding models, institutional support, and long-term sustainability. At ACM, we are proud to offer a model that balances accessibility with financial viability. ACM Open provides an equitable, transparent, and sustainable approach to Open Access that ensures the continued quality and availability of computing research.

The goal is clear - to make high-quality research freely available to everyone, while maintaining the integrity of the publishing process and ensuring the financial sustainability of scholarly publishing for the long term. As we move closer to our goal of 100% Open Access by 2026, we remain committed to working with the academic community to build a stronger, more sustainable Open Access future.