Commonplace • Series 1.3: Global Transition to Open

Getting Your Library to Open: Four Steps and Five Measures

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Introduction

This is a “How To” guide. This guide will propose four steps a library needs to take if it wants to be open. It will also provide five measures that can be used to judge success. We need to begin with the understanding that while the steps are easy to describe, they will be difficult and likely take years to accomplish. When what you are aiming for is hard and long-term, measurements—signs that progress is being made—are necessary. Without them you will not reach your destination.

What is an Open Library?

Promoting open access is part of the answer, but more is required. An open library strongly and actively supports an open scholarly ecosystem; that is, a scholarly ecosystem that is open and controlled by the scholarly community and managed for its benefit. An Open scholarly ecosystem should encourage diversity, eliminate barriers for both researchers and readers, maximize access and availability for scholars and the public, encourage innovation, and achieve the largest possible societal benefit from subsidies provided by governments and other funders. The alternative is an ecosystem that is dominated by a small number of large commercial firms and large not-for-profit scholarly organizations that share their interests. These firms extract monopoly rents and remove subsidy from the system to the benefit of shareholders, or to subsidize non-publishing activities.¹ In such an ecosystem, short-term profit is the primary goal, access is regulated and monitored, diversity is constrained, and innovation discouraged.

This is the choice before us.

Steps

The steps can be described simplistically as moving resources, mostly money from box to box in a simple model. We can think of the library as the two-by-three box shown below in [Figure 1](#).

	Commercial		Open
	Just-in-Case	Just-in-Time	
Outside In	1	3	5
Inside Out	2	4	6

Figure 1

The first dimension is “outside-in” and “inside-out.”² The “outside-in” boxes contain resources devoted to bringing content from the world to the campus. “Inside-out” boxes contain resources devoted to sharing campus resources with the world.

The second dimension is “commercial” and “open.” “Commercial” here indicates market-based transactions and extends beyond for-profit to include market transactions with non-profit organizations. “Open” indicates transactions that are not simply open access, but that are also with community-based organizations.³ “Commercial” can be subdivided into “just-in-case” and “just-in-time.” The former indicating resources devoted to content in anticipation of use and the latter indicating resources devoted to content purchased on demand. The boxes are numbered, and the numbers in grey will be used as shorthand in the discussion below.

[Figure 2](#) below shows the state of a typical library at the beginning of the journey to open. Nearly all the money is in Box 1. It is being spent to purchase content. Smaller amounts of money are in Box 3 are devoted to interlibrary loan and in Box 6 devoted to archives and special collections.

		Commercial		Open
		Just-in-Case	Just-in-Time	
Outside In	1	Purchased Content	3 ILL	5
	2		4	6 Archives & Special Collections
Inside Out				

Figure 2

Step One: Just-in-Time to Just-in-Case.

The first step is critical, but in some ways it is simple. It requires moving money from Box 1 to the Box 3. This can be accomplished by implementing on-demand purchasing for books, both digital and paper, and moving from journal subscriptions to article purchase on demand.⁴ It is important that this step save money that can be used to accomplish the next step.

Step Two: Get Serious About Inside Out.

Using the money saved in Step One, expand the money spent in Box 6 by expanding the capacities to promote and make accessible work created on campus by creating a repository, library publishing program, or open access authors' fund. Each of these things will increase the world-wide visibility of and access to campus content. This will require adding expertise, through training or hiring new staff; acquiring new technology, and reallocating budgets. None of this is simple, but all of it is doable.

Figure 3

Steps One and Two are shown in [Figure 3](#).

Step Three: Transformative Agreements.

This step is not for everyone. It probably is only useful at large research-intensive institutions and even then, it might not be a good idea.⁵ The money here is mostly moved around inside Box 1, which is not really a change. Some of the funds are moved to the Box 2, but it continues to go to commercial firms. Over time, the dollar expenditure on these agreements should decline. If it does not, the agreement is not transformative, and this step does not further the journey to open. Step Three is shown in [Figure 4](#).

Figure 4

Step Four: Fund Common Resources

This is a difficult but crucial step: spend less money purchasing content and instead fund national or international digital resources and infrastructure. This would include investing in resources like arXiv and DOAJ, open journals or open monograph programs, or infrastructure projects like DSpace, Hyku, OJS, PubPub, or Portico. The reason this step is hard is partly because they are open resources. You don't have to put money in this box to access what comes out of it. More importantly, money put into Boxes 1, 2, 3, and 6, however it is spent, has a direct impact on people at your institution. It either provides them resources (Boxes 1 and 3) or promotes their work (Boxes 2 and 6). But money put into Box 5 does not directly impact anyone on your campus. While it is necessary to create a healthy open ecosystem for the world, your library can freeride if it chooses. This is what makes this step a big challenge. Step Four is shown in [Figure 5](#).

Figure 5

I have proposed a more detailed roadmap using an imaginary library to show how these steps play out over a decade, so while the transition to an open library may seem to be difficult, if you go out ten years and plot it back, it is not as big a stretch it might seem.⁶

Measures

Libraries have three types of resources: dollars, people, and space. We will set space aside. The other two are relevant to this discussion. Both are fungible, that is you can turn dollars into people and people into dollars. In the discussion that follows we will use the term “resources” to mean the total of dollars and the cost of people, that is their salaries including benefits.

In the measures that follow there will often be situations where definitions are important, but they are not yet well defined. As an example, who counts as a commercial publisher or how are overheads allocated. For now, we will recognize that this is the case and will assume the definitions can be established. It would be best if this were done by national organizations such as ARL, ACRL, or IPEDS.

Measure One: Percent of Resources Devoted to Open

That is the total resources in Boxes 5 and 6 divided by the sum of the resources in all the boxes. In the past, I have suggested that this percentage should be 2.5%.⁷ This is clearly not adequate, especially for larger libraries that make significant investments, often largely of people in Box 6. The current percentage should likely be more than 5% with a five year goal of 10% to 20% and a ten year goal of 30% to 40%. This is the overall measure of success in becoming an Open Library.

Measure Two: The Percentage of Commercial Dollar Expenditures Devoted to Outside-In Just-in-Time

That is Box 3 divided by the sum of Box 1 and Box 3. For most libraries this percentage is currently in the 10% to 20% range. Whatever it is, it should increase at a reasonably quick rate. This assures that the library is accomplishing [Step One](#).

Measure Three: Dollars Spent with Commercial Firms as a Percentage of Total Dollar Expenditures

That is the total dollars spent in Boxes 1 through 4 divided by the sum of all the dollars spent in all the boxes. Whatever this percentage is now, it should decline over time and preferably at a predetermined rate. This measure assures that the library does not remain captive to commercial firms as they find new ways to sell their products. For example, a transformative agreement does not change this measure unless it costs less than the “big deal” it replaces or if the cost of the “transformative agreement” does not decline.

Measure Four: Commercial Dollar Expenditures Devoted to Outside-In Just-in-Case

That is the dollars spend in Box 1. This number should decline. This assures that as [Step One](#) is being accomplished, there are surplus dollars that can be spent in other areas, particularly Box 6.

Measure Five: The Percentage of Total Resources Devoted to Open Outside-In

That is Box 5 divided by the sum of all the boxes. This is the percent of the library's resources devoted to common community managed resources and infrastructure and is a subset of Measure One. This measure should be at least half of Measure One at should probably grow to be 60% to 75%. This measure assures that the library is accomplishing Step Four. As noted above this step will be difficult and so this measure is particularly important.

Conclusion

The voyage to becoming an Open Library is a bit easier to chart than it is to embark on. You will also need to establish the details for the measures, set targets, and log progress. Any library can do it, but it does take strong institutional will and follow-through. You will also want to look for others who are on this journey to collaborate with, and prod each other on.

Footnotes

1. When the term “commercial firms” is used in this paper, it should be read to include those non-commercial organizations, primarily large scholarly societies, that share the interests and behaviors of commercial publishers. [↵](#)
2. This terminology was coined by Lorcan Dempsey. See: Dempsey, Lorcan, “Library Collections in the Life of the User: Two Directions,” *LIBER Quarterly* 26 no. 4 (October 2016): 338–359, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10170> [↵](#)
3. A good guide to what open should mean: Bilder, Geoffrey, Jennifer Lin, and Cameron Neylon, *The Principles of Open Scholarly Infrastructure*, 2020, <http://doi.org/10.24343/C34W2H> [↵](#)
4. The process of moving from subscription to the purchase of individual articles, especially when “big deals” are involved, has gotten much easier with the advent of tools such as Unsub (<https://unsub.org>). For an assessment of Unsub see: Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, “Taking a Big Bite Out of the Big Deal,” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, May 19, 2020, <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2020/05/19/taking-a-big-bite-out-of-the-big-deal/> [↵](#)

5. See for example: Aspesi, Claudio, Nicole Allen, Raym Crow, Valerie Hollester, Heather Joseph, Joseph McArthur, Nick Shockey, and Katie Steen, *2021 Update: SPARC Landscape Analysis and Roadmap*, September 2021, <https://sparcopen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021-Landscape-Analysis-092221.pdf>, p. 29-31, Ashley Jester, "Discomfort with Gold OA," *Common Place*, April 22, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21428/6ffd8432.913aef43>, or the position paper by a group of Open Access publishers, *Current Transformative Agreements Are Not Transformative Position Paper – For Full, Immediate and Transparent Open Access*, March 2020, https://www.copernicus.org/2020-03-10_TA-statement.pdf –
6. David W. Lewis, "The Future of Academic Library Materials Expenditures: A Thought Experiment," April 2015, <https://doi.org/10.7912/C2F074> and David W. Lewis, Tina Baich, Kristi L. Palmer and Willie M. Miller, "The Efficient Provision of Information Resources in Academic Libraries: Theory and Practice," forthcoming in *Library Trends*. A broader set of goals and measures can be found in, David W. Lewis, "Measures of Change in Academic Library Behavior," *Library Leadership & Management*, 32(1) November 2017, <https://journals.tdl.org/llm/index.php/llm/issue/view/382> –
7. David W. Lewis, "The 2.5% Commitment," September 11, 2017, <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/14063> –