



July 18, 2012

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am writing to call your attention to two crucial developments earlier this week in the global effort to enable public access to the results of taxpayer-funded scientific research. While this is an issue that the US Congress – and your Administration – continue to consider, other national and International funding bodies are taking decisive action to ensure that this information can be readily used to speed discoveries, spur innovation, and fuel economic growth. Now is the time for your Administration to act to implement public access policies at all US science and technology agencies.

Yesterday, the European Commission (EC) announced its intention to open up access to all of its research findings – scientific articles as well as data – funded by its \$98 billion research-funding program, Horizon 2020. The EC will require researchers to either publish articles reporting on their results in scientific journals that do not charge users subscription fees to access and reuse articles (“Open Access” journals), or to deposit their articles into freely accessible, digital repositories no later than six months after publication (or 12 months for social science and humanities research). Just as important, the EC is urging member states to follow its lead, and to implement and enforce similar policies for their domestic research.

The EC’s policy bears a striking resemblance to a national Open Access policy announced by the United Kingdom earlier this week. The Research Councils UK (RCUK) – comprised of the seven major public research funding bodies in the UK – issued a policy requiring researchers to make all articles reporting on RCUK-funded research openly accessible under conditions that are nearly identical to that of the EC – either via publication in Open Access journals, or via deposit into publicly accessible databases, with embargos of no more than 6 months for all scientific disciplines, and 12 months for the humanities and social sciences.

This approach is rapidly becoming the default mode for countries that want to retain a competitive advantage in R & D, in science, and in the translation of ideas into new products and services. Yet in the

US, only one of our eleven major agencies and departments that fund major scientific research – the National Institutes of Health (NIH) – has a policy ensuring this kind of public access to its results.

As Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the European Commissioner responsible for the Digital Agenda stated, “Innovation is an over-used word. We talk a lot about it, but don’t do enough of it. One reason for that is that we put obstacles in the way of innovation – like locking up information that is critical for innovators, for entrepreneurs.”

Your Administration has a unique opportunity to take action to do something concrete – to unlock this information – by acting on the request of the more than 28,000 individuals who took the time to sign the recent “We the People Petition” calling for the expansion of the NIH’s successful Public Access Policy to all other US federal science agencies. The signers of this petition are representative of the millions of Americans, including patients and their families, health care professionals, researchers, entrepreneurs, and business owners, who would directly benefit from guaranteed, free online access to articles reporting on the results of research that their tax dollars support.

As a result of the NIH policy, the American public has access to an invaluable resource containing a wealth of information on the very latest biomedical research. Today, NIH’s database, PubMed Central, contains nearly 2.5 million full-text articles, which are accessed by nearly half a million users each and every day, highlighting the deep demand for this information among all sectors of the American public.

At a time when our economic growth depends heavily on successful innovation in the sciences, the information reported in these articles provides crucial fuel to spur innovation, the development of new products and services, and job growth. We urge your Administration, which has so publicly supported openness and transparency throughout the government, to take action today. We ask that you act to bring US policy in line with the rest of the world, by issuing a straightforward policy that expands the NIH Public Access Policy and requires free, timely, public access to the results of taxpayer-funded research across all US federal science agencies.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heather Joseph  
Executive Director, SPARC  
Spokesperson, Alliance for Taxpayer Access