

To the editor,

The March 6 [article by Rodman et al.](#) calls welcome attention to an important new policy development in access to publicly-funded research. But it leaves a few false impressions about the 2022 [Nelson memo](#) from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The authors support open access (OA) and want to facilitate grantee compliance with the forthcoming federal OA policies. So do we. But their analysis is undermined by two false assumptions. First, they assume that the only way for grantee-authors to comply with the new policies is to publish in OA journals. Second, they assume that all or most OA journals levy article processing charges (APCs). Building on these two assumptions, they focus their recommendations on ways to raise money to pay APCs.

The Nelson memo is explicit in §3.a that agency policies should ensure “that all peer-reviewed scholarly publications authored or coauthored by individuals or institutions resulting from federally funded research are made freely available and publicly accessible by default in agency-designated repositories.”

Grantees can fully comply with the policies by depositing the right version of their work in the right repository. That is entirely compatible with publishing in OA journals. But depositing in the right repository is necessary, and publishing in an OA journal is not.

It’s possible that some agencies will create a second compliance channel for those who do publish in OA journals. But it’s too early to say. In any case, depositing in the right repository will suffice, and as far as we know today publishing in OA journals will not suffice. And even if some agencies will count publishing in OA journals as compliance, grantee-authors may still comply by depositing in a repository without paying an APC.

The authors are right to point out that researchers, especially those early in their careers, are in a difficult position given the pressure to publish in certain journals. The Nelson Memo provides universities with a new opportunity to re-think those pressures, focusing more on the research itself and its quality, and less on the journal in which it is published.

Apart from charging no APCs, the repository method of compliance has the advantage of addressing this specific concern. It preserves author freedom to submit new work to the journals of their choice, for example OA or non-OA journals. This is especially important for early-career researchers, who often face pressure from their departments to publish in journals that may not be OA. The repository method of compliance allows them to satisfy their funder and their promotion-and-tenure committee at the same time.

It has been well-documented for more than 15 years that a significant majority of peer-reviewed OA journals do not charge APCs, even if a majority of articles currently published in OA journals are from the APC-based variety. Using data from today (March 28, 2023), the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) lists 19,150 peer-reviewed OA journals, of which 68% charge no APCs. Peer-reviewed OA journals use a wide variety of equitable and sustainable models that dispense with author-side fees and draw instead on individual and collective funding from libraries, research institutions, and funding agencies.

The most important message for grantee-authors is that paying an APC is *not necessary* to comply with the new federal OA policies. If a particular journal charges an APC to publish an author's federally funded research, authors should not draw the wrong conclusion. The fee is not to comply with the federal funder policy; it is to publish in that particular journal. There is no charge for compliance with the federal funder policies.

Signed,

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