



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Establishing a Central Open Access Fund

Max Planck Society, Germany

The Max Planck Society was founded in 1948, succeeding the former Kaiser Wilhelm Society established in 1911.

At present the society has 13,000 employees, of which approximately 4,500 are researchers. In addition, there are some 10,000 student assistants, fellows of the International Max Planck Research Schools, doctoral students, postdoctoral students, research fellows and visiting scientists.

The research facilities of the Max Planck Society are regarded nationally and internationally as Centers of Excellence in basic research with a strong commitment to the ideal of open access publishing. Max Planck Institutes take up particularly new and innovative research fields that require special resources and for which German universities do not yet have the requisite organizational structure.

The Max Planck Society currently maintains 80 institutes, research units, and working groups devoted to a wide range of dynamic and fast-growing research areas.

The Institutes' focus is on the following research fields:

- Biology and Medicine
- Chemistry, Physics and Technology
- Social and Behavioural Sciences and Humanities

The driver to establish the fund: support from researchers at Max Planck

The impetus to drive forward the open access goals of the Max Planck Society originally came from the researchers themselves.

The initiative however to establish a dedicated central budget unifying subscription and publishing costs then moved onto the licensing unit of the Digital Library, managed by Dr. Ralf Schimmer. The Digital Library's role is to facilitate optimal access to scientific information for the Max Planck's scientists, to provide a sustainable infrastructure for the management of scientific information and to support the society in its Open Access policy.

The proposal needed to get procedural clearance from the Administrative Headquarters and also the approval of the Steering Committee for Scientific Information. This all was approved in 2005 and since then has developed to cover other publications in other open access journals in addition to those published by BioMed Central.

Financing the Fund

The central budget is financed by a flat-rate levy – referred to as a “solidarity contribution” – across each of the Max Planck Institutes. The amount is subject to adjustment from time to time, and is managed collectively by all Max Planck Institute Directors.

The initial calculation was that over the course of a few years the annual expenditure for central publication costs would gradually expand to reach €300,000. This assumption of such substantial growth has in fact turned out to be realistic.

Administering and monitoring the fund

Budgeting and planning for the central fund was neither done in opposition nor in addition to the basic subscription funds already in place used to cover the annual costs of accessing print/online subscription journals, ebooks and online databases.

The central e-resource budget (a fairly new achievement for the Max Planck Society) has had to be regularly adjusted over the course of the last few years. Consequently it became apparent that there was a real need to combine the various resource types and modes of payment into one single and consolidated budget thus facilitating internal financial procedures and cost allocation.

How is the fund being used to date?

The fund is now being used to simultaneously pay and monitor the costs for regular subscription content and for Open Access publication fees.

How is the fund being monitored?

The Department of Scientific Information Provision within the Max Planck Digital Library administers the fund. The department’s responsibility is to regularly monitor and evaluate the current rate of spending and future growth of the fund.

What are the plans for the future as regards open access and the fund itself?

The Max Planck Society will definitely continue to support Open Access publishing. The central fund and other organizational provisions are now securely in place to enable and cater for this new and fast-growing publishing model.

“The Max Planck Society has a strong commitment to work on the transition from a subscription cost model to a publication cost model. We believe that with our single and consolidated budget we are in a position to effectively organize such a shift without losing control of our spending.”

Dr. Ralf Schimmer, Head, Department for Scientific Information Provision,