

OAK Fund Annual Report:  
2020-2021

Dr. Robert McGeachin

Dr. Bruce Herbert

Texas A&M University Libraries

## Executive Summary

The Open Access to Knowledge (OAK) Fund at Texas A&M underwrites publication charges for scholarly journal articles, book chapters, and monographs published in open access publications in order to encourage the shift to publishing Texas A&M's research that is free of subscription barriers and support the transition of scholarship towards open science models<sup>1</sup> that can help meet Texas A&M's strategic goals.

The OAK Fund has benefitted from strong support for the past couple of years from the Office of the Vice President of Research and the University Libraries. In 2019-2020, this support allowed us last year to fund open access publications authored by 248 faculty, staff and graduate students from 11 colleges/research organizations and five campuses. Unfortunately, the Vice President of Research withdrew their support for the OAK Fund in 2020-2021. Therefore, for FY21, due to the loss of funding for OAK Fund from the Office of the VPR, we only funded one paper per author per year, with the funding cap per paper set to \$2,000.

Major outcomes for 2020-2021:

- The OAK Fund distributed funds to 118 faculty, staff and graduate students from 11 colleges/research organizations and four campuses.
- The OAK Fund supported the publication fees for 42 articles for a total amount of funding distributed of \$61,803.

Given our reduced funding for 2020-2021, we changed two rules to maximize the number of authors we could support:

- Amended the OAK Fund rules to support an author only once per year.
- Amended the OAK Fund rules to lower the maximum support per article from \$3000.00 to \$2000.00.

## What are the Goals of the Program?

The Open Access to Knowledge (OAK) Fund at Texas A&M underwrites publication charges for scholarly journal articles, book chapters, and monographs published in open access publications. The OAK Fund was established in 2013 to help fulfill Texas A&M University's commitment to the Compact for Open-Access Publishing Equity (<http://www.oacompact.org/>).

The goals of the OAK Fund at Texas A&M University are to support and encourage:

- (1) Texas A&M faculty and research staff that want to publish in open-access venues but who do not have other sources of funding to cover open access publication charges.
- (2) Innovative scholarly publishing that takes advantage of the opportunities of distribution and open access presented by digital and networking technologies; and
- (3) Increased access to Texas A&M research and scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. Open Science by Design: Realizing a Vision for 21st Century Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25116>.

The Texas A&M Libraries committed \$50,000 (and \$11,803 in unexpended funds from previous years) to fund Open Access publications for the 2020-2021 academic years. This document reports on the outcomes for the 2020-2021 academic year of the OAK Fund program.

## **How is the Program Managed?**

### **Eligibility**

Any current member of the faculty, full-time research staff, or graduate students at Texas A&M University and the Texas A&M Health Sciences Center are eligible to apply to the OAK Fund, including researchers at the Galveston or Qatar campuses or affiliated State Agencies who hold joint appointments at Texas A&M University. OAK Funds apply to Open Access publication charges fees for peer-reviewed articles and book chapters or scholarly monographs published in journals or monographs that provide free online access to all peer-reviewed articles they publish. Manuscripts published in journals or monographs with a hybrid open-access model or delayed open-access model are not eligible for support from the OAK Fund.

### **Funding Caps and Coauthor Distribution: \*New This Year\***

Eligible authors may receive funding for one OA article per fiscal year.

- This limit counts for both multiple-authored and single-authored articles.
- This is a yearly cap; it applies to the fiscal year in which an application is submitted. In no way does the cap roll over to future years.

Approved applications will receive a maximum payment of \$2,000 to support publication of the work. This cap applies regardless of the number of eligible coauthors.

The cap for funding available through the OAK Fund does not include membership in PeerJ. Use of PeerJ memberships by eligible faculty or researchers does not diminish eligibility for funding through the OAK Fund.

### **Application Review Process**

The Office of Scholarly Communications (OSC) in the Sterling C. Evans Library administers the OAK Fund. OSC has advertised the program through campus-wide emails, a website, and presentations to various groups around campus. The OAK Fund application review process is as follows:

1. The application and eligibility for funding can be found at [https://library.tamu.edu/services/scholarly\\_communication/Open\\_Access/oakfund.html](https://library.tamu.edu/services/scholarly_communication/Open_Access/oakfund.html) .
2. Author(s) status verified against campus LDAP database. Publication OA and peer review status are verified using: Directory of Open Access Journals, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, or Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association member list. Publication fees checked against fee schedule on publisher's website.
3. If eligibility criteria met, Project Manager calculates individual author allocation based on total OA fee divided by number of eligible TAMU authors. Cumulative allocations to authors are tracked. Each author can request a maximum of \$3000 per annum.
4. If the application is approved and ready for payment, an acceptance letter is sent to applicant and TAMU co-authors with directions for payment/reimbursement via Library Business Office.

5. If application declined, an explanatory letter is sent detailing reasons and, where necessary, pointers to relevant resources provided in support of successful future application.
6. The article is archived in the faculty publications collection in Oak Trust, Texas A&M's institutional repository.

**What was funded?**

The OAK Fund distributed funds to 118 faculty, staff and graduate students in support of publication fees for 42 articles for a total amount of funding distributed of \$61803 in the 2020-2021 academic year. Awards averaged \$1545 per application (Table 1).

Table 1. OAK Fund awards, 2020-2021.

Award Characteristics	Amount
2020-2021 Applications Funded	42
2019-2020 Applications Funded	79
2018-2019 Applications Funded	76
2017-2018 Applications Funded	77
2016-2017 Applications Funded	76
2013-2015 Applications Funded	75
Average Award Amount	\$1545
Highest Award	\$2000
Lowest Award	\$201

Table 2. Number of authors funded by the OAK Fund by college, 2020-2021.

College	Number of Awards
Ag & Life Sciences	34
Architecture	3
Education	11
Engineering	33
Geosciences	5
Liberal Arts	0
Medicine	7
School of Public Health	3
Science	1
Vet. Med. & Biomed. Sci.	11
School of Pharmacy	1
Texas A&M AgriLife Research/ Texas A&M AgriLife Extension	3
TAMU-Galveston	5

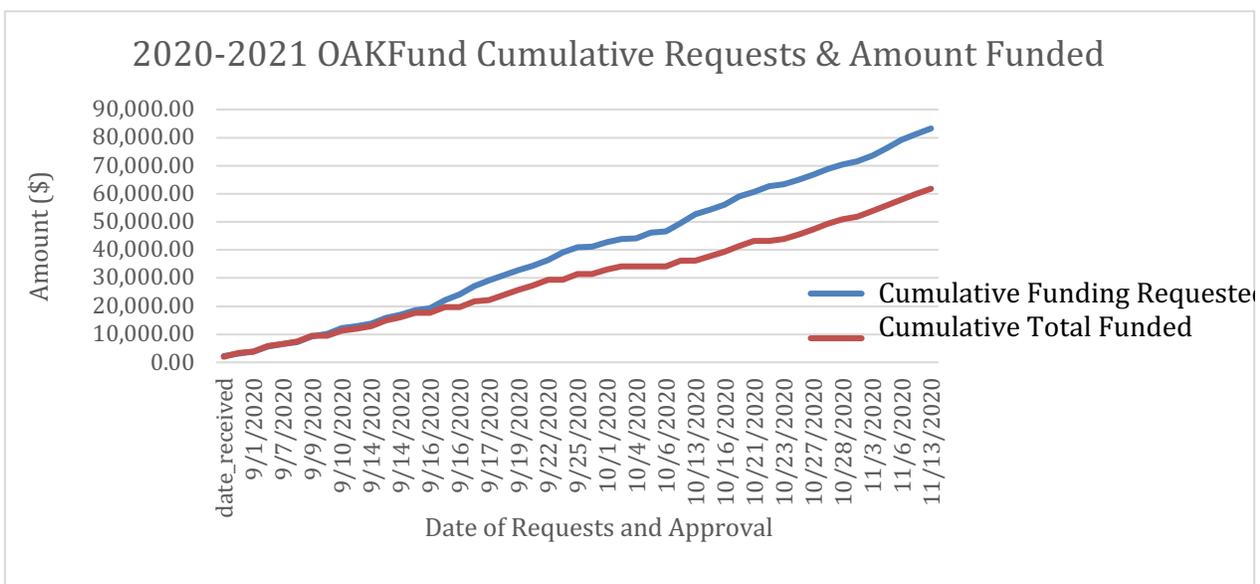
OAK Funds were distributed to faculty from 37 departments or organizations in 11 different colleges/Research organizations and four campuses: TAMU, TAMUG, the Health Sciences Center, and the TAMU AgriLife Research (Table 2). Note: There are more awards when listing by college because many papers had coauthors from different colleges.

The distribution of OAK Funds to different organizations has increased since the first year of the fund, illustrating increased faculty awareness of the funding and a greater movement towards interest in open access publishing across all disciplines. This resulted in an even distribution of the awards to the Colleges.

**Who was funded?**

Requested funds continued to exceed amount funded, as has been found in previous years (Fig. 1). This was mainly due to two reasons. First, only 7 applications were denied because they did not meet the fund’s guidelines for eligibility. All the declined awards requested support to cover publication fees for ineligible hybrid Open Access journals that also charge subscriptions in addition to single article OA publication fees.

Figure 1. OAK Fund cumulative requests and awards, 2020-2021.



In response to reasonable criticisms of previous funding rules, we continued to implement two recommendations made in the 2016-2017 OAK Fund Report. Graduate students were eligible along with faculty and staff. This year 26 graduate students were among the 118 authors funded.

Second, in previous years many requests could not be fully funded under previous funding rules because the manuscripts were authored by both eligible and ineligible authors leading to complexities that did not help TAMU authors or the Libraries’ goal to advance open access. Therefore, the 2020-2021 OAK Fund program continued to fully fund articles if the lead or corresponding author was from TAMU. As a result, this funding cycle 21 multi-institutional articles were fully funded that otherwise would have only gotten partial funding.

The growing popularity of the TAMU authors publishing in OA journals is reflected in the fact that this year the total \$61,803 available was all encumbered by mid-November this year. With half the

funding this year there were only about half the previous number of TAMU authors publishing with OAK Funds this year.

**Increased Access to High Quality Texas A&M Research and Scholarship through Open Access**

Research being published Open Access (OA) through support from the Open Access to Knowledge (OAK) Fund is distributed across academic disciplines. An interesting change from previous years is the broader range of journals that are manuscripts authored by TAMU researchers. Several journals that were common in previous years, such as Scientific Reports, PLOS One, Peer J, Frontiers in..., and BioMedCentral titles, accounted for a large share of the OA articles supported by the OAK Fund. In 2019-202, these journals published 36 of the articles funded this year (59% of total) (Table 3). Many of the articles supported by the OAK Fund this year are in single titles many of which are new to OAK Fund. These journals published 32 of the articles funded this year (41% of total).

It appears that TAMU authors are continuing to broaden the Open Access journals in which they publish. All of those funded were verified as quality peer reviewed OA journals in the application review process. Where last year 31% of the funded articles were from just five of the oldest and most reputable OA journals, this year TAMU authors have greatly broadened the scope of the OA journals being used.

Table 3. Top journals of papers supported by OAK Fund awards, 2019-2020

Journal Name	Articles Funded (#)	SJR Rank	JCR Quartile	Categories
Scientific Reports (Nature)	3	1.41	Q1	Multidisciplinary
PLOS One	3	1.1	Q1	Multidisciplinary
Peer J	1	1.04	Q1	Multidisciplinary
Frontiers in... journals*	9	1.98	Q1	Multidisciplinary
BioMed Central journals*	1	1.30	Q1	Multidisciplinary
MDPI journals*	8	0.76	Q1	Multidisciplinary
Other individual OAJ titles	15			Multidisciplinary

Represents a family of journals from same publisher\*

**OAK Fund as Change Model**

This is an excellent time to assess the OAK Fund program given the withdrawal of funding from the VPR. We believe the program has been extremely successful in improving faculty comfort with open access and advancing open access publishing of Texas A&M’s research as measured by the diversity of faculty authors who have applied for support, the speed at which program funding is awarded,

and the growing significance of the open access publications supported. Similar successes, on a much more modest scale, have been observed at other universities<sup>2</sup>.

The OAK Fund is an important mechanism to reduce faculty anxiety of publishing in new open access venues. Faculty are inherently conservative in where and how they publish their research. The OAK Fund is important in supporting faculty experimentation with open access publishing, particularly in disciplines where there is no funder mandate, (i.e., disciplines other than the biomedical sciences). Given our limited funds, our impact is maximized if the funds are spread out among faculty who have not been previously funded. We analyzed the last five years of funding and found that a large percentage awards were to faculty who had not received funding in the past (Table 4). The challenge, at current funding levels, is that we will not be close to meeting campus demands.

Table 4. Summary of five years of OAK Fund request to show the number of authors who request funding more than once – repeat requesters.

	Publications Funded (#)	Authors Funded (#)	Author Applications (%)
One Request	190	190	77
Two Requests	64	32	13
Three Requests	33	11	4
Four Requests	40	10	4
Five Requests	25	5	2
Eight Requests	8	1	< 1
Total	360	248	100

Another consideration on the continuance of the OAK Fund should focus on whether our funding is going to support the development of the type of open access publishing infrastructure we want to champion. Other libraries, such as the University of Arizona<sup>3</sup>, have dropped their APC funding because they wish to use their resources to support other open access or open infrastructure initiatives such as championed by the Invest in Open Infrastructure<sup>4</sup> initiative.

## Recommendations

Below we outline three alternatives for ULET on the future of the OAK Fund program.

### 1. Find more money.

While we could certainly still operate the fund with 50k of total funding, this level of funding would likely be completely dispensed in about 2 months. This would not meet demand on campus. If we want to keep the fund going, we really need to bring the total funding back up to (at least) 100k.

<sup>2</sup> <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2020/08/31/guest-post-assessing-user-perceptions-of-an-open-access-subvention-fund/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://new.library.arizona.edu/about/awards/oa-fund>

<sup>4</sup> <https://investinopen.org/>

## 2. Shift our funding to other open access publishing initiatives

One possibility is to use OAK Funding to support other initiatives that support Texas A&M scholarly publishing and help transition publishing towards a more sustainable, open system. Some examples of the range of these initiatives (all which generally involve a member-supported model) are below. OSC has had some discussion that we may want to focus on monographs as the OAK Fund primarily affected journal articles. If this is the choice, we recommend that OSC do a deep dive to these initiatives.

- TOME (<https://www.openmonographs.org/>): Monographs remain the preeminent form of scholarly publication in the humanities and humanistic social sciences, but the funding model is broken. TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem) seeks to address this problem by moving us toward a new, more sustainable system in which monograph publishing costs are met by institutionally funded faculty book subsidies.
- PLOS Community Action Publishing (<https://plos.org/resources/community-action-publishing/>): Our Community Action Publishing (CAP) model aims to eliminate author APCs in order to make our most selective Open Access journals truly open to read and open to publish. Institutions commit to a yearly flat fee, ensuring their researchers receive access to unlimited publishing opportunities in *PLOS Biology*, *PLOS Medicine*, and *PLOS Sustainability and Transformation*.
- Knowledge Unlatched (<https://knowledgeunlatched.org/>) is an Open Access service provider registered as a for-profit GmbH in Berlin, Germany. It offers a crowdfunding model to support a variety of Open Access book and journal content packages as well as the financial funding of partnerships.

## 3. Read & Publish Transformative Deals

At its most fundamental, a contract is a transformative agreement (<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2019/04/23/transformative-agreements/>) if it seeks to shift the contracted payment from a library or group of libraries to a publisher away from subscription-based reading and towards open access publishing. If this is the primary strategy chosen by the Libraries, then the effort would fall mostly on Eric's team with OSC in support.

Much like funds for APCs, there are questions if most read & publish deals are moving scholarly publishing to a sustainable, open models.