# Funding Community Controlled Open Infrastructure for Scholarly Communication: The 2.5% Commitment Initiative

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In August 2017, a short paper, "The 2.5% Commitment" was distributed on several e-mail lists.[1] The paper proposed that every academic library should commit to invest 2.5% of its total budget to support the common infrastructure needed to create the open scholarly commons. Somewhat to our surprise, the paper and the ideas it contained have generated widespread discussions and interest.

The paper was a response to the Elsevier purchase of Bepress and an article by John Wenzler that suggested that academic libraries faced a collective action problem, and that as a result they would never be able to create the open scholarly commons they aspired to.[2] Our experience working with open infrastructure projects has also made clear how little funding most of these projects have.

We, the authors, believe Wenzler has underestimated the academic library community. We believe that with some focused attention on the problem and by raising awareness of the consequences of inaction, we can change our behavior and create incentives for ever larger contributions to the common good. To that end, we have been working to move this agenda forward. We hope all academic libraries will join us in this effort and make the commitment to invest in open infrastructure.[3]

## Why 2.5%?

2.5% was picked because that is what is required if the U.S. academic libraries are to have $100 million annually to support open projects. This assumes 60% participation of all U.S. academic libraries who collectively have budgets of about $7 billion.[4] $100 million was a little less than the reported price Elsevier paid for Bepress.[5] The figure is ultimately arbitrary. The more important point is the need for the library community to increase investment in common open infrastructure and open publications. What ultimately matters is the contribution, not the particular number.

## What are the goals?

The 2.5% Commitment Initiative's goal is to increase the collective investments from academic libraries towards open common infrastructure, that is, projects that provide software or services that support open scholarship. The first step is to make libraries aware of their individual and collective investments in open projects. This information helps to create a norm for what the appropriate level of investment should be. To do this we aim to create a tool that can be used by academic libraries to measure their level of investment in a standard way. This will allow reporting to various library groups — ACRL, ARL, consortiums, etc. — and allow academic libraries to measure how they stand in comparison to their peers, and to track their progress over time. We hope that as a secondary benefit, organizations that operate open infrastructure projects will be encouraged to provide information about what they do and how they do it, and that this information will be more widely available to that library community.

## What have we done so far?

We began with some initial data collection to begin to establish what libraries were doing and what they considered to be a contribution to open infrastructure.[6] We had 35 libraries report contributions. Many were solicited through the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and Oberlin Group lists, so it is a somewhat biased sample that includes about half liberal arts colleges and half research universities. Several things became clear as we did this work.

First, what should count as common open infrastructure is not a simple question. Our current thinking is that there are three buckets.[7] The first bucket is core open infrastructure projects and organizations. These projects and organizations create tools or services that the community uses to build the open commons. This bucket includes DSpace, Fedora, Omeka, the Open Journal System (OJS), the Digital Preservation Network, LOCKSS, the Directory of Open Access Journals, CrossRef, and advocacy organizations like SPARC or Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR). We currently believe these organizations and projects should be not-for-profit. The second bucket is the resources that libraries use to support their institutional repositories. This includes hardware, software, and staff. It might also include funds to external organizations that either support locally installed systems or to external organizations that host repositories. It is probably necessary to include expenditures for both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in this bucket. So, OCLC, Atmire, Ubiquity Press, 4Science, and even Bepress would count. The final bucket is open content. This bucket would include contributions to ArXiv, HathiTrust, or Lever Press. There is some debate about whether or not funding for article processing fees should count and whether expenditures to for-profit companies should be included.

Second, there were also unexpected difficulties in establishing staff costs, especially when the work was done by a campus technology organization and not the library itself. Some libraries also had difficulty establishing their total budget, including staffing costs, because they had position lines, but not allocated dollars for staff. All of this made our first efforts at data collection a bit messy.

The average budget of the libraries in our sample was $7,633,990, not including salaries. The most investment by a single library was $868,065 and the least was $1,048. On a per student basis, the most invested was $1,048 and the least was $1 with an average FTE investment of $14. The average percentage of the total budget, without salaries was 2.96% with the highest percentage at 9.4% and the lowest at 0.3%.[8]

From our limited sample, we found that most large research libraries are contributing at a higher percentage than the average. It is encouraging that these libraries are making these investments. But we will be doing much better if the rest can catch up and contribute at least at the average level.

<u>What comes next?</u>

The next step is to build a data collection tool that will allow us to collect data about open investments for a larger number of schools. This will require finding funding and a host institution.  We believe both are within reach and hope to have a tool ready in time to collect data by June 2018

The conversation that the 2.5% Commitment has fostered - at a fall SPARC meeting, CNI, and ALA Midwinter - has surfaced several important issues that go beyond our initiative. The first is the need for a road map, for a plan of action that can guide investment. How such a plan would be created and who would best take on the task is not clear. Our recommendation would be that existing academic library organizations should take on this task. We can imagine ARL, the Greater Western Library Alliance, the Oberlin Group, or large systems like SUNY or the California State University might create road maps to guide their own investments. Initially, these plans might only be for their individual groups, but over time we could bring these plans together on a larger scale. To further this effort, we intend to create a map of the current landscape from the data we have collected.[9] This should advance the planning process.

Related to the creation of a road map is the vexing question of what should count as an investment. Our initial work has been to describe the current landscape, and as such, we did not evaluate the quality of the investment, or exclude any particular option. We will need to grapple with the question of what makes the list, and who gets to decide what is on the list.[10]

Beyond a plan, there have been conversations about collective investing. This has been talked about as a mutual fund or a United Way model. The idea would be to contribute to a common fund that would make collective investments and guide and assess the projects it was investing in. We believe such an effort, though difficult to organize, would provide an important level of coordination and further collective action.

## What can you do?

1. Take a close look at your contributions to open access projects and use the spreadsheet on our website at http://scholarlycommons.net to measure your current investments. Understand that what you are doing now is the first step.
2. Whatever your contributions are, make one more. If you use an open source product like DSpace or OJS and don't make a financial contribution to the project consider doing so. If you are not a SPARC member, maybe you should be. If open textbooks would help your students, you should contribute to OpenStax. Or find a different organization or project — the Directory of Open Access Journals, Wikipedia, or Impactstory. But make that one new contribution and do it now.
3. Talk to colleagues at peer institutions. Find out what they are doing and how you might collectively set a standard for contribution that raises the bar for you and your peer institutions. Hold each other accountable.
4. Begin conversations with faculty and your administration to build support for an institutional commitment to common open infrastructure. The goal today may be 2.5%, but in the not too distant future, it will be 5.0% and as the more content become open it will be even higher. You need to start building the case for campus support today.

## Final Word

One of the participants in our first round of data collection shared with us this comment, "As the word of the year was just announced as 'complicit' there is much to be said about where the other 97.5% of the library budgets go, and if that aligns with long term values." We all need to stop and think about where all of our money goes. We have choices. They are not always easy, but it is up to us to spend in ways that will remake scholarly communication so that it serves our faculty and students, and the rest of the world as well.

Please help us make the 2.5% Commitment a movement alongside the open access movement. It is an attempt to get us all, as members of the academic library community, to work together by making larger investments to the common good. We have been encouraged by the interest and the conversations that has been generated. But interest and conversation are not enough. At the end of the day what matters is money. There is no sustainable path for the open infrastructure projects that the academy needs without ongoing funding from academic library budgets. The stakes are very real as commercial publishers are as we speak carrying out plans for further enclosing the academic commons. All libraries need to step up and they need to do so now.

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[1] David W. Lewis, "The 2.5% Commitment," September 2017, https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/14063.

[2] John Wenzler, "Scholarly Communication and the Dilemma of Collective Action: Why Academic Journals Cost Too Much," *College & Research Libraries* 78, no. 2 (February 2017):183-200. doi: https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.2.16581.

[3] The initiative website is https://scholarlycommons.net. You can follow us on Twitter at @in4open.

[4] U.S. Department of Education, *Academic Libraries: 2012. First Look* (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, January 2014), 10-12, https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014038.pdf .

[5] The *Financial Times* reported Elsevier paid $115 million for Bepress. See: David Bond, "Relx Buys Bepress to Boost Academic Publishing," *Financial Times*, August 2, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/c6f6c594-7787-11e7-a3e8-60495fe6ca71.

[6] We reported on the results of this initial investigation at the Coalition for Network Information Fall Meeting in Washington, DC on December 11, 2017. The slides for this presentation can be found at https://scholarlycommons.net/2017/12/10/cni2017/.

[7] The draft list of investments that we used can be found at https://scholarlycommons.net/the-list/.

[8] We would not make strong claims based on this data since the sample is small.

[9] We are taking inspiration from the diagram of Elsevier's acquisitions in the academic knowledge production process created by Alejandro Posada and George Chen. See: Alejandro Posada and George Chen, "Preliminary Findings: Rent Seeking by Elsevier: Publishers are Increasingly in Control of Scholarly Infrastructure and Why We Should Care," *The Knowledge Gap: Geopolitics of Academic Production* (blog), September 20, 2017, http://knowledgegap.org/index.php/sub-projects/rent-seeking-and-financialization-of-the-academic-publishing-industry/preliminary-findings/.

[10] Cameron Neylon in a thoughtful critique of the 2.5% Commitment proposal has explored the question of investment quality. See: Cameron Neylon, "Against the 2.5% Commitment," *Science in the Open* (blog), January 5, 2018, http://cameronneylon.net/blog/against-the-2-5-commitment/