A collaborative imperative?
The read to publish funding gap

These slides are also available for view or download as pptx on slideshare: http://bit.ly/priceCHS2019

SLIDE 1

- While the examples I’ll share are drawn from my recent experience at the SCELC library consortium, the ideas and opinions are my own. I’ll be leaning into the future in the provocative spirit of Charleston, despite being very new to the pursuit of transformative agreements.

- Furthermore, much of the data I’ll share have been scraped together from many more or less (mostly less) confirmable shady sources: they are not exact and I cannot defend them in any detail.

- Despite these significant caviats, I do believe that they paint an accurate picture of a major challenge to the future of scholarly communication as we know it…il’m calling it the read to publish funding gap.
SLIDE 2

- This figure shows two samples of 100,000 articles each, the top is a random selection of articles with DOIs, the bottom is a separate sample of articles that Unpaywall users actually tried to view, where nearly 50% of the articles were freely available (and this is from reputable sources).
- The problem is this-- more and more of the content that libraries have traditionally paid for is becoming freely available.
- How is that a problem, you might ask... Well its certainly NOT a problem for the SCORES of really small libraries and institutions (including half of SCELC members) and 1000s of unaffiliated researchers out there that can't afford a site license or an article purchase, and indeed this is the laudable goal of Open Access...to make content available to those who otherwise couldn't access it.
- It is a problem because despite the fact that a growing portion of this content freely available on big deal publisher’s platforms, our big deal costs continue to grow.
To focus in on data estimating the impact of Plan S on a major publisher as an example, these rough approximations forecast an increase to nearly 50% of articles on the publisher platform being freely available in the coming few years.

Although it may not happen in this way, or this quickly, the Big 5 Publishers are preparing for and even advancing this OA future.

In this brave new world, who will pay for that publishing? If you think it can be funded by only, or even mostly, the authors at research intensive institutions, I think you’ve got another thing coming! … But to make that case, we have to start with where we are.
SLIDE 4

- SCELC is California-based Consortium of libraries serving small to mid-size institutions.
- Our group of “Read” Institutions represents one to two-thirds of the traditional big deal spend by California institutions on these three major publishers content.
- Not a problem in and of itself… as we represent the majority of institutions most of which are getting good value for their subscription dollars.
SLIDE 5

- The issue is, that these “Read” institutions author (very approximately) only 15-20% of the articles published by California authors in those publishers journals.
SLIDE 6

- So, they are currently paying 2 to 3 times more than they would pay in a fully-transformed, pay-to-publish world.
Can we expect the “rest of California”, primarily publish focused institutions or their authors to fund that read to publish finding gap? Surely not, if they are going to come anywhere close to their cost neutral, pay to publish objectives.

This is certainly not a surprise to the big deal publishers, but it was news to us. Read institutions have a lot of skin in the game, and significantly more open publishing from the pay to publish model poses a major threat to a huge portion of big deal publisher revenue.
Lest I leave you with the impression that this only applies in states or countries that have distinct read and publish consortia, here’s data from a fourth publisher that shows that the same read to publish gap applies WITHIN consortia that include both types of institution.

The “read” libraries in this package pay 73% of the total cost
The “read” libraries in this package pay 73% of the total cost, but authors at their institutions publish only about 25% of the articles. (Sound familiar?)
These libraries are paying nearly three times more than they would under fully-transformed, pay-to-publish model.
So, the same magnitude of read to publish gap exists WITHIN our consortium, raising the same question of who will pay to cover that gap.
So here is a Collaborative Imperative as I see it:

Transition the current system to avoid disintermediation

Countries/States > Consortia > Libraries > Authors

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- We need to work together to find a way to transition the current system to avoid disintermediation of libraries and consortia.

- If we don’t find a way, and instead allow, or even cause, the system to implode, our role as stewards in this system will come to an end. We will cede our financial influence to individual authors who will not be able to negotiate as a group to control costs nor seek to manage the system for the good of the many, as we have in the past.
To put it in a binary way, we can choose to collaborate or go it alone.

- **To Collaborate**, we’ll need to partner with “publish” consortia and institutions to support the transition, this will presumably require that we figure out how to make continued big deal investment beneficial for “Read” institutions.

- **Alternatively**, we can choose to go it alone, leveraging the decreasing value in the current “read” subscriptions to lower our costs, which seems really likely to lead to disintermediation.
Actual decisions libraries & consortia have to make now

Ejournal Package Renewals in light of growing OA article availability

- What do we want? What are our priorities?
- Do we renew? If so, for how long, and under what financial/transformative terms?

SLIDE 14
- Now I’ll shift focus to our current efforts to prepare for this challenging future, one renewal at a time.
- How do we handle each ejournal package renewal in the light of this growing OA article availability?
- We have to figure out what our subscribers want, to figure out their priorities.
- More specifically, do we renew, and if so for how long and under what financial and transformative terms?
So in a quick and dirty effort to establish current priorities of subscribers of a particular package which is up for renewal, we asked them to rate and rank the importance of three objectives.

More than 9 out of 10 indicated that the lowest possible increase was extremely or very important. Half responded that protection against reduced value was very or extremely important, and yes 4 out of 10 said that support for OA publication was very or extremely important too.

When forced to choose, 8 of 10 ranked the lowest possible increase as most important, whereas less than 1 in 10 ranked support for OA publication first. More than half of the subscribers ranked OA price protection second and support for OA publication last.
However, when forced to choose between two specific options for length and annual increase, an astonishing one third of subscribers selected a shorter term with a higher annual increase!

We found ourselves in a bind like never before...in the past we have been able to reach overwhelming agreement when provided with two options. So what could we do?
Working with the publisher, we were able to negotiate a single compromise (2 year option), and address those transformative aspirations with a shared commitment with the publisher to develop viable transformative options for the next renewal.

So thankfully, we were able to reach consensus on the compromise option.
Take Home Points

1. Transition to a fully-transformed pay to publish future will require us to address the “read to publish funding gap”
2. If read institutions are to maintain their spend, they will need benefits too
3. This shifting landscape demands increasing collaborative effort at many levels if libraries are to maintain their role as stewards of scholarly communication funding