

How to convince faculty to support subscription cancellations

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There have been repeated online discussions about my suggestion to libraries that now would be an excellent time to [start cancelling subscriptions](#). Prime counter-argument is that librarians risked their jobs or at least face faculty backlash if they did that. Personally, I have witnessed many such cancellations and there has never been a riot or even a librarian reprimanded, let alone fired. Not even when a library once had to cut 50% of all subscriptions. In fact, there is now a [growing list of reports](#) of painless big deal subscription cancellations. Faculty understand, there are limits to budgets. Faculty are resourceful in finding the literature, even before we had so [many new tools](#) at our disposal.

However, things are different in different countries and different institutions and with different faculty. My experience may not be representative. In either case, it doesn't hurt to have faculty on your side. In fact, I strongly advocate much more close collaborations between faculty and their librarians than we have now. At this point in time I consider librarians our closest allies and most important institutional partners. After all, who else would be more qualified, predestined, even, to help us implement a [modern infrastructure](#)?

I have [outlined before](#), why librarians are in an excellent position right now to take the next step: the hands of faculty are pretty much tied at this point. Moreover, that goes without saying, librarians are the most competent people in this matter (maybe together with the few computer science faculty who actually work in this field).

Here's a short, non-exhaustive list of arguments I think ought to be very convincing for all but perhaps the most Luddite faculty, in defense of a budget shift from subscriptions to in-house infrastructure. Of course, one would preface such a list with a short explanation as to what is being argued:

"Dear faculty member,

as you may have heard in the news, our institution has joined a global initiative of hundreds of other scholarly institutions which strives to modernize our scholarly infrastructure. Our infrastructure has not undergone extensive modernization since its inception in the early 1990s, so the modernization is long overdue. One part of the modernization entails moving subscription funds over to infrastructure funds. Above and beyond the technical limitations of subscription literature (with which you are likely more than familiar), there are many other reasons why subscriptions are among the worst technologies to subsidize with tax funds. Here are some of the reasons why we now have to cancel subscriptions and how you will directly benefit from the consequences of these cancellations:

- subscription funds go to corporations that [waste](#) >90% of the public moneys [spent](#) on them. Only their shareholders benefit
- you have likely endured many cancellations in the past that came without any added benefit to you, beyond saving your institution money. This time, we will use the saved money to implement [services](#) that will benefit you directly: they will minimize your tedious work with writing, reading, data management and code, so you can focus on your research even more. Stay tuned, these services will be presented shortly.

- once we have successfully transitioned, there will likely be funds left over, which will flow right back into your research budget
- oh, and if you use our [shiny new tools](#), you won't even notice that we're canceling subscriptions, as these tools will fetch (almost) all your literature for you
- please pardon the dust while we remodel
- for a more exhaustive list of benefits, please see [list of benefits]
- please feel free to contact us at any time in case you feel your personal needs have not been addressed satisfactorily“

Of course, one would formulate these arguments a little more professionally than I have done here, but I wanted to convey the gist of where the thrust of the argument might go.