

# Funder mandates: Are scientists like junkies?

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[Mike Taylor](#) wrote about how frustrated he is that funders don't issue stronger open access mandates with sharper teeth. He acknowledges that essentially, the buck stops with us, the scientists, but mentions that pressures on scientists effectively prevent them from driving publishing reform. Obviously, from the scientist's perspective, this is a classic [collective action](#) problem: every scientist who would start boycotting corporate publishers would be risking their livelihood. On the other hand, if we all started to publish exclusively in a world-wide, federated scholarly communication system, based on a collective of [SciELO](#) or [SHARE](#)-like platforms, we would not only save billions in publishing costs every year and provide fully open access as an added benefit, but also no scientist would risk anything.

As I see it, there are two (clearly not mutually exclusive) approaches to this problem:

1. Ask for outside help. One can see scientists like junkies: they are addicted to publishing in the journals of parasitic publishers and can't possibly wean themselves from their fix. This appears to be Mike's position and [Stevan Harnad](#)'s (although they probably might disagree on green vs. gold details). There is no doubt that this would work, if implemented as Mike and Stevan (and many others) argue. Thus, of course, it would be foolish to not embrace and welcome funder mandates.
2. Work on removing the pressures on scientists that prevents them from collective action. The fix is essentially mediated by the hierarchy of journals which bestows prestige on scientists and which decides who gets to keep their livelihoods and who don't. To address this issue, we recently published a paper in which we outline that [there is no empirical foundation for journal rank](#), in an attempt to effectively remove the fix.

While both approaches need to be pursued, personally, I strongly favor the second route. It annoys the hell out of me that we scientists creep and crawl on all fours to politicians, funders, publishers asking them to force us to do something we should bloody well be able to do ourselves: we broke the system, we fix it. Begging others to save us from the hell we created for ourselves is probably the one single most annoying aspect of the entire situation. We're already living and researching off of people's taxes and now we ask yet more for help – isn't there anything we can do ourselves? Can't we even get our own house in order without the help from someone who doesn't have any direct responsibility for the quagmire?

I just can't get over the humiliation that urging funders to do what we should be doing is essentially like saying: "we're too weak to do it ourselves, please, in addition to all the money we're already getting from you, could you please also do the mandates for us and, while you're at it, shell out the dough to police and enforce the mandates?"

Funder mandates are great. They have been instrumental in getting us as far as we have gotten and while they are humiliating, they get the job done and work as advertised. Mike is correct in that they could have more teeth, but at least the funders have gotten the ball rolling with approach [#1](#). When will we start to do our part and launch approach [#2](#)? Where's the response from scientists saying: "thank you funders, here's what we will do!" Instead, we keep pleading for yet more help.

Where's the quid pro quo from us scientists? Does it always have to be a one-way highway of public service to the scientific community and none out of it? Is the scientific community really such a black-hole of public goods? Or is that just my myopic perspective?