

## International Finding On Access To Scientific Data Outlines Critical Need For Open, Systematic Approach

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Open access to publicly funded scientific data will benefit society in many ways and is a policy issue that must be systematically addressed in an international forum according to findings presented by an international group of scientists and policy-makers to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and reported in the current issue of the journal *Science*.

"Facilitating access to publicly funded data is a very cost-effective way to improve our global economic, environmental, health and general scientific research," said Peter Arzberger, Director of Life Sciences Initiatives at the University of California, San Diego, one of the *Science* authors.

At recent meeting at the ministerial level of the OECD Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy, science ministers endorsed a declaration calling for the open access to publicly funded data, and invited the Organization to develop a set of guidelines to "facilitate cost-effective access to digital research data."

Arzberger, also chair of the OCED Follow-up Group on Issues of Access to Publicly Funded Research Data, which consisted of representatives from ten countries, explained the significance of the international body's action, "OECD is an international forum to discuss, develop and refine economic and social policies and consists of 30 member countries around the globe including the United States. This declaration for access to data is an important breakthrough because it highlights the need for a systematic international policy approach to obtain the enhanced benefits to science, economy, and society."

The work of this Committee represents a microcosm of expertise and background from the whole vast world of science and science policy. "As more and more scientific discovery becomes represented in the form of diverse digital information it is increasingly critical that researchers in various fields have access to data bases that become the building blocks for new knowledge," said Geoffrey Bowker, a specialist in scientific cyberinfrastructure, who is professor of communication at UCSD and another author of the *Science* report.

The report highlighted a number of areas requiring incentives for providing access and suggested that international action would be necessary to overcome many of the existing barriers. It is the hope of the OCED working group that open access will become the normal policy in scientific research rather than researchers often having to struggle to get vital information.

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