

OPEN KNOWLEDGE FOR THE SOCIAL SECTOR

The Open Licensing of Knowledge Products

Improving usability

There is a limit to the funds available to even the largest foundations, and so most try to use their resources in a way that will have the greatest impact on the problems they hope to solve. One avenue to greater impact is the use of open licenses by foundations and their grantees, making grant-funded works, and/or works published by foundations themselves, freely available for broad use by others. Open licenses enable you to not only distribute knowledge products for education and research purposes, they enable others to improve and build upon your works to create new works—and new knowledge—in potentially unlimited and unforeseen ways.

There are many benefits to applying open licenses on foundation-funded and foundation-produced resources. Your foundation can increase the impact, reach, and scalability of its grants, creating the conditions for maximum access and re-use of funded materials. Open licenses can also enable novel, innovative, and entrepreneurial uses of grant-funded materials.

Licenses that give people the right to download, print, and distribute an article, or to translate or otherwise adapt an article to local needs, multiply the value of access. Here's an example: foundations often fund research that is relevant to the welfare of the world's poorest people who often live in countries where their own researchers can't afford to subscribe to the journals in which the work is published. Making articles on advances in medicine freely available through the internet can speed the transfer of knowledge, often by years, to places where it is urgently needed.

Increasingly, government agencies and intergovernmental organizations are adopting open policies for copyrightable works and data they create or commission. For example, all grants under the U.S. Department of Labor's [Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Program](#) require that copyrightable materials produced through a grant be licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution license (CC-BY). In this way materials may be freely used by all, eliminating the need for costly duplication of effort as community colleges put together courses to train workers for new jobs.

Creative Commons offers one of the more popular **options for open licensing**. CC licenses are public copyright licenses that grant permission to the public to use the licensed materials, and typically contain a minimal set of conditions, such as requiring that a user provide attribution to an author. CC licenses are built on top of, and encourage respect for, copyright and copyright holders; they are the global standard for sharing open content. With over [880 million CC-licensed works](#) available on the web CC licenses have become ubiquitous, having been adopted globally by foundations, governments, scientific publishers, and cultural heritage institutions such as national museums and libraries.

Many foundations are beginning to make the same requirement for works produced with their grant funds. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has recently begun implementing its own open licensing

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policy and is sharing its “Open Licensing Toolkit for Staff”. Any foundation considering a similar move can access this guide at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwDMshYbD>.