

Tina Baich

## From vision to action

### Catalyzing the U.S. Repository Network

Open infrastructure is foundational to the conduct of open research, and repositories are a key component of open research infrastructure, providing an avenue for the open dissemination of research outputs. Repositories also play a crucial role in increasing equity of access and supporting compliance with funder policies for open access. The U.S. Repository Network (USRN) seeks to support the nation's open research repositories in cementing their position as an essential component of our national research infrastructure.

In summer 2021, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) announced its partnership with the Confederation of Open Access Repositories (COAR) to catalyze a US repository network and its intention to hire a visiting program officer to lead that work.<sup>1</sup> I was lucky enough to secure that role and began work in September 2021.

SPARC is a nonprofit advocacy organization driven by the belief that sharing knowledge is a human right. SPARC's membership includes more than 200 libraries and academic organizations across North America that share the desire to create more open and equitable systems of research and education.<sup>2</sup>

COAR is an international association with 155 members and partners representing libraries, universities, research institutions, government funders, and others. COAR brings together individual repositories and repository networks to build capacity, align policies and practices, and act as a global voice for the repository community.<sup>3</sup> To further its Next Generation Repositories vision, COAR launched the Modernizing the Global Repository Network initiative.<sup>4</sup>

Through its Modernizing initiative, COAR identified institutional silos and the lack of a cohesive, collaborative approach to repositories as the greatest challenges to catalyzing a US repository network. SPARC and COAR came together to address these challenges and create the USRN. The USRN is envisioned as an inclusive community committed to advancing repositories through advocacy, good practices, and community building. In this context, "US repositories" refers to all open research repositories based in the US regardless of content, host, or platform. That is, repositories containing articles, data, gray literature, and emerging forms of scholarship; repositories hosted by higher education institutions, research centers, or other nonprofit organizations; and repositories using open source or vended platforms, are considered part of this network. All such repositories are welcome to participate in the USRN as we seek to build value for all repositories in the US.

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## Developing a strategic vision

As the visiting program officer, the first task set before me was the development of a strategic vision for US repositories. With the goal of a community-driven vision, I designed a plan for community engagement.<sup>5</sup> I first assembled a 63-member Expert Group of library leaders and repository managers, which included SPARC Steering Committee members, US COAR members, and association and consortia representatives. Additional members helped create a balance of institutional size and geography across the group.

The Expert Group members responded to a survey and participated in an ideation session to aid us in drafting a strategic vision for US repositories. Additional consultation occurred during community calls with the Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions (COAPI) and OpenCon librarians. The vision was reviewed by the Expert Group and then opened for public comment. All that input led to the following community-driven, strategic vision for US repositories:

An interoperable network of repositories is an essential component of our national research infrastructure, offering rapid and open access to research, and plays a crucial role in collective efforts to transform global research communications, leading to a more open, inclusive, and equitable system.

Through the visioning process, the community also identified a set of ten foundational characteristics. They represent a mix of social and technical characteristics that the USRN will center and work to advance. The foundational characteristics include (1) accountability, (2) collaboration, (3) community, (4) discoverability, (5) equity and inclusivity, (6) interoperability, (7) local and global, (8) preservation, (9) sustainability, and (10) user-centered.

## Moving to action

In August 2022, an inaugural fifteen-member USRN Steering Group was formed. This group, co-chaired by Vicki Coleman and Martha Whitehead,<sup>6</sup> consists of some who were part of our initial Expert Group and others who were new to the work of the USRN. It also represents library and consortium leaders, repository managers, COAR and SPARC members, and a range of institutional size and geography. The Steering Group, as well as information gathered during the visioning process, informed the development of the USRN's 2022-23 Action Plan.<sup>7</sup>

The Action Plan focuses on three areas of action essential to the success of the USRN.

1. Engage with the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy (OSTP) and federal funding agencies on implementation of public access guidance.
2. Develop a Network governance model.
3. Build community and external relationships.

The release of the August 2022 memorandum “Ensuring Free, Immediate and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research”<sup>8</sup> offered an immediate opportunity to engage with OSTP and federal funding agencies and to advocate on behalf of the USRN. The USRN seeks to raise awareness of the benefits of a distributed network, based at universities and research centers, in supporting compliance with forthcoming agency-based public access policies. The USRN recently released a set of desirable characteristics<sup>9</sup> and will begin work

on best practices for repositories to help ensure they can be designated as repositories that meet compliance requirements. While several federal agencies have their own designated repositories, there are many who do not, and the distributed network of repositories across the US is ready to accept deposits of research outputs from federally funded researchers to enable compliance.

The other two action areas address essential elements for USRN's ongoing sustainability. Success in this work requires a community invested in actively moving the strategic vision for US repositories forward. Developing and implementing a community governance model for the USRN will ensure it remains a community-driven initiative. The other necessary element is building community through a community of practice and other engagement mechanisms to increase awareness of and participation in the Network by the US repository community. Finally, the USRN will identify and build relationships with potential partners (e.g., other active repository and open infrastructure communities) to increase collaboration and further reduce silos.

## Conclusion

Repositories are an essential component of an open research lifecycle supported by open infrastructure. They serve as a key dissemination avenue, making research outputs—not only articles but all research outputs—accessible to all. Repositories have the potential to play a greater role in research dissemination, even supplanting traditional systems of publishing through innovative projects such as COAR's Notify Initiative.<sup>10</sup> The possibilities for open research infrastructure, including repositories, are numerous, exciting, and most certainly complex. It has been a privilege and honor to take part in the development of the USRN as a means of advancing US repositories, and I am optimistic and enthusiastic about where the next year will take us. If you'd like to receive updates, including ways to get involved in the USRN, visit <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/us-repository-network/>. ✍

## Notes

1. Heather Joseph and Kathleen Shearer, "Catalyzing the Creation of a Repository Network in the US," SPARC, June 24, 2021, <https://sparcopen.org/news/2021/catalyzing-the-creation-of-a-repository-network-in-the-us/>.
2. See <https://sparcopen.org/> for more information about SPARC.
3. See <https://www.coar-repositories.org/> for more information about COAR.
4. Confederation of Open Access Repositories, "COAR Launches Strategy to Modernize the Global Repository Network," press release, July 12, 2021, <https://www.coar-repositories.org/news-updates/coar-launches-strategy-to-modernize-the-global-repository-network/>.
5. For a more comprehensive description of the strategic vision development process, see Tina Baich, "U.S. Repository Network Initiative: Progress Report," COAR/SPARC, February 25, 2022, <https://hdl.handle.net/1805/29411>, and Tina Baich, "U.S. Repository Network Initiative: Community Consultation Summary," COAR/SPARC, July 8, 2022, <https://hdl.handle.net/1805/30146>.
6. Vicki Coleman is dean of Library Services at North Carolina A&T State University and a SPARC Steering Committee member. Martha Whitehead is vice president for the Harvard Library, university librarian, Roy E. Larsen Librarian for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences,

and the current chair of the Confederation of Open Access Repositories Executive Board.

7. See <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/us-repository-network/action-plan/> for the full USRN Action Plan 2022–2023.

8. Alondra Nelson, “Ensuring Free, Immediate and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research,” Office of Science and Technology Policy, August 25, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-Access-Memo.pdf>.

9. The “Desirable Characteristics for Digital Publication Repositories” are available via <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/us-repository-network/action-plan/>.

10. For more information, see Confederation of Open Access Repositories, “Update on the COAR Notify Initiative: Advancing Innovation in Scholarly Communications,” October 26, 2022, <https://www.coar-repositories.org/news-updates/update-on-the-coar-notify-initiative-advancing-innovation-in-scholarly-communications/>.