



Insight Brief

From Pilot to Impact: What Happens When Path to Open Titles Become Open?

Early evidence shows how a community-supported program can scale open access for scholarly monographs

| Executive summary

Open access has expanded significantly for scholarly journals, yet books in the humanities and social sciences have progressed more slowly due to the challenges of securing consistent funding and building scalable, sustainable models across disciplines and presses.

To help accelerate progress, JSTOR introduced Path to Open, developed in partnership with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the University of Michigan Press, and the University of North Carolina Press in 2023.

Path to Open began as a pilot program designed to test a core question: **Can open access monographs scale in a way that expands access while remaining financially sustainable for libraries, publishers, and scholars?**

Built on a shared premise—that no single stakeholder can solve this challenge alone—the pilot explored whether a coordinated, community-supported approach can succeed.

This brief draws on data from the first 100 Path to Open titles that became openly available, along with feedback from participating libraries and presses. It explores the impact of the pilot and what the early results suggest about the viability of a community-supported model for expanding access while supporting long-term sustainability.

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What is Path to Open?

Path to Open is a community-supported model that combines shared library investment with delayed open access to publish and expand the reach of scholarly books.

How it works

- 300 titles from participating press submissions are selected annually by a peer committee to be part of Path to Open.
- JSTOR subsidizes the initial costs of publishing these titles with a \$5,000 payment per title.
- Libraries pay an annual or multi-year fee to gain exclusive access to 300 new titles each year before they flip to open, along with 600 previously published Path to Open titles.
- Funds from participating libraries are used to recover the costs of publishing and distributing the open access content.
- Monographs become open access two to three years after publication. The first 100 titles are now available and 300 additional titles will become open annually beginning in 2027.

Why it matters

The delayed open access period reflects the economics of monograph publishing, where titles require significant upfront investment and rely on multiple revenue streams over time. Recent research by Ithaka S+R and the Association of University Presses highlights the importance of balancing open access goals with sustainable revenue models for scholarly books.¹ By sharing investment across institutions, Path to Open creates a model that aligns with existing library acquisition workflows and budget structures while giving participating libraries immediate access to more frontlist titles at a lower cost per book. At the same time, it supports a sustainable path to open access publishing and expands long-term access to scholarship.

¹ Brown, Laura, et al. "Print Revenue and Open access Monographs: A University Press Study." Ithaka S+R Research Report, 2023. DOI: 10.18665/sr.319642.

From pilot to overall impact

In January 2026 the first 100 Path to Open titles, all published in 2023, became freely available worldwide, creating the first opportunity to evaluate the impact of open access on the usage and reach of this set of diverse, peer-reviewed scholarship.

At the start of the pilot, the Path to Open Community Advisory Committee worked with JSTOR to develop success metrics against which to evaluate the initiative's impact. These results reflect a comparison between the first three months of open access (January–March 2026) and the full licensed-access period (October 2023–December 2025), when titles were only available through participating libraries.

Path to Open goals and early results

From the beginning, JSTOR and the Path to Open Community Advisory Committee set program goals related to expanding access, reach, usage, and bibliodiversity. The findings below reflect the early impact of the first titles becoming openly available.

Goal

Result

Increase usage over 300% in the year titles become open access

- **+441%** increase in item requests compared to 2025
- **+176%** increase in item requests

Expand global reach across countries and institutions

- **+875%** increase in countries (from 16 to 156)
- **+725%** increase in institutions (from 245 to 2,023)

Reach audiences beyond institutional access

- **52%** of open access usage comes from users without institutional access

Increase the number of open access books published

- **8** presses published open access content on JSTOR for the first time
- **100** titles are now open, with 1,000 more becoming open access as a result of the pilot

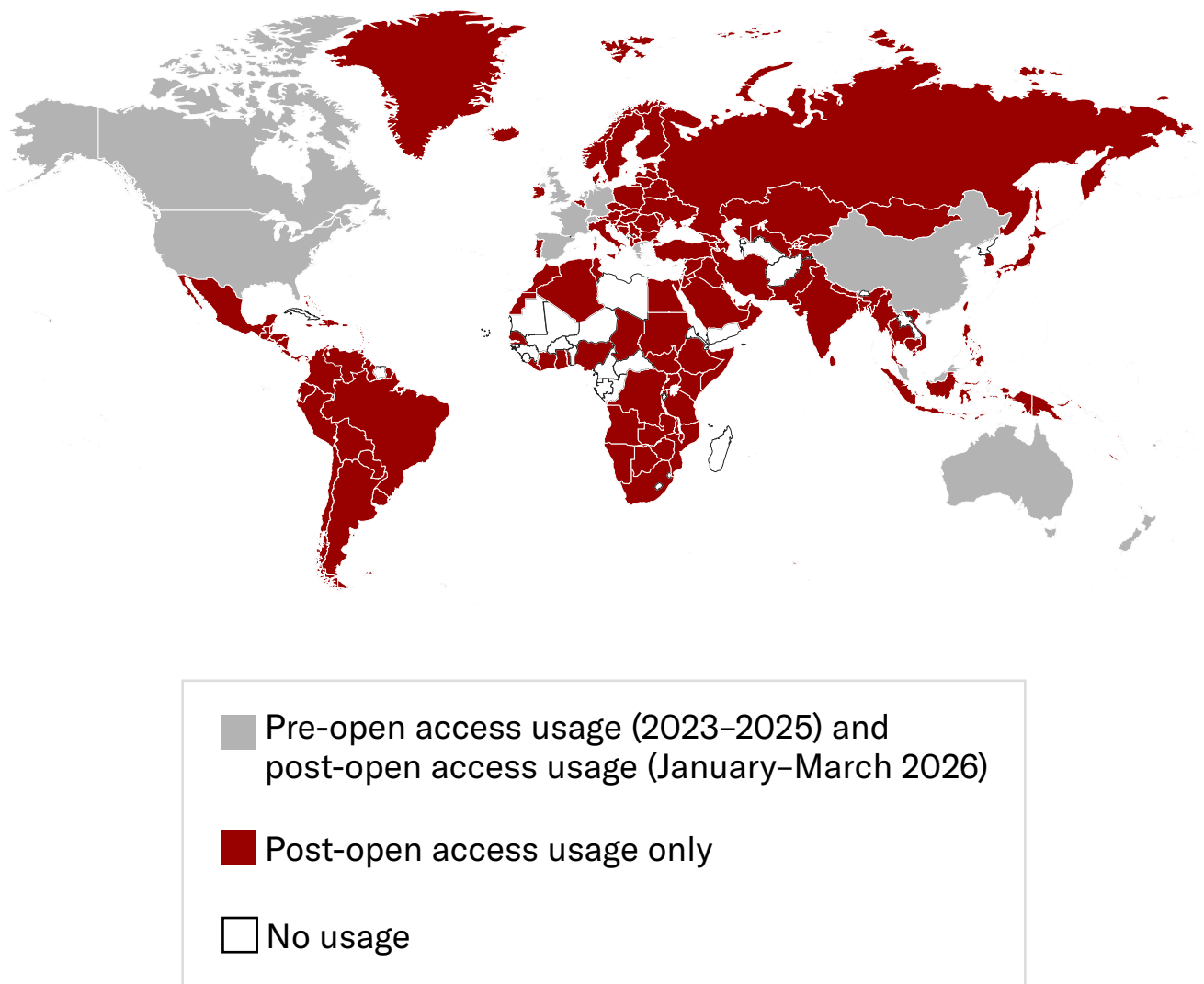
Increase bibliodiversity by expanding open access across a variety of subjects

- **48** disciplines across the full 2023–2025 corpus
- **29** disciplines represented in the first 100 titles

Dimensions of access and use

When the first Path to Open titles became openly available, geographic reach expanded significantly compared to the licensed-access period. Open access not only sustained usage in already participating countries but enabled new regions and audiences to engage with the content for the first time.

Geographic reach before and after open access



Global reach

- Expanded from 16 to 156 countries
- Significant growth outside of the US and UK, including in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America

Open access monographs reach a broader global scholarly community, and have significant impact in regions where licensed content is often limited. These results suggest an opportunity to expand Path to Open participation beyond the US and UK, building a more globally representative community of publishers and libraries.

Institutional reach

- All institutions: 245 → 2,023
- Community colleges: 0 → 24
- Very small institutions: 19 → 316

Open access expanded institutional reach from 245 institutions during the licensed-access period to more than 2,000 institutions after titles became openly available. This included growth among community colleges and institutions classified by JSTOR as “very small,” using categories modeled on the [Carnegie Classifications](#). These figures reflect institutions identifiable through JSTOR systems and likely underrepresent total institutional usage. The findings highlight strong demand across a broad range of institutions and underscore the importance of continued library participation to sustain and expand this reach.

New audiences

- 52% of overall usage comes from readers without institutional access

Over half of the usage of the 100 openly available titles comes from new audiences who are not systematically authenticated through their institutions. Open access is an important means of reaching independent researchers and learners around the world.



As a university press, our mission is to publish scholarship that matters and help it find the widest meaningful audience. Path to Open has given the University of Nebraska Press a practical, collaborative way to extend that mission: Titles that were once available primarily to readers with institutional access are now reaching readers around the world. *Seeing usage increase by more than 250 percent and geographic reach expand from 13 to 60 countries affirms what we hoped* this model could do—make serious humanities scholarship more visible, discoverable, and accessible.

Jane Ferreyra
Director
**University of
Nebraska Press**

| Expanding engagement

Title-level impact

- 100% of the titles were used while licensed in 2025, and open in 2026
- 91% of titles already exceeded their usage compared to the combined 2023–2025 licensed-access periods
- For approximately 10% of titles, usage increased by more than 1,000%

How title selection shapes performance

Path to Open's performance reflects not only the effects of open access but also the program's approach to title selection. The model prioritizes books in disciplines that demonstrate strong demand on JSTOR—either through high levels of open access usage or significant increases when licensed content becomes openly available—while also expanding representation in newer or underrepresented subject areas.

This approach is designed to expand access beyond traditionally dominant subject areas and ensure that titles reflect both scholarly value and reader interest.

Open access drives rapid, sustained engagement for titles across the collection, with most titles exceeding their prior two to three years of licensed usage within weeks.

This outperformance is also evident in comparison with other open access books on JSTOR: During the same three-month period (January–March 2026), Path to Open titles averaged 719 uses per title, approximately 80% higher than the 411 for other open access books. This difference likely reflects a combination of factors, including the recency of frontlist titles, the program's curated selection, and coordinated promotion.

Together, these results suggest that a curated, community-supported approach can drive strong engagement across a diverse set of titles, underscoring the importance of ongoing evaluation of title selection and performance as the program scales.



I am happy that *Ecologies of Imperialism in Algeria* is part of Path to Open. ***This program has helped triple the readership of the book*** and greatly expanded the geographic scope of those readers. I am especially pleased that a book working through themes of imperialism and environmental change in North Africa has become more accessible to people in the region.

Brock Cutler

Professor of History

Author, ***Ecologies of Imperialism in Algeria (University of Nebraska Press)***

Disciplinary impact

- Disciplines with the most significant usage increase per title after open access:
 - Archaeology
 - Architecture
 - Performing Arts
 - Political Science
 - Urban Studies

How open access expands usage across disciplines

Open access supports bibliodiversity in scholarly content by increasing visibility and engagement across disciplines, including those that are typically less discoverable. Engagement across all subject areas points to strong demand for scholarly content beyond traditionally dominant fields, while patterns of use within disciplines highlight where open access is having the greatest impact.

In some cases, this impact is pronounced. For example, newly opened Path to Open titles account for approximately one-third of all archaeology book usage on JSTOR, and just two titles represent nearly a quarter of usage for all communications studies books. These patterns highlight how a small number of high-quality, openly available titles can drive substantial engagement within a discipline.

They also point to strong demand for scholarly content across a wide range of subject areas, including disciplines with historically lower publishing output, and underscore the role of curation as the program's selection process helps shape disciplinary representation. Together, these findings emphasize the importance of continuing to evaluate disciplinary representation and expand publisher participation to maintain a diverse pipeline of titles as the program grows.

Community response and program value

In addition to usage data, we gathered feedback through surveys of participating libraries and publishers to better understand how the Path to Open model is perceived in practice.

Among responding libraries (21% of pilot participants), perceived value is strong, with 87% indicating the program delivers sufficient value relative to cost. These responses reflect the views of a self-selected group of engaged participants and so should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative of the full population.

87% of responding libraries indicate the program delivers sufficient value relative to cost

Fifty-three percent of participating publishers responded to the survey, providing a more comprehensive view of partner sentiment. Perceived value is high: 89% of responding publishers rate the program positively. Most also indicate that Path to Open plays a meaningful role in their publishing programs, with the majority describing it as a core or complementary part of their long-term monograph and open access strategy.

While initial feedback suggests that the program's per-title funding is broadly viewed as sufficient to support participation, further data analysis will be important for assessing how open access affects cost recovery, including the role of print sales before and after titles become open.

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BLC has seen firsthand how JSTOR's Path to Open program delivers real impact—for libraries, authors, publishers, and, most importantly, the communities we serve. *We've seen steady growth in participation across BLC member institutions alongside strong usage of newly published titles, demonstrating the value of this shared investment model.* The significant increase in usage globally once titles transition to open access underscores the long-term impact of this approach. We're delighted to see JSTOR continue the program beyond its pilot phase, signaling a durable, collaborative model for expanding access to scholarly content.

Charlie Barlow
Executive Director
Boston Library Consortium

| What comes next

The results from the first 100 Path to Open titles, combined with program evaluation and community feedback, provide early evidence that the model is beginning to deliver on its core goals. These findings show that the community-based model—with participation from publishers, libraries, and scholars—is expanding access, increasing usage, and engaging new audiences, even as it continues to evolve.

As Path to Open transitions from pilot to ongoing program, its impact is already visible across the scholarly community:

- Libraries license access to high-quality frontlist titles while contributing to a shared investment model for open access.
- Publishers receive funding through library participation while benefiting from increased visibility, broader global reach, and stronger engagement with their content.
- Authors reach wider and more diverse audiences.
- Readers gain access to trusted scholarship that might otherwise remain out of reach.

Today, Path to Open has nearly 300 participating libraries, more than 50 publishers, and a growing corpus approaching 1,000 titles across open, recent backlist, and newly added frontlist content. Each year, 300 titles become openly available and 300 new titles enter the program, creating a continuous pipeline of newly published and open access books.

Realizing that potential will depend on expanding participation both from libraries, to sustain JSTOR's ongoing investment in new titles, and from publishers, to ensure a high-quality, diverse pipeline of content.

With continued shared investment across the community, Path to Open is well positioned to build on this momentum to expand access, strengthen impact, and support a more sustainable future for open access monographs.



How long does it take for titles to become open?

- Designed model: 3 years
- Actual average: ~2.2 years (first 100 titles)

Why it matters

The first 100 titles became openly available sooner than expected (~2.2 years vs. the planned 3 years), which expanded access faster, while still supporting the period when monographs rely most heavily on early sales for cost recovery and lowering per-title cost for participating libraries.



Ready to Join us on the Path to Open?



about.jstor.org/join-path-to-open



About the Author

Hector Nazario is the senior business analyst for Books at JSTOR. His work focuses on analyzing usage, reach, and impact to inform strategic initiatives that expand access to scholarly content.