Description

The quality of research often improves with good collaborators. In our modern world, answering complex questions requires a team of experts. The Open Science Prize (OSP) was set up to promote international research collaborations. The OSP rewarded biomedical academic research and encouraged crowdsourcing of open data to help researchers make breakthroughs.

Collaborations in Science

The money for the OSP came from three agencies. They are the National Institutes of Health, the Wellcome Trust, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The OSP was not a typical grant as it was awarded as part of a competition. In addition, in order to win, scientists had to create solutions based on open data and had to be part of a research collaboration.

In Phase I, scientists from 45 countries submitted 96 applications for the OSP. The judges ranked the applications based on how they advanced open science, their impact, and innovation. Moreover, the judges also assessed the originality and feasibility of the academic research. Only six of the projects were selected for Phase II. These six research collaborations received US$80,000. The researchers used this money to create prototypes.

The scientists made summaries explaining their work while some other research teams also made videos. Members of the public could freely view these summaries and videos on the OSP website. Many people voted for their favorite projects. In fact, 3,730 votes were cast from 76 countries around the world. During Phase II, the researchers were judged again with a focus on the prototypes they had made.

What Did We Learn?

The winning idea came from a research collaboration between American and Swiss scientists. They created an online platform to allow public health workers to track viral outbreaks in real time. The tool uses analyses of viral genomes to track the spread of diseases. The platform made it easy to bring together data from many sources. The data is available in real time which can help health professionals make plans to stop the spread of viruses. The Phase II prize was US$230,000.

The collaboration between the three funding bodies has many benefits. All three agencies were able to share resources. This meant that the prizes could be bigger. OSP funding made the work of scientists even more effective. For example, one of the Phase I winners focused on air quality. Their prize money made it possible for them to collect seven times more data than they had before. Their OpenAQ project now has 28 million data points.

By awarding a prize for work already done, there is some evidence of the kind of impact the research will have. The OSP does this and promotes open research. Promoting international collaborations in science is critical since many health issues affect several countries. Prizes like the OSP can help international funding bodies to support innovative work. International collaborations often result in creative solutions to complex problems.

There are other lessons from the Open Science Prize as well. These include:

- Partnerships require time and compromise
- A two-step funding model was effective in driving innovation
- A public vote increased the visibility of the competition and created enthusiasm
- The partnership between international funders increased the reach of the competition and its resources.

Can Open Research Work?

There are some concerns that open research may hurt scientists' careers. It seems that this might not be true. To answer this question, the National Academies is studying open science. The study will take 18 months and will find out what changes would need to happen to make open science the norm. In 2013, the White House Office of Science and Technology said that agencies with large R&D budgets should improve public access to research. Furthermore, a recent bill in Congress would make this requirement a law.

Brian Nosek is the executive director of the Center for Open Science. He argues that there needs to be more support for "getting research right". He suggests that research projects should undergo peer review at the proposal stage. This review would focus on the study design. A second review of the research report would happen at the end. This would not depend on the results of the research. Rather, it would assess how well the researchers followed protocols. This would encourage publication of all results, not just the favorable ones.

The Open Science Prize shows that international collaborations can create powerful solutions. The OSP also shows that open science is one way to solve the big issues of our time. Open research tends to be associated with more citations and media attention. It also helps researchers collaborate. Open research can help your career by helping you find new jobs and grants. With all these benefits, shouldn't you switch to an open research model?

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Date Created

2017/10/10
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