

As a state public policy leader, what are the best ways to promote the use of open educational resources (OER) in my state?

State leadership can do many things to improve OER adoption, but to be successful, these efforts must respect faculty freedom to choose the materials that are best for their courses.

In addition to increasing access to education, our goal is to provide more choice for faculty, not less. OpenStax is a part of Rice University and was founded by a Rice professor, and academic freedom is paramount to our mission. We strongly believe that faculty should be empowered to select the materials that are the best fit for their courses. We've learned that the best way to increase use of high-quality OER at the state level is to support initiatives that promote faculty awareness and remove obstacles to OER adoption. We discourage the creation of policies that mandate OER or otherwise restrict faculty selection of instructional materials.

Here are some state-level actions that you can take to increase use of OER:

- Establish a program of small grants for faculty to help them switch their courses to OER. For example, while OpenStax books are aligned to standard scope and sequence requirements and thus do not require major curriculum change, small grants can help cover time for faculty to revise their syllabi, making them better prepared to make a smooth, effective transition.

The University of Georgia system has successfully increased OER use through such a program. Learn more about it at <http://bit.ly/1RT0rX5>.

- Encourage colleges and universities to make note in course catalogs and bookstore listings which courses use no-cost or low-cost materials, so they are easy for students to identify.
- Exempt OER from statutes, rules, and policies established to reduce textbook costs. These policies often have the unintended consequence of making OER difficult to adopt and use. Examples include laws that limit how often textbook content can be changed or that discourage faculty from adopting updated versions to encourage textbook reuse. Unlike commercial textbooks, anyone can remix, reuse, and distribute OER without cost to meet the needs of a course or to reflect updated information, so limiting such changes can undermine one of OER's significant advantages.

Here are some state-level actions that you can take to increase use of OER (continued):

- Require your state’s higher education agency or university system to develop model policies for improving OER adoption, which can be used as starting points for discussions within institutions. OpenStax can provide examples of effective institutional policies and work with your team on policy development.
- Require institutions to review and revise intellectual property policies to ensure that OER can be freely disseminated and adapted. This practice increases the availability of high-quality OER.
- Require that all instructional materials produced with government funds carry an open Creative Commons CC BY Attribution license and are posted publicly, so that all of your state’s faculty and students can benefit.
- Require that statewide or institutional technology plans include specific support for OER.

We’re happy to share our experience.

OpenStax works with states and institutional partners to increase the adoption of high-quality OER. If you share that goal, we’re excited to help. Contact Daniel Williamson, Managing Director at daniel@openstax.org.

