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TOPIC

ALTMETRICS

CONSUMING ARTICLE-LEVEL METRICS:
OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS

INSTITUTIONAL ALTMETRICS
AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

ALTMETRICS IN EVOLUTION

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES:
ALTMETRICS AND SOCIAL IMPACT

WHAT IT MEANS WHEN A SCHOLAR
ADDS A PAPER TO MENDELEY



NISO Awarded Sloan Foundation Grant to Develop Standards and Recommended Practices for Altmetrics

The National Information Standards Organization (NISO) is undertaking a new two-phase project to study, propose, and develop community-based standards and recommended practices in the field of alternative metrics. Assessment of scholarship is a critical component of the research process, impacting everything from which projects get funded to who gains promotion and tenure to which publications gain prominence. Since Eugene Garfield's pioneering work in the 1960s, much of the work on research assessment has been based upon citations, a valuable measure but one that has failed to keep pace with online reader behavior, network interactions with content, social media, and online content management. Exemplified by innovative new platforms and products, a new movement is growing to develop more robust alternative metrics—called *altmetrics*—that complement traditional citation metrics. The project is funded through a \$207,500 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. NISO will first hold several in-person and virtual meetings within the community to identify the critical areas where altmetrics standards or recommended practices are needed. This will be followed by a second phase of convening a working group to develop the consensus standards and/or recommended practices prioritized in the community meetings.

Citation analysis lacks ways to measure the newer and more prevalent ways that articles generate impact such as through social networking tools like Twitter, Facebook, or blogs. Additionally, new forms of scholarly outputs, such as datasets, software tools, algorithms, or molecular structures are now commonplace, but they are not easily—or if at all—assessed by traditional citation metrics. These are among two of the many concerns the growing movement around altmetrics is trying to address.

For altmetrics to move out of its current pilot and proof-of-concept phase, the community must begin coalescing around a suite of commonly understood definitions, calculations, and

data sharing practices. Organizations and researchers wanting to apply these metrics need to adequately understand them, ensure their consistent application and meaning across the community, and have methods for auditing their accuracy. Agreement is needed on what gets measured, what the criteria are for assessing the quality of the measures, at what granularity these metrics are compiled and analyzed, how long a period the altmetrics should cover, the role of social media in altmetrics, the technical infrastructure necessary to exchange this data, and which new altmetrics will prove most valuable. The creation of altmetrics standards and best practices will facilitate the community trust in altmetrics, which will be a requirement for any broad-based acceptance, and will ensure that these altmetrics can be accurately compared and exchanged across publishers and platforms.

The first phase of the project will gather two groups of invited experts in altmetrics research, traditional publishing, bibliometrics, and faculty assessment for in-person discussions with the goal of identifying key altmetrics issues and those that can best be addressed through standards or recommended practices. This input will form the basis of two virtual meetings, open to the public, to further refine and prioritize the issues. Additional community input will be sought through an array of electronic and social mechanisms and events coordinated with major community conferences. A report summarizing this input will identify the specific areas where NISO should develop standards or recommended practices, which will be undertaken by a working group convened in phase two. The complete project from initial meetings to publication of standards is expected to take two years. Information about the meetings and other methods for participation will be announced on the NISO website (www.niso.org/topics/tl/altmetrics_initiative/) and in the monthly Newsline e-newsletter.

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