

Investing in the Future of Open Educational Resources

With support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, OERu is opening access to a credible, high-quality and affordable education for learners around the world

A key indicator of the strength and vision of [OERu](#) (Open Education Resource universitas) is the continued support received from forward-thinking patrons and organisations such as the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#). Through this generous funding, OERu is gaining global recognition as a channel in which tertiary education can be accessible to learners around the world.

Hewlett Foundation's Vision for OER

The Hewlett Foundation defines Open Educational Resources (OER) as, "Teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge."

In the past 16 years, the Hewlett Foundation has invested \$190 million in OER – not including administration costs – funding organisations working on content development, the creation of intelligent policy regarding open content, and more.

TJ Bliss, Program Officer in the Education program at the Hewlett Foundation, understands and appreciates the value of Open Educational Resources, and oversees the foundation's grantmaking to expand its reach and efficacy. "I see OER becoming a more important part of the conversation around openness in general – open data, open access, open government," he shared. "OER will enter the mainstream and open licensing of content will become the default, thereby increasing access to high-quality educational materials for students around the world."

The Hewlett Foundation has provided funding for OERu since its inception in 2011 through successive grants to support the organisation's capacity to help learners access high-quality OER and develop partnerships with accredited institutions. The arrangement provides significant opportunity for learners, both formal and informal, to acquire globally recognised qualifications.

Learning for Free

OERu is a non-profit organisation that has taken on the challenge of providing an excellent, affordable education to students around the world, with centralised infrastructure and hosting costs for online courses funded through



"The next key piece is for organizations offering open educational resources to become financially self-sustaining. Websites that provide high-quality educational materials for free need to find ways to, at a minimum, recover their costs so that they can grow. It has to reach that scale."

~**Barbara Chow, Program Director, Education Program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation**

membership fees from its international institutional network. Surplus revenue from membership fees is invested in commissioning the development of additional courses for the benefit of the international network.

The OERu was designed for sustainability from inception. The rigour of the network's planning is now delivering dividends: 80% of operational costs to host OERu-shared infrastructure are generated from sustainable membership fees. OERu is succeeding in shifting the question from: "How to achieve sustainable OER projects?" to "How will higher education institutions remain sustainable without OER?" This means that donor funding can be invested in building strategic capacity for the network, rather than keeping the lights on.

Global Partnerships

Partner institutions provide two courses to the OERu curriculum, assembled from existing OER or by converting two courses to the open licensing model. This two-course contribution minimizes the institution's risk, while improving the OERu catalogue and increasing brand awareness for the institution.

By assembling courses from high-quality OER and volunteer student support services from [Academic Volunteers International](#), OERu is able to offer learning opportunities for little-to-no cost to students. To cover the recurrent operational costs of credentialing services, OERu partners charge assessment fees. OERu does not regulate the costing structure for credentialing services, leaving this decision to the individual institutions to determine the price point that works best for them and facilitating their ability to generate new income.

"The OERu's core mission is to widen access to more affordable education with pathways to achieve credible qualifications, especially for learners currently excluded from the privilege of a tertiary education.

Many educators believe in expanding affordable access to higher education, but what may be difficult for institutions to deliver individually becomes possible through active participation in the OER universitas international innovation partnership." ~Emeritus Professor Jim Taylor, member of the Board of the Open Education Resource Foundation, and Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Purposeful Funding

The Hewlett Foundation would like to see the OERu continue on the path in front of it, maintaining its commitment to openness and continuing to accomplish its core mission while being responsive and flexible to changing contexts.

"The goal is for OER adoption in higher education to happen at the degree level, where groups of faculty will work together and decide to create a pathway where students can get through an entire degree program and get a qualification without having to pay for a textbook," said Bliss. "OERu is building this model out at a global scale, and the field is interested in learning from their progress and challenges."

"Ideally, we want to see OERu succeed, with lots of students around the world actively participating and gaining qualifications." ~TJ Bliss, Program Officer, Education Program, Hewlett Foundation



Donor

