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Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice
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DDNJ

Redefining Scholarly Publishing

Dismantling Barriers to Research in the Human Services and Disability Support Systems.

Matthew Wappett Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

DDNJ | Developmental Disabilities Network Journal



The Traditional Academic Publishing Model is Broken!

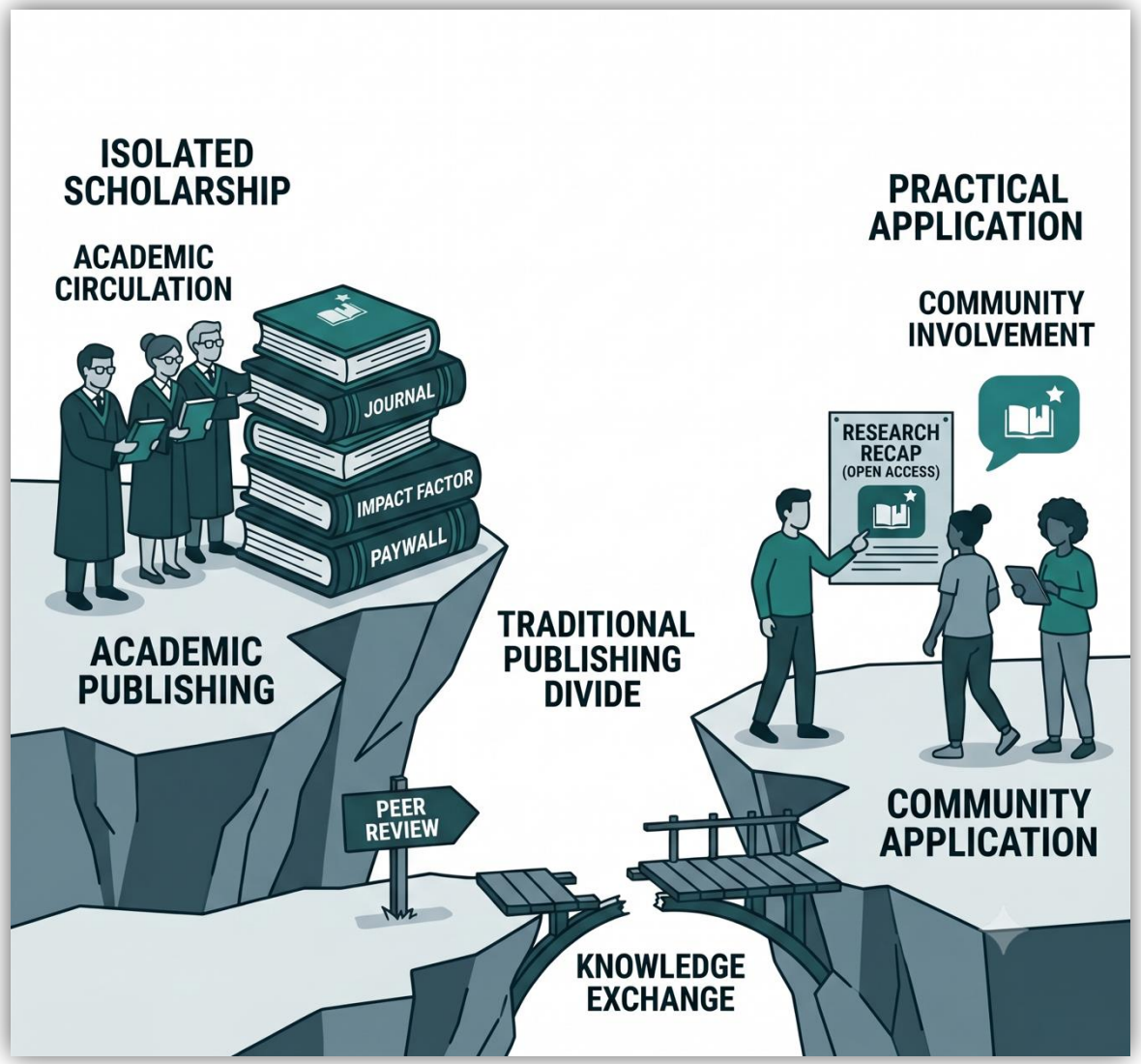
DDNJ | Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

The Traditional Publishing Divide

Traditional academic publishing systems prioritize scholarly isolation over practical community application.

We must bridge this gap.

In the human services, research only matters if the people we serve can actually use it.



DDNJ | Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Barriers in Traditional Academic Research

The Academic Paywall

Rigorous, life-changing research remains locked behind expensive subscription barriers and premium databases. Community practitioners, local human service programs, family advocates, and people with disabilities cannot afford to access critical peer-reviewed findings.

Gatekept Peer Review

Conventional peer review relies exclusively on university-affiliated academics. It completely excludes the lived experiences and valuable viewpoints of self-advocates, family members, and community programs who understand real-world application best.

Lack of Lived Experience & Community Involvement

Traditional academic research and publishing models don't provide space for lived experience and inclusion of subjects in the dissemination process

The Impracticality of Traditional Academic Research



A lot of academic research is focused on self-serving agendas and professional discourse communities that become isolated echo chambers. Many traditional academics pursue esoteric and impractical "research" that doesn't serve the community and has little practical application. A major critique of traditional academic research is that it has fallen victim to abstract theory, methodological fetishism, personal interest, and ivory-tower isolationism.

DDNJ Origins and Vision

Foundations

Going back to grad school I have wanted to create a journal that is more inclusive and accessible. Back in 1998 I pitched a similar idea to the CEC Board, only to be patted on the head and sent on my way. I kept this idea in the back of my brain for over 20 years, talking to people about my vision, and looking for opportunities to operationalize it

The Idea

In 2012 I pitched the DDNJ vision to the AUCD Board, without any interest on their part. In 2018-2019 I went to Georgetown for a NCCLC training and shared this idea with multiple other UCEDD Directors and staff. In 2019 I reached out to USU Libraries and found that I had all the supports at USU to make this happen without formal organizational support.

DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

DDNJ's Mission & Focus

Mission

DDNJ encourages rigorous scholarship about disability systems and highlights research and evaluation that demonstrates the value and impact of the Developmental Disabilities network and related disability advocacy and support programs.

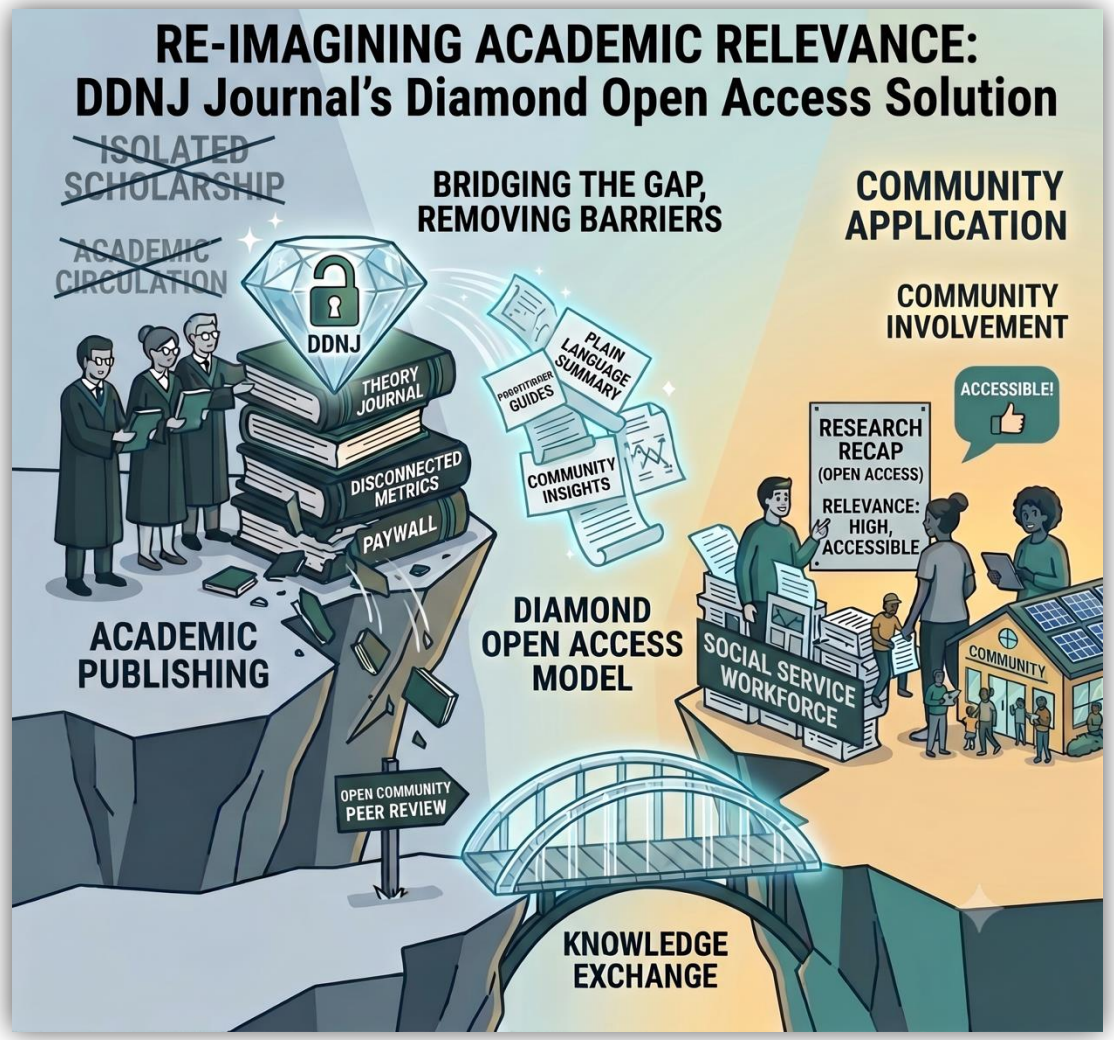
Focus

DDNJ focuses on rigorous applied research about disability systems. We publish research demonstrates the value and impact of the Developmental Disabilities network. We also welcome scholarship from programs with a similar focus on disability rights, community living, and interdisciplinary research. This journal specifically highlights programs, practices, and policies that encourage the full inclusion of people with disabilities in communities and all aspects of public life.



DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Introducing the DDNJ Model



Dismantling Traditional Barriers

The Developmental Disabilities Network Journal (DDNJ), published by the USU Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice (IDRPP), is an innovative, "Diamond" open-access scholarly platform designed for rigorous applied research on disability systems.

By prioritizing free access to download, read, and submit, DDNJ facilitates a global bridge connecting university-led centers to local advocacy organizations and self-advocates on the ground.

DDNJ | Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Open Access is a Core Necessity

Empowering Application through Open Access

In the human services, research is empty if it cannot be used by the community. Open access ensures there are zero financial barriers to downloading and reading the latest evidence-based practices.

When knowledge is truly open access, disability advocates, families, healthcare professionals, teachers, direct support professionals, researchers, and anyone else in the community can instantly translate rigorous data into immediate action and enhanced support frameworks.



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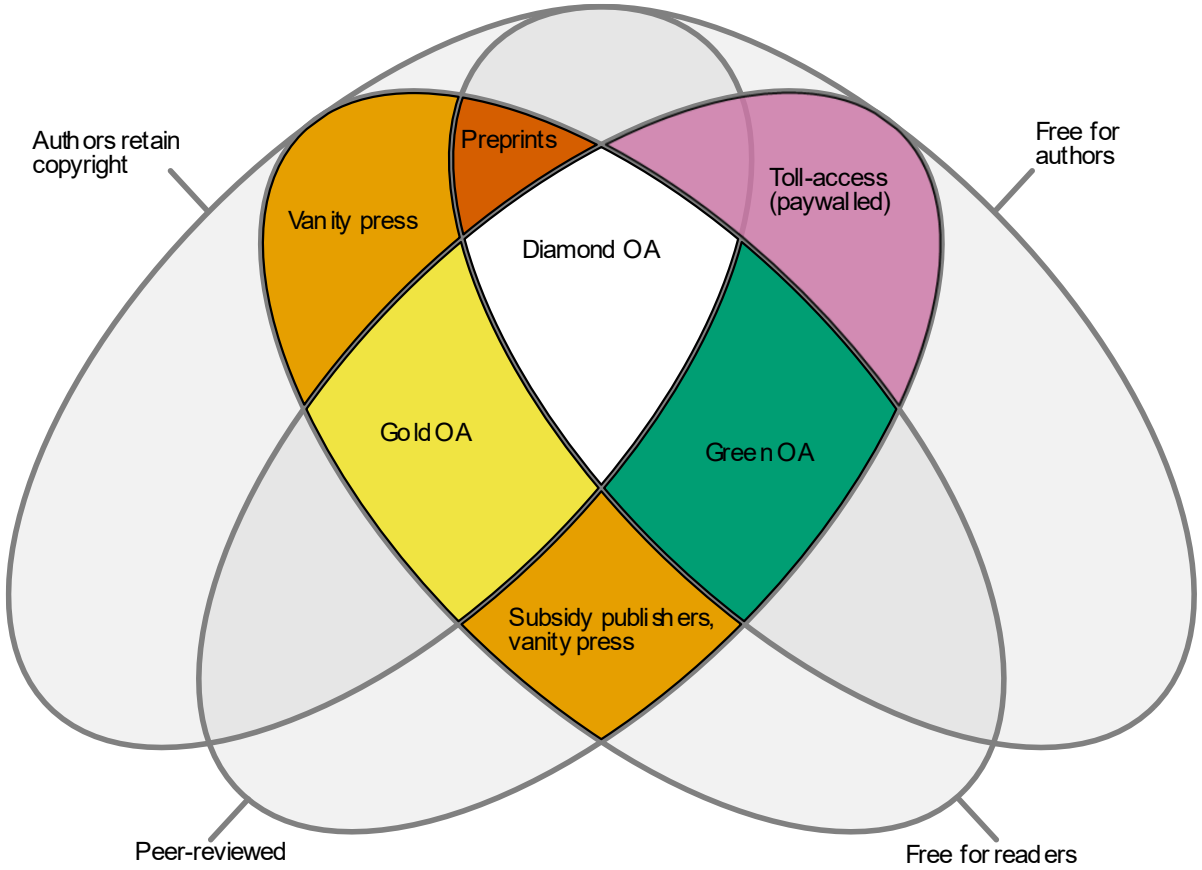


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NonCommercial: You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

ShareAlike: If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

Diamond Open Access (No Fees)



No Fee to Read, No Fee to Publish

Most commercial open access journals charge author-facing article processing charges (APCs) that can reach up to thousands of dollars per article. This excludes non-funded field practitioners and self-advocates from publishing their research and creates a “pay to play” model in open access publishing.

DDNJ is fully sponsored by USU and the IDRPP, meaning it operates on a "Diamond" open access publishing model. We charge nothing to authors and nothing to readers, democratizing scholarly research for all.

DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Inclusive Peer Review Processes

Disability Leadership in the Editorial Process

All members of the DDNJ Editorial team identify as a person with a developmental disability, and most members of the DDNJ Editorial Board identify as a person with a disability or a family member of an individuals with a disability. This means that all editorial decisions and support come from a foundation of lived experience.

Review by Experts with Lived Experience

We attempt to recruit reviewers who are experts, but who also have lived experience. Where possible we recruit reviewers who identify as individuals with disabilities, siblings, and parents/caregivers. By including these stakeholders in the peer review team, we validate lived experiences as critical expertise.

Mentoring & Supportive Review

Instead of gatekeeping or rejecting community-submitted findings based on rigid, academic formatting rules, DDNJ editors offer constructive guidance and review processes that nurture first-time practitioners and self-advocates toward successful publication. We consciously support new authors, self-advocates, and first-generation academics.

DDNJ's Publishing Flow

Pre-Review

Submissions first go through a pre-review process that ensures formatting and adherence to basic journal requirements.

Peer Review

Manuscripts that pass the pre-review process are sent out for a double-blind peer review. Reviewer feedback is then sent to authors.

Final Copyediting

Final manuscripts are sent to our copyeditor who works with authors to ensure references, formatting, and accessibility requirements.

DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Innovative Dissemination Methods

Plain Language

Jargon and technical language is a major barrier in all academic publishing. DDNJ requires every research article to feature a clear, jargon-free plain language summary tailored for parents, self-advocates, and policymakers.

Technical Accessibility

All tables and figures are reviewed for accessibility. The journal is optimized across multiple digital formats including accessible Pressbooks and PDFs. The newest iteration of the journal to be launched in 2027 will be even more accessible by moving away from PDFs

Multimedia Content

We extend reach via the DDNJ Author Insights Podcast, bringing authors' stories to life. Full audio transcriptions are provided in both English and Spanish for bilingual communities. The newest iteration of the journal will allow for video content to be embedded.

Reimagining Scholarly Publishing

Publishing Factor	Traditional Academic Publishing		Inclusive Publishing (DDNJ Model)
Access Boundaries	Expensive Institutional Paywalls	✓	Free Open Access (Diamond)
Publication Cost	High Author Fees (APCs up to $4,000)	✓	$0 Diamond Model (Free to publish)
Peer Validation	Exclusively University Scholars	✓	People with Lived Experience and Community Members
Dissemination Formats	Dense, text-only academic PDF	✓	Plain Language + Pressbooks + Podcasts

DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Highlighting Inclusive & Engaged Research

- **Co-Research Frameworks:** Individuals with developmental disabilities serve as active research partners, defining study goals rather than being treated merely as passive subjects.

- **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Aligning academic rigorous analysis with the immediate operational goals of state and national DD network advocacy partners.

- **Refining Scholarly Worth:** Transitioning away from pure theoretical prestige metrics. Lived experience, user outcomes, and systemic equity become the ultimate evaluation criteria.

Top 6 Downloaded Articles

- “Disability Decolonized: Indigenous Peoples Enacting Self-determination”
- “Assessing and Mitigating Risk for Applied Behavior Analysis Providers During a Pandemic”
- “Enhancing Digital Accessibility for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Learners- Innovative Strategies for Inclusive Education”
- “Inclusion in Disability Evaluation and Surveillance Projects: Reflections and Recommendations For Inclusive Project Teams”
- “Increasing Access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication Services for People with Complex Communication Needs During COVID-19 and Beyond”
- “Interdisciplinary Treatment Approach to Youth with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Co-occurring Mental Health Conditions”
- “Adapting Participatory Action Research to Include Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic”

The Ideal DDNJ Inclusive Publishing Path

Co-Design

Research/Evaluation projects are designed alongside community partners & disabled individuals.

Co-Review

Manuscript evaluated by academic peers alongside community advocates and PwD

Accessible Build

Plain language summaries written; alt-text and screen-reader elements compiled.

Publication

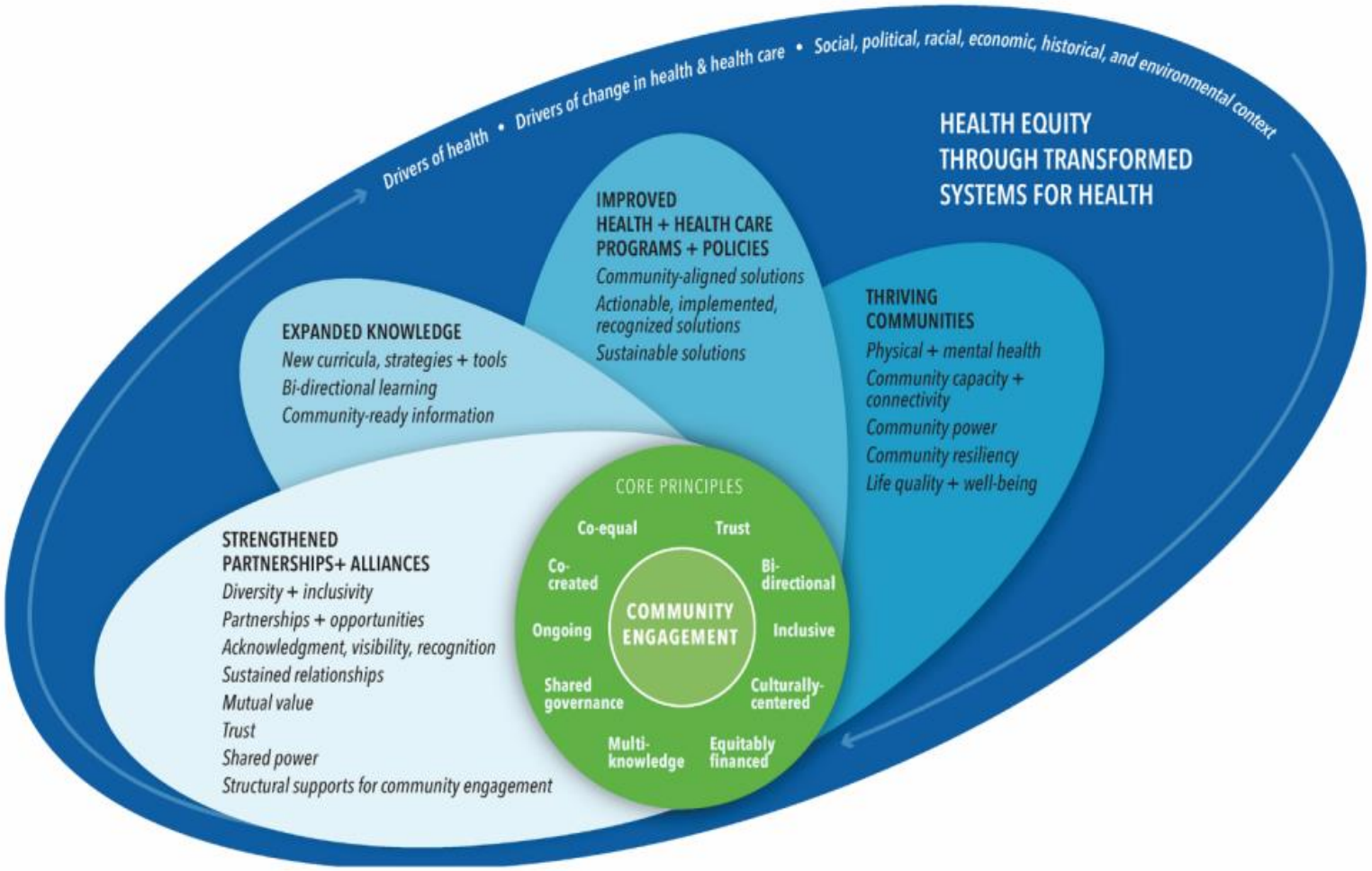
Diamond Open Access release via Digital Commons, Pressbooks, podcast transcripts & direct outreach.

The Bridge to Improved Inclusive Outcomes

Rigorous But Actionable

DDNJ acts as a digital bridge, ensuring that rigorous, community-engaged research on disability support systems actually reaches the people who need it. Our primary metric of success is improved quality of life for individuals with disabilities; not mere citation counts in isolation. This is where our podcast and other elements of design help provide alternative avenues to understanding impact.

Our model follows the National Academy of Medicine's "Conceptual Model to Advance Health Equity through Transformed Systems for Health



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DDNJ's Publishing Evolution

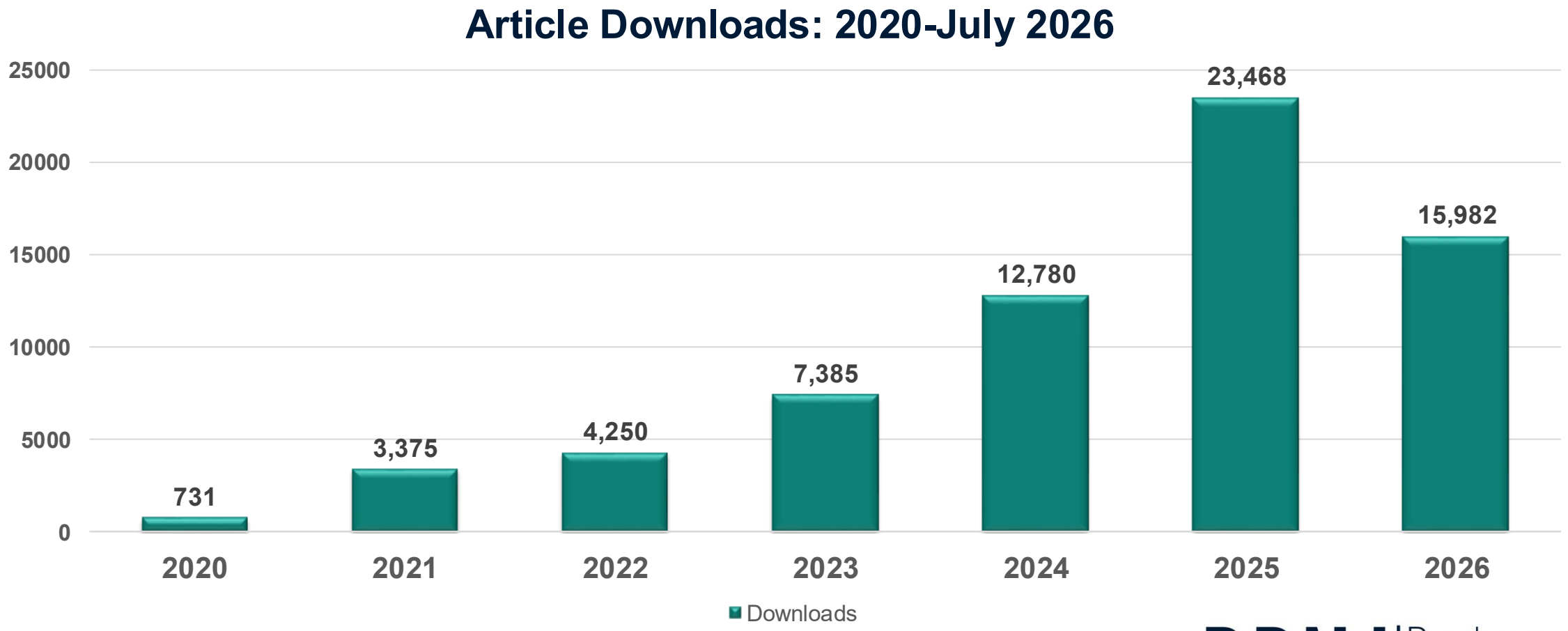
Original Vision

Our original publishing model was to create two issues per year with a minimal investment of staff time and effort. This was a gross miscalculation on my part, and the model didn't take into account the interest in inclusive publishing practices, nor the time and effort it takes to support a journal like DDNJ.

Our Evolution

During COVID we were approached by AUCD CORE to publish a special issue on the pandemic. We have continued to publish special, collaborative issues once per year. The other issue is an "open" issue with other non-thematic submissions. In spring 2026 we moved to a "rolling" publication model.

The Growth of DDNJ

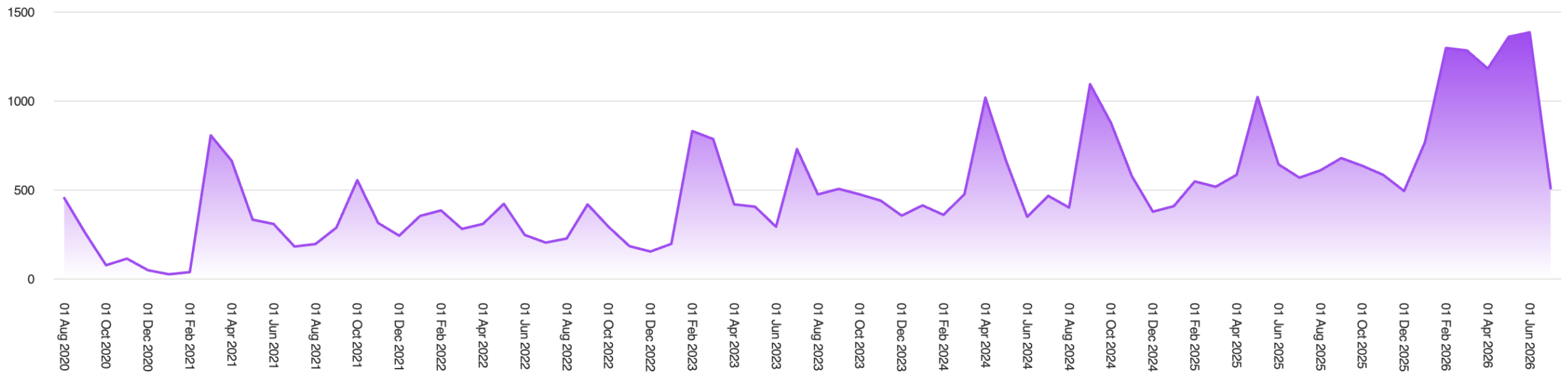


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The Growth of DDNJ

Metadata Page Hits

Jan 20 - Jul 26



DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Publishing Reach From Utah to the World



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Where We're Going

- **More Accessible Web Interface:** Although the website and content is technically accessible, it will be improved through an updated website design, more native HTML content, and the ability to integrate the podcast, video abstracts and other supporting media that provides multiple options for accessing the content.

- **More Staff Time:** The growth of the journal has necessitated that we assign another staff member as an Associate Editor to help manage the manuscript submission and author support functions.

- **Journal Sponsorship:** With increased submissions and more submissions from newer authors we have to invest more staff time to supporting the journal. With a national and global reach, we are a platform that might appeal to sponsors who want to get their organization and/or information out to our readership, which would help support journal operations.

- **Reviewer Training:** We will be launching twice a year reviewer trainings to ensure that reviewers are adhering to our model and our expectations. This will ensure more timely and informative peer-reviews for authors.

Areas Where DDNJ Can Do Better

- **Individuals with More Significant I/DD:** Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities that impact cognitive function continue to be a challenge for inclusion in the review process. We have several pilot initiatives to provide supports for this group, but still have work to do.
- **More DD Council, P&A and other Federal Program Involvement:** The majority of content comes from the academic side of the DD Network (UCEDD, LEND, IDDRC programs). We continue to find ways to support authors from other DD Network programs to submit work for publication in the journal.
- **Targeted Marketing:** Although the content in DDNJ comes from DD Network programs, the application of the research is broader and could benefit other community-based researchers, providers, and organizations. Better outreach via social media and other platforms could benefit more.
- **Reviewer Recruitment & Retention:** Most academics understand the review process, but program staff, community members, family members, and self-advocates don't. This creates a whole different set of issues that traditional journals don't have to navigate.

DDNJ Developmental Disabilities Network Journal

Join the Movement

Let's reshape human services research together to prioritize community accessibility and genuine lived-experience representation.

digitalcommons.usu.edu/ddnj editor.ddnj@usu.edu

Sign up to be a reviewer:
https://usu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3wmxW6ztKfPbhgq

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