



GLOBAL EQUITY IN OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING

WORKSHOP SERIES ON PRACTICAL MECHANISMS AND ACTION PLANS TO REMOVE BARRIERS FOR READERS AND AUTHORS

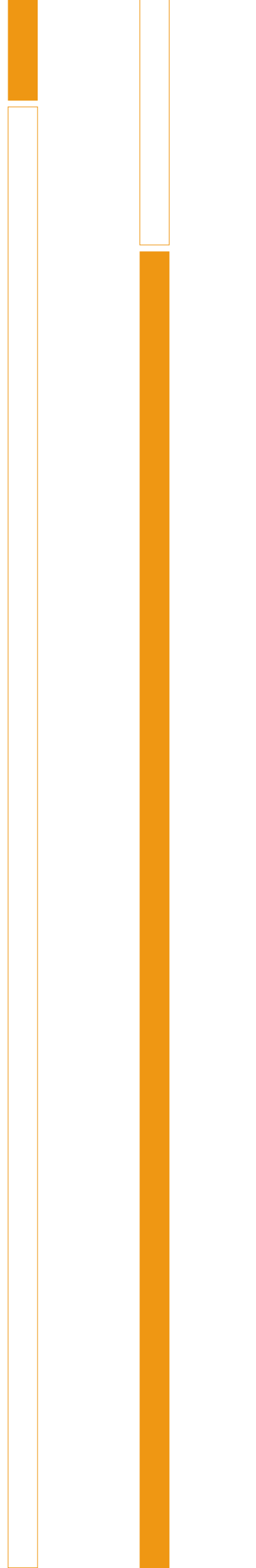
Workshop 3

Viewpoints and perspectives from across the Americas

October 10, 2023

REPORT

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Introduction

As open access publishing grows, many are concerned that as equity of access to read and use research increases, equity in publishing may decrease and that many actors in the research publishing ecosystem may become more disenfranchised than before. Many recent initiatives and statements by organizations such as [OA2020](#), [cOAlition S](#), [UNESCO](#), [Science Europe](#), the [US Office of Science and Technology](#), and the [International Science Council](#) (ISC) have highlighted inequity as a challenge in the open access publishing landscape. The causes of this inequity are not just financial but also structural and cultural.

OA2020 convened an online workshop, in collaboration with [Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior \(CAPES\)](#), [Consortio Colombia](#), [Canadian Research Knowledge Network \(CRKN\)](#), [California Digital Library \(CDL\)](#), [Iowa State University Library](#), UNESCO, the ISC, cOAlition S, Science Europe, and additional partners, with the aim of bringing together a wide range of participants from across North, Central, and South America to discuss the unique challenges to equitable open access in 2023 across these regions and to explore potential solutions.

Part of a [series of regional workshops](#), this workshop was an opportunity for those who produce and fund research across the Americas, including scientists and scholars, research administrators, libraries and library consortia, university leadership, science councils and grant funders, and ministries and agencies of research and education, to better understand the current tensions in the scholarly communication landscape and seek actionable plans and practical mechanisms that ensure equitable opportunity to openly disseminate the results of research. This third workshop expanded and built on insights gathered in previous workshops that focused on viewpoints from [Africa and Europe](#) and from the [Asia Pacific region](#).

The outcomes of the workshop presented here will inform immediate and long term actions on a global scale that the organizers will further discuss with additional stakeholders, including scholarly publishers, in 2024.

Participation data

Participant registrations (n = 391) for the Viewpoints and perspectives from across the Americas workshop came predominantly from Brazil (n =256), followed by the United States (n =40), Canada (n=23), and México (n=22).



Figure 1 Map of participant registrations for the Viewpoints and perspectives from across The Americas

Participants provided their occupation details at the time of registration. The majority of participants work in either a university (n = 112), Library/Library Consortia (n = 88) or Science and Education Public Agency (n = 67).

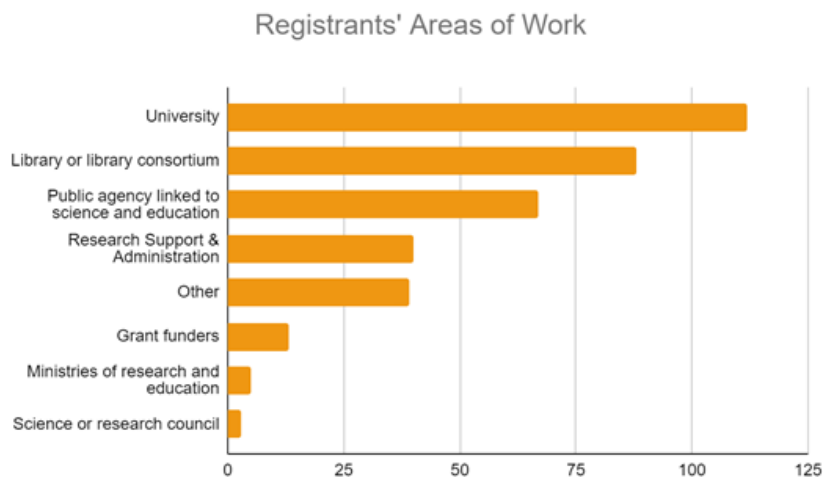


Figure 2 Participants' indicated areas of work

At registration, participants provided responses regarding what general OA principles and challenges they were most interested in. This allowed the workshop planners to develop a list of shared principles and topics for discussion in the workshop.

For the shared principles, participants were asked to select which of the following principles they most wanted to discuss:

- a. Academic communication is part of the research process and, as such, the costs of open access publishing services must be covered by funders and institutions
- b. Fees associated with open access publishing services should be fair, reasonable, transparent, and globally equitable.
- c. Scholarly communication is part of the research process and, as such, costs for open access publishing services should ultimately be borne by research funders and institutions.
- d. Spending on scientific publications should allow global open access for both readers and authors.
- e. The tariffs associated with open access publishing services must be fair, reasonable, transparent and equitable worldwide.

Of the principles described in bullets above, b, c, and d, were the most popular amongst our participants. This suggests that the group was most interested in discussing transparency in the fees related to OA publishing and their payment by research funders to allow global access of content for both authors and research.

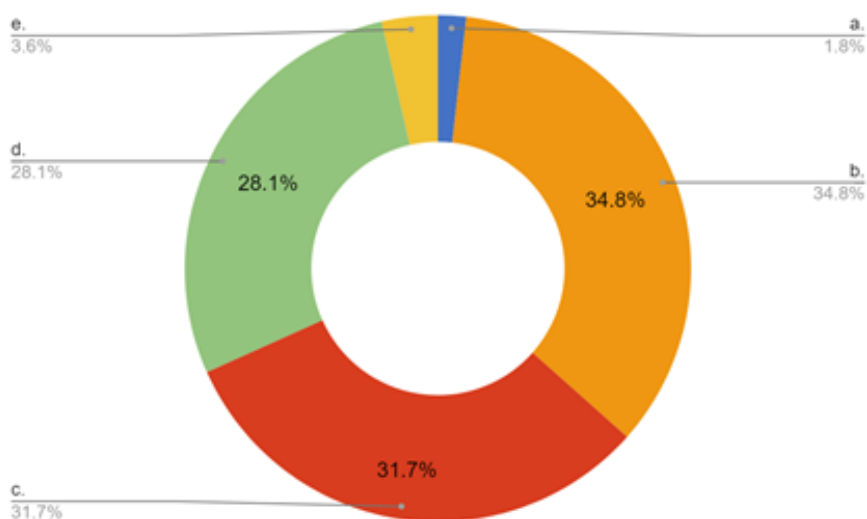


Figure 3 Participants selected principles of interest for the Viewpoints and perspectives from across the Americas. Full descriptions of the principles are listed above in bulleted format.

Finally, participants were asked to describe their own experiences with challenges in working towards equity in OA publishing. Participant responses could be placed into one of 10 categories:

1. Concerns regarding costs of publishing open access
2. Global inequities in participating in the open access publishing system - primarily barriers for researchers in South America to engage in open access publishing in North America
3. A lack of funds to support authors who want to publish open access
4. Combating negative attitudes towards open access publishing
5. A general desire to make research and information openly accessible for all people
6. Concerns about the commercialization of open access publishing business models and their sustainability
7. Concerns regarding copyright & material sharing
8. The negative impacts of open access business models and agreements
9. Metadata sharing
10. Other inequities in participating in the open access publishing system.

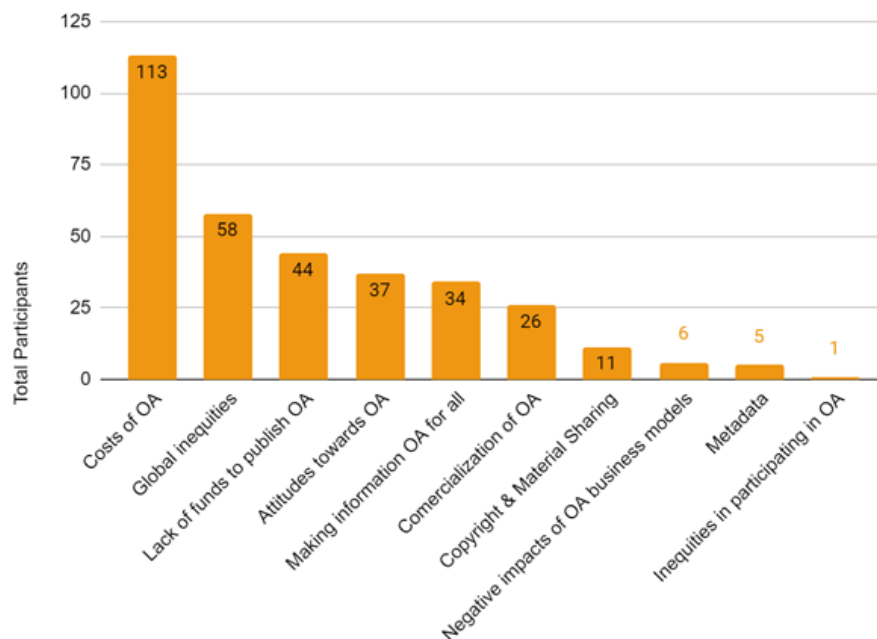


Figure 4 Participants indicated challenges in participating in OA publishing.

By far, concerns related to the cost of publishing research open access was the largest area of concern raised by our participants. This issue also extended into the other categories. For example, concerns about the commercialization of open access and the ability for middle- and low-income countries to participate in OA publishing was often related to costs.

Another major area of concern highlighted during the webinar is the many barriers faced by authors in South America when participating in OA publishing. Many participants raised concerns about the global south being left out of OA publishing due to:

- > Lack of affordability to participate in pay-to-publish OA and other OA business models due to financial or policy constraints.
- > Lack of access to disseminate research in venues outside of the global south due to lack of funding, strong emphasis for publishing in high-impact journals, language barriers, and the disregard and discounting of research coming from the global south.
- > The hegemony of the English language and western writing styles.

Overview of the Workshop

The overarching objective of the workshop was to bring together actors from different regions to share how they have perceived inequities in open access publishing and to brainstorm, together, immediate next steps and longer term actions that different actors can take to reduce some of those inequities.

The 4-hour workshop program included:

- > Viewing of a selection of [perspective videos](#) contributed by researchers and scholarly communication professionals from across the Americas highlighting some of the challenges related to equity and inclusion that they have experienced.
- > A panel discussion featuring experts involved in both open access negotiations with commercial publishers and diamond open access publishing initiatives.
- > Facilitated breakout group discussions (in English, Spanish and Portuguese) to brainstorm immediate and long term actions that different actors can take to reduce inequities.
- > A plenary session to wrap up and finalize proposals for action.

Key challenges

Based on questions that were used in the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop, at the start of the workshop participants were asked to identify what they experienced to be the top challenges to global equity in open access by responding to a survey. The challenges that were identified by the workshop organizers were the following:

- > Prohibitive pricing/fees of OA publishing services
- > Lack of institutional funds to support authors in publishing their work open access
- > Incentives and research assessment criteria that favor Anglo-American and commercially-owned journals
- > Marginalization of indigenous and community-relevant/community-engaged research
- > Lack of support and recognition for a plurality of scholarly communication channels/venues (bibliodiversity)
- > Sustainability for journals / small publishers against a backdrop of market consolidation that reduces competition

44 participants responded to the question with the majority of 36% indicating that lack of institutional funds to support authors in publishing their work open access was the biggest challenge.

The key challenges outlined above were further addressed by participants and facilitators in the Breakout Discussions.

Insights from the Breakout Discussions

English Breakout Discussion

Two breakout rooms for English speakers were provided, each delving into distinct aspects of the scholarly landscape. In room #1, the discussion focused on the dynamics of research assessment criteria, particularly in the United States, where responsibility is divided between smaller and larger institutions. Smaller institutions prioritize diverse metrics, while larger ones seek a balance between prestige and holistic evaluation. The conversation also delved into the prevailing bias toward Anglo-American or commercially-owned journals, exploring alternatives and proposing a roadmap for research assessment reform. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science was emphasized, highlighting the imperative to align investment strategies with open science principles.

Concurrently, in room #2, attention shifted to the pervasive challenges associated with the prohibitive pricing of OA publishing services. Participants emphasized the need for defining fair and equitable pricing parameters, citing cOAlition S' efforts around transparency which has faced resistance from publishers. Interest was expressed in developing Diamond OA publishing efforts to reclaim agency over academic publishing and address Article Processing Charges (APCs). The discussion scrutinized potential influencers in pricing dynamics, suggesting stronger consortia alignment and urging libraries to advocate for OA recognition in promotion and tenure. Proposed partnerships with organizations like HELIOS, CoARA, and DORA were discussed as avenues for a fair distribution of OA costs. Participants recommended investing in Diamond OA models and incentivizing faculty participation. Policymaking bodies such as those involved in HELIOS, DORA, and CoARA were identified as potential advocates for reshaping research assessment criteria in favor of non-Anglo-American and non-commercially-owned journals, reflecting the collective endeavor to foster greater equity and openness in scholarly publishing.

Portuguese Breakout Discussion

Four breakout rooms hosted discussions in Portuguese.

The discussions in the first room highlighted the absence of clear criteria for fair pricing in open access publications, emphasizing the need for parity among countries based on fellowship values and a shift in evaluation methods to focus on article performance rather than expected impact. The potential influencers of pricing, particularly CAPES, were suggested to reform its evaluation system Qualis, favoring qualitative criteria over metrics like the journal impact factor, and fostering support for local and regional quality journals like those indexed in Latindex and SciELO. The discussion also touched on funding policies for academic publications and the necessity to support authors from institutions with limited resources to ensure equitable representation in open access publishing. Additionally,

international collaboration to explore best practices in fee payment, consistent monitoring, and evaluation of pricing values to ensure policy effectiveness were recommended.

In the second room, participants identified libraries as potential contributors to transformative agreements through institutional periodical portals. There was a call for funding agencies to take a leading role in defining a minimum set of reputable SciELO journals as “top journals,” diverging from the impact factor-based selection. It was suggested that fair publication costs should be determined based on comprehensive assessments of production expenses, including human resources. The participants also highlighted the importance of funding bodies who currently pay for subscriptions to influence publication prices, particularly CAPES in Brazil, which spends around USD 90 million annually on journal subscriptions. The discussion featured calls to place emphasis on shifting the publication paradigm and evaluating scientific production quality based on metrics beyond the journal impact factor, rather than seeking partners to cover costs. Furthermore, there were warnings regarding the proposed ‘fairer pricing framework’ commissioned by cOAlition S, emphasizing the need for a change in publication paradigms rather than relying on strategies that may exacerbate the situation in Latin America.

One of the main concerns highlighted by the third discussion group was the dominance of English in international publications, leading to barriers where scientific work in other languages is often overlooked or not accepted, calling for recognition beyond English-centric standards of quality. Additionally, multilingualism in publications was identified as a challenge (especially regarding DOI citations and increased publication costs) while being beneficial for reaching diverse audiences. The discussion critiqued the overemphasis on the H-index in journal evaluations, which has boosted the rise of predatory journals. Suggestions to improve evaluation criteria by focusing on editorial quality, peer review, and other scholarly metrics beyond quantitative and market-driven standards were proposed, advocating for a consultative council to advise funding agencies like CAPES. The issue of exorbitant fees for open access publication services, driven by market forces and evaluation criteria based solely on popularity, was raised, suggesting a need for fair cost evaluations based on editorial quality and regional economic considerations. Strategies to strengthen Latin American scientific publication models and reduce dependency on commercial publishers were discussed, emphasizing the importance of infrastructural support, reiterating the need for sustainable funding, and recognizing the geopolitical implications of open access policies and agreements. The significance of comprehensive databases in incentivizing researchers and the challenge of transformative agreements in relation to the cost of closed journal subscriptions were also addressed.

In the fourth room, workshop participants mentioned the absence of studies to determine the actual cost required for effective editorial processes, highlighting the need for comprehensive research in this area. There were also calls for campaigns against predatory publishing practices and suggestions to boycott publishers charging exorbitant prices. Furthermore, there was a proposal for a shift in the scoring system for evaluating journals,

pointing out that currently, journals with higher impact receive greater scores, thereby potentially influencing higher pricing—suggesting a need to reconsider this relationship between impact and pricing in evaluations.

Spanish Breakout Discussion

An additional breakout room held discussions in Spanish. The exchange revolved around the lack of clear parameters for fair pricing of publishing services and the need for national regulatory bodies to balance publishers' roles. Participants highlighted that decision-making regarding the payment of APCs should not be left to authors, but rather be arranged on the institutional level. Collaboration through national consortia was suggested to negotiate pricing with major publishers, aiming beyond individual transformative agreements. Further points were made on the need for infrastructure federations and collaborative alliances among Latin American regions to set similar negotiation conditions. Emphasizing the need for evaluative criteria reflecting cultural shifts, there were suggestions to foster cultural alignment in evaluation criteria (with the involvement of governmental entities in decisive modifications to evaluation structures), to advocate for changes beyond traditional ranking systems (such as the abandonment of Scopus guidelines), and to acknowledge citizen science as a valid criterion for assessment.

Recommendations

The lively breakout discussions produced a variety of recommendations for reducing inequities in open access publishing, all of which echoed the shared principles set out by the workshop series organizers:

- > *Scholarly communication is part of the research process and, as such, costs for open access publishing services should ultimately be borne by research funders and institutions;*
- > *Spending on scientific publishing should enable global open access by both readers and authors;*
- > *Fees associated with open access publishing services should be fair, reasonable, transparent, and globally equitable.*

The recommendations, summarized here, signal both immediate and long term actions different actors can take to promote inclusiveness and equity in open access publishing in venues produced by commercial, society, funder, higher education and research entities.

*

Funders and institutions should take on the burden of costs of open access publishing, alleviating individual authors of any cost burden.

They should invest in local and regional publishing venues, especially those that do not operate on author-facing fees. They should participate in partnerships and international collaborations to support infrastructure

They should negotiate with publishers for conditions, such as differential pricing, that reduce inequities.

Those that contribute financially to scholarly publishing via subscriptions and open access publishing fees should collaborate on gaining an understanding of the actual total costs of scholarly publishing, including understanding of cost and value of editorial work, to support such negotiations.

Research-producing communities, including higher education and research institutions, their libraries and library consortia, should inform and empower their negotiations with international and regional alignments.

They can form collaborative alliances across borders to set shared negotiation objectives and garner equitable leverage. They can seek to establish cross-consortium agreements to engage both research-intensive universities and smaller institutions into negotiations to enable equitable access and open access publishing benefits across diverse institution types.

Publishers that charge fees should offer differential pricing of OA publishing services considering various factors (GDP, exchange rate fluctuation, etc.) to foster inclusive and equitable open access publishing, with region-specific measures.

Bodies that set research assessment criteria, including governmental agencies and institutional leadership must address the shortcomings of the current evaluation system.

They should adjust evaluation criteria to place less reliance on quantitative metrics such as the journal impact factor and integrate more qualitative assessments and the use of local and regional indexes.

They should define research assessment criteria that reward openness and reflect the research process and its many output types, including citizen science.

They should participate in alliances such as HELIOS, CoARA, and DORA to promote broad reform globally.

Librarians can collaborate with faculty bodies to advocate with groups of higher education administrators for greater recognition of OA and support for OA content as part of promotion and tenure, so that there is alignment between faculty/administration requirements and consortia efforts.

All stakeholders must commit to a cultural change.

Next steps

The workshop series, initiated by OA2020 in partnership with cOAlition S, UNESCO, Science Europe, and the International Science Council (ISC), has sought to bring together different actors within the academic and research domain, in particular those who directly experience the inequities of the current system in scholarly publishing.

These organizations, all engaged in actions to advance open access, felt it important to hear, first hand, about the challenges and barriers that authors encounter, particularly in resource-limited contexts, in order to develop actionable plans and practical mechanisms that ensure no author is limited in their opportunity to publish their accepted articles open access in the journals of their choice.

Informed by the insights shared in the workshops, the workshop organizers have been developing strategies aimed at shaping a more open, equitable and inclusive paradigm in scholarly communication.

The workshop series organizers will communicate about these efforts broadly in the course of 2024.

Appendix: Technical challenges

In offering the workshop series, the organizers made best efforts to enable open discussions among diverse actors across a wide range of geographies, languages and time zones.

Along the way we encountered technical challenges which shaped execution of the workshop and the nature of the discussions. We outline these here for reflection and to inform planning of similar events in the future.

Logistics: While online meeting platforms offer the potential of bringing together participants from different geographies, some participants may still be excluded because of lack of access to stable internet connections. Pre-recorded video contributions, like those we solicited, can be helpful in delivering a common meeting experience, as can setting up virtual collaboration tools for participants to share their inputs before, during and after meetings. We used Google Docs, but even this solution does not sufficiently address logistical inequities.

Language: Care was taken to reduce language barriers in the workshop. Moderators and panelists each spoke in their native languages (English, Spanish and Portuguese) and simultaneous interpretation was provided. Also, breakout rooms were set up by language, to allow participants to provide input and converse in their native language; a significant shortcoming of this approach was, however, that there was no opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas from different communities—one of the chief aims of the workshop.

Sector complexity: The diverse and many actors involved in scholarly communication each have their own professional knowledge and competencies, but these may not overlap or intersect. For example, researchers may have knowledge of the editorial processes of scholarly journal publishing, but may have little knowledge of the business processes of journal subscriptions managed by their librarians—and vice versa. Lacking a common baseline of understanding and in the context of a 4-hour workshop, discussions of how to address inequities in the complex realm of scholarly communication can be challenging. Organizers of future events might consider developing a primer for participants to study in advance, to establish a common baseline of understanding.

Inclusiveness and representation: Based on registration data, the specific topic of the workshop seems to have resonated with different actors in different ways. Despite our best efforts to reach potential participants from countries across The Americas, registrants from Brazil constituted the largest proportion. This is likely due to CAPES' hosting the event and to the limited network of the organizing committee in other countries.

Additionally, as illustrated in workshop video contributions different actors have diverse takes on the very meaning of equity in the context of scholarly communication. Due to limited representation of some actors among workshop participants and the limited time at our disposal, discussions ultimately centered on only select aspects of equity in scholarly communication. Having a code of conduct that encouraged participants to yield the floor to those whose viewpoints and experiences may be underrepresented was a crucial element in executing the workshop.

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