



INVITATION TO ACTION

COLLABORATING TOWARDS GLOBALLY EQUITABLE SCHOLARLY JOURNAL PUBLISHING

Context

Following an initial [data-gathering exercise](#) concluded in 2021, the Open Access 2020 Initiative (OA2020) initiated an [equity working group](#) comprising library consortium representatives from a wide range of geographic contexts, including from low- and middle-income countries, to discuss their expectations with regard to equity and the open access transition in scholarly journal publishing, in particular considering the large volume of journals that operate on service provider business models (for example, APC-based models). Participants in OA2020, together with other partners, wish to explore mechanisms to ensure that the scholarly journal publishing ecosystem to which they are contributing via institutional funding for open access publishing is accessible not only to readers but also to authors, globally.

The perspectives shared among this working group formed the basis of a plenary session at the [15th Berlin Open Access Conference \(B15\)](#) entitled “Equitable opportunity to publish open access: strategies, principles and partnerships to steer the open access transition in scholarly journal publishing toward conditions that are fair and equitable for researchers everywhere”. The plenary session featured both individual video contributions of working group

members from Nepal, Kenya and Colombia and a document of discussion prompts summarizing the perspectives of the entire group.

The subsequent discussion among the more than 350 stakeholders and decision-makers in research and scholarly communication from 46 countries resulted in the conclusion that **“Open access publishing must be enabled under equitable economic conditions”**. The B15 cohort further expressed strong commitment to engaging in local and international partnerships to promote temporary and long-term mechanisms to achieve this end.

Eliminating paywalls and author-facing fees

Eliminating barriers to reading and publishing and elevating the potential of researchers everywhere is at the very heart of OA2020.

Research communication today is constricted by journal paywalls that raise barriers between researchers and scholarly knowledge and create a divide between those whose institutions can afford to pay subscription fees and those whose institutions cannot. To address these inequities, institutions around the world are using the power of their current investments in scholarly journal publishing to break down access barriers for all readers instead of perpetuating them, in line with **the stated mission of OA2020**. Through **transformative agreements** and other open access publishing frameworks, libraries and consortia worldwide are repurposing their former investments in subscriptions to enable immediate open access publication of **hundreds of thousands** of peer-reviewed research articles, so that no reader is excluded from access based on their financial status, and researchers everywhere can freely build on the new knowledge.

The OA2020 community is equally committed to ensuring that authors do not encounter financial barriers as journals transition to OA business models and open access becomes the default in scholarly publishing. We believe that research communication is an integral part of the scientific process and that researchers everywhere should be empowered by research institutions and

funders with the opportunity and provided with the means to publish their articles openly in the venues of their choice under fair and equitable conditions. This is in line with the landmark UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science adopted at the 41st session of its General Conference in November 2021, asking that scholarly communication adhere to “the principles of open, transparent and equitable access” (p.17(20 j)).

Invitation to action

There is strong alignment in the open access objectives of the research performing organizations united in OA2020 and other international organizations that fund and produce research. Together, they would like to **facilitate discussions among stakeholders** in scholarly communication from all geographic and economic contexts with the aim of collaborating on the development of practical mechanisms and concrete solutions that would foster an open scholarly publishing paradigm based on these principles:

Fees associated with open access publishing services should be fair, reasonable, transparent, and globally equitable.

To achieve this, we invite publishers to engage with the global research community in establishing transparent criteria for differentiated pricing, for equal levels of service, that takes into consideration the fact that wealth is distributed unevenly across countries, regions and institutions, defining fees—including full waiver of fees—proportionally, for example, to the purchasing power parity of local and regional research communities. Such differentiated pricing criteria should be applicable for all manner of open access business models, including per-article fee (APC) based models, subscribe to open, collective funding models, etc. We encourage the exploration of innovative business models that support the unique scholarly communication needs of diverse research communities under financially equitable conditions. Additionally, libraries and consortia seek transparency around prices and services associated with open access publishing. The Plan S price transparency requirements are the emerging standard in this area, and all parties are strongly encouraged to align with these.

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.

There are many elements that influence open scholarly communication practices, including access to scientific literature, national science and scientific communication policies, research assessment criteria and reward systems for researcher performance, and availability of research funding as well as methods for its distribution. Recognizing the great variety in how these elements play out in diverse local and national contexts, we encourage coordination among stakeholders (institutions and research administration, libraries and library consortia, faculty and academic governance, national research councils and funding organizations), in order to develop synergistic approaches and locally appropriate cost distribution frameworks that rationalize and prioritize investments to enable open access to research without financial burden to authors or to readers.

Spending on scientific publishing should enable global open access by both readers and authors.

To achieve this, we invite publishers and the global research community to partner in developing both temporary and long-term mechanisms to ensure that all authors, including those whose institutions have not yet negotiated or do not participate in publisher agreements and authors without institutional affiliations, are granted equitable conditions to publish their research articles openly by default, such as immediate improvements to the current publisher discount and waiver policies, solutions to ensure all authors are fully informed of and granted the equitable conditions to which they are entitled by default, and more.