

PeerJ's AIM: Make "Open" Accessible for All

Wayfinders #2: building equity from a 'per-publication charge' context

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Brief History of PeerJ

- Launched in **2012** as a **fully Open Access** Publisher
- Mission-driven, PeerJ is committed to removing barriers to participation in science communication
- Launched with non-publication model:
 - Personal Lifetime Memberships
 - One-time payment, lifetime publishing rights
 - Too radical, or too complicated
 - Introduced APC in response to user demand and expectation

Context for today

- Equity is multi-faceted, and I can't speak to all of those facets today
- The model I am discussing does not address all facets of equity
- My focus for today: removing the “per-publication” charge as a significant barrier to equitable participation

Elements I hope to touch on:

- Key reasons for introducing a new publishing model
- First steps in designing and implement that model
- Data helps guide decisions - but so can your mission
- Pitfalls, obstacles and key learnings

Our survey says...

Trends from authors surveyed after free publishing offers in 2022

Authors who *want* to publish OA but have no funding

Any price to publish is too high

The vast majority of these authors were in the Global South

Authors who want - or have - to publish OA but for whom cost is an insignificant concern

In almost all cases, the journals they were intending to submit to:

- Had higher APCs
- Many were hybrid
- Around 50% had lower Impact Factors
- Almost all of these authors were from the Global North
- Journals were more subject/community specific

Authors who had no imperative or inclination to publish OA and would have chosen a paywalled journal

Mixture of geographies, similar alternative journal profiles

Our survey says...

1. Price is a primary decision-driver when choosing where to publish
2. It's not the level of price, it's the existence of a price

If we want everyone to choose OA, we have to eliminate price as a barrier and payment as a burden.

If we want to fund access to participation for everyone we need to remove that barrier and burden for everyone.

We should aim for a model where collectively we can fund the costs of participation and access.

Our mission says...

When PeerJ launched we listed four key tenets:

#1 - We will help to make all academic publishing Open.

#2 - We will innovate in everything we do.

#3 - We will serve academia.

#4 - We will do all of the above at a minimal cost to the creators, and zero cost to the consumers of academic content. At the end of the day, we want to get to a position where it is free to publish, as well as free to read, all academic output. With the help of the academic community, we believe we will get there.

AIMs - Annual Institutional Memberships

- Launched in May 2023
- Features of AIMs:
 - Unlimited publishing for authors affiliated with member institutions
 - Authors can choose OA and not have to worry about paying a fee
 - They can be confident that if their institution is a member when they submit they will not face an APC
 - Opportunity to reduce price as a barrier for authors, and reduce administrative costs and per-unit burden for all parties involved
- **First step towards a model of collective action**
 - Psychologically disassociate per-publication cost and OA
 - Find and engage with partners and contributors who share our values and mission
 - Opportunity to explore active contributions to support participation for all

Modelling the model

What's working for other people?

- Market trends - other publisher models

Who is willing and able to pay?

- What do those people want from a model?

What's your place in the market?

- As a smaller publisher, we are not a priority. The easier and simpler the model and commitment, the easier and simpler a decision for the purchaser

What's manageable and scalable for our organisation? Where are their potential cost savings/efficiencies that can benefit us and the customer?

Modelling the model

Scrutinise data to unearth target partners - don't make assumptions

Try to create a model that fairly accounts for your smallest customer and your largest customer; this is difficult, but you need to try to have a solution for everyone

Understanding your current customers needs and behaviours is difficult

Understanding the needs and behaviours of new/unknown customers is REALLY difficult

Build in some elasticity to modelling a transition; there's a lot you can't know until you start, so plan to be flexible

Two big lessons learned so far - 1

New models change behaviour, but not consistently

- Over the entire program, we have seen an uptick of submissions from member institutions
 - Institutions with a wide range of deals/author options - least change, as the author has the most options
 - Well-funded institutions
 - Lower cost per published paper
 - Institutions with few or no other deals - significant growth
 - Less-funded institutions
 - Higher cost per published paper

What are the implications for recalculating membership fee? How do we ensure affordability for the partner, and cost-effectiveness for us as a publisher?

Two big lessons learned so far - 2

Not everyone shares your vision:

- Some customers are happy with the status quo - they have no problem with paying APCs
 - Collectively we have set up an industry around APCs
 - People have been conditioned to associate OA with APCs, and the cost of participation with the article as a unit
- Some customers may not share your values: that equity is important, or possible, or their problem to help solve
- Some potential customers may see your model as an opportunity - and not always in a positive way
 - Planning, reporting and modelling for new customers is key
 - Due diligence for unknown potential partners is vital

What's next for AIMs?

1. Onboarding new members
1. First renewals approaching
1. Launching a series of small, community-led, mission-driven APC-free journals - *Open Advances*